

We all want to hear good news. We want to go to the mechanic and hear him say, “Your car is fine. That rattling noise you heard was nothing. This rust bucket will last you another 100,000 miles.” We want to go to the doctor and hear him say, “You’re perfectly healthy! You don’t need any medication, any treatments, any change of lifestyle. Go home and keep doing what you’re doing.” We want to turn on the news and hear our leaders say, “Everything is great! We’ve got plenty of money, no enemies, no crises. The future is bright.”

That’s what we want to hear. But it’s not what we need to hear. What we need to hear is the truth. We need to hear our mechanic say, “This car is going to die on the highway if you don’t get it repaired right now.” We need to hear the doctor say, “You’re gonna have a heart attack any day now. You need to make some changes.” We need to hear our leaders say, “We have a serious problem and we need to make some hard choices as a city, state, and nation.”

We need to hear the truth. But it’s the last thing we want. And, every day, we’re tempted to listen to the car mechanic, doctor, or politician who tells us what we want to hear, rather than the truth. The result, of course, is disaster. It’s foolishness to live like that. But people can be pretty foolish sometimes.

The Word of the Lord is the truth. It’s what we need to hear. But it’s not always what we want to hear. And the prophet Jeremiah knew that better than most. I suspect he knew that the moment that God called him into the prophetic ministry.

Because the first thing he does is try to convince God not to make him a prophet. *“Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.”* The Lord makes him a prophet anyway. And then, perhaps as he had expected, God warns him that his message will fall on deaf ears. The Lord told him plainly, *“You shall call to them, but they will not answer you.”* It’s no wonder he later laments, *“I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me.”*

To make matters worse, Jeremiah was not the only voice in town. For every word of truth that he proclaimed, there were plenty of others claiming to speak for God, but with a message far more appealing than Jeremiah’s. These so-called prophets promised peace and prosperity right around the corner, even though Babylon was already at the gates.

Faithful King Josiah had been killed, his successors were wicked, and Jeremiah himself became a target of hostility. King Jehoiakim gladly listened to the smooth voices of those who said, *“No disaster shall come upon you.”*

It was “market-driven ministry” long before the phrase existed, giving people what they want rather than what they need. The Lord summed up their message: *“They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord.”* They said, *“It shall be well with you”* to those who despised God’s Word, and *“No disaster shall come upon you”* to those stubbornly following their own hearts.

Who wouldn’t want to hear that? Who wouldn’t rather believe that everything will work out just fine, with no repentance necessary and no change required? A God who simply confirms our plans and blesses our desires is much easier to embrace than the God who calls us to turn from sin and trust in Him alone.

But, of course, here is when we need to look into the mirror of the Law for ourselves. It’s easy to shake our heads at the false prophets of Jeremiah’s day yet, deep down, we too want a sermon that reassures without repentance, that soothes without calling us to the cross. We too want to mentally tune out when God’s Word confronts our pride, our selfishness, and our sinfulness. The problem is not just ‘out there’ in other pulpits and other pews. It’s in here, too.

We live in a market-driven culture, and the temptation to make preaching market-driven is strong. I know that. As a preacher, I face the same temptation. Rocking the boat is terrifying for a pastor. You never know which sermon is going to stir up a hornet’s nest that leads to the congregation turning on you. Or splitting into a million pieces of fragmented opinions and hurt feelings.

But when we reshape God into our own image, we lose the real God entirely. The Lord asks, “*Am I a God at hand... and not a God far away?*” Yes, He is near, Immanuel, God with us. But He is also far away, the One whose holiness fills heaven and earth, who sees what is hidden, whose power is vast, inscrutable, and utterly beyond us.

This transcendent Lord promises judgment on those who proclaim their own imaginings: “*Behold, the storm of the Lord! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked... until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his heart.*” The false prophets’ sunny forecasts would shatter in the storm of 587 BC, when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and carried her people into exile.

But even in wrath, God did not forget His people. Earlier in the chapter, He made a promise: “*Behold, the days are coming... when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch... and this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’*”

This Righteous Branch is the true and final Prophet. Jeremiah had stood in the council of the Lord to hear His Word. Jesus is the eternal Word who comes from the Father’s side. Jeremiah proclaimed faithfully what he had been told. Jesus proclaims faithfully what He Himself is and does. Jeremiah faced false prophets and hostile rulers. Jesus faced Pharisees, scribes, and priests who wanted Him silenced. Jeremiah endured scorn. Jesus endured the cross.

Like Jeremiah, Jesus would not preach what people wanted to hear, but what they needed. “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” Like Jeremiah, He contended with lies, distortions, and misuse of God’s Word.

And, like Jeremiah, there would be a storm. In our Gospel lesson today, He warned of clouds gathering and winds blowing. On a Friday outside Jerusalem, the storm broke in full and Jesus became the lightning rod for God’s anger against every false word, every twisted teaching, every self-serving proclamation, and every sinful heart.

Only at the cross do we understand clearly what God’s Word is really about. There, His Word was not a feather pillow to soothe us in our sin, but a fire to burn away what was dead, and a hammer to shatter the prideful rocks of our hearts. There, we find out just how much division the truth of God’s Word can really inspire in hardened hearts. There, we see God’s wrath poured out on His own Son, and there, too, we find the peace the false prophets could never give.

That same fire-and-hammer Word still works today. It comes to you in preaching, stripping away your excuses, exposing the truth, and burning through every false peace you have built for yourself. But it also comes with the sweet and reassuring Gospel, that Christ has taken the storm for you. That His righteousness covers you. That you are forgiven.

And this Word doesn’t come alone. In Holy Baptism, God’s hammer drowns the old self and raises the new. The fire of His Spirit ignites faith so that you live not by your own dreams but by His promises. In the Lord’s Supper, He puts into your mouth the very body and blood that bore the storm of wrath, the very flesh that was raised in glory. In this supper there is peace, not a market-tested slogan, but the real reconciliation of sinner and God.

The Word of the Lord is still a tough business. It still refuses to bend to our desires or demands. It still calls us to turn away from ourselves, toward Christ. But this same Word is the only Word that gives life. It is the testimony of the Spirit, the bread that feeds the soul, the voice that says with authority, “*It shall be well with you,*” not because we imagine it so, but because Christ has made it so.

This is the Word that will not fail. This is the Word that will endure when all dreams crumble. This is the Word that forgives, restores, and keeps you until the day you see Him face to face. Amen.