

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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5th Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 20:7-13

Pastor Randy Ott

Confess Christ Confidently!

Each one of us I'm sure has certain areas of our life or certain things that we have to do in life that we don't have a whole lot of confidence in doing, but every now and then we have to do them. One of the areas that I have always disliked, not enjoyed, is public speaking. The first time I was in speech class in college, I had to go up and stand and just read from the Psalms. I don't even remember what Psalm it was, but I do remember how my knees were shaking as I stood behind the podium. I could feel my chest tightening as I was trying to read. I could hear my voice not sound like it normally sounds because my chest was so tight and my breath was so shallow and my voice was so shaky. I didn't sound like myself at all, but boy was I happy when it was done and I could go sit down. I remember the Professor and the things that he said afterwards. This was during the football season and I played left tackle for our football team. He said, "Randy, I suppose you would have been a lot more comfortable if that would have been a 6'5", 240 lb. defensive end in front of you instead of the podium." He was dead on right. It's not something that I enjoyed. It's not something that I had a lot of confidence in doing.

There might be different things like that for you, but one of the things that our God talks to us about this morning, that he wants us to have confidence in and that he wants us to do, is to talk publicly—to speak publicly—but to speak publicly about Christ. To confess Christ confidently even if there is persecution, even if there is rejection. That is what Jeremiah talked about. That's even what Jesus talked about in our Gospel. Remember he said, "If they call me (Christ) Beelzebub, what are they going to do to you?" You know that they are going to attack you. But our God wants us to confess Christ confidently even when we face that kind of persecution.

So as we consider these words from Jeremiah today and think about confessing Christ confidently, we see that God wants us to do this in spite of opposition and he wants us to do it with the zeal of the prophets. He wants us to do it to the glory of the Lord. As we consider these words of Jeremiah, we see that is exactly what he is talking about.

Have you ever been in a group of people at work or at a gathering some place or some other place where the conversation comes around to religion? Maybe it is some of the topics of the day—the hot topics of the day like same-sex marriage or something like that, and people are talking about it and they are saying things that you know are directly against God's Word. Have you ever spoken up and have people that you have always thought of as your friends look at you differently because you stood up for what God says in Scripture? Have you had them almost attack you—lash out at you? If you

have ever experienced anything along those lines, you know what your stomach feels like when those things happen. You know what it is like to be attacked. Even when you are being attacked because you are standing on God's Word, it doesn't feel good. It's not enjoyable. If you've ever had that happen to you, you can probably relate to what Jeremiah is saying in our text. He really is just lashing out at the Lord. Jeremiah was a prophet, but he had a sinful nature, and he was letting the Lord have it with both barrels at the start of our text, wasn't he? *"LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived."* "You called me from when I was young to be your prophet and to speak your Word to your people. And God, I've done it, and it has brought me nothing but heartache, misery and pain in my stomach. I speak out and every time the message you give me is always about destruction. People don't want to hear it. Because they don't want to hear it, they attack me, God, and I'm sick of it." That is basically what he is saying.

Jeremiah, if you remember his story at all, was a prophet during the time of the last six kings of the kingdom of Judah. That was the southern tribes, remember them? There were the ten northern tribes after it split, after Solomon, and the two southern tribes. The kings of Judah, some were good and some were bad, but Jeremiah served under some that were not good and godly kings. In fact, one time Jeremiah had dictated the message that the Lord had given him for the king, I believe it was Jehoiakim. He dictated it to his scribe, or his secretary so to speak, Baruch, and they went in and read it to the king. As it was being read and as the scroll was unwound as Baruch read it, the king took the scroll and cut off what had been read and threw it in the fire. I don't think he was saying, "Boy, this message sets me on fire." He was saying, "I don't care what you say or what your God says, things are going good and I don't want to listen to you." Jeremiah knew what it was like to be rejected. He knew what it was like to be rejected from the highest levels of the king all the way down to the people on the streets that were whispering, "Boy, one of these days he is going to say something that is not going to happen and then we are going to let him have it and he is going to wish he never spoke for the Lord."

Jeremiah faced opposition and there were times he didn't want to have to say what God said. He didn't want to speak God's truth to God's people at times because the opposition was so fierce.

I think we could probably relate to that. At times for us it is real easy to talk about other things when some of those hot topics of the day come up and people are attacking God and his Word. It's easy for us to change the subject to the weather and talk about how hot it is going to be this next week, talk about training camp for the Packers, talk about anything else except what those people are saying when they are attacking God's Word. It is easy to do. At one time or another in our life God has probably put a situation in front of us where we could have taken whatever they were talking about, maybe the teaching of creation or teaching of God's right gift of sex and promoting homosexuality or some other things that God says are wrong. We could have talked about it and said, "Here's what God says. God says it is a sin, but here is what God has done to take away all of our sins." And we could have lead them by the hand away from just talking about right or wrong—which so often is what people think Christianity is all about—but Christianity isn't about what we do or not do, it is about what Jesus did for us. We could have lead them by the hand, taken them down the path by saying, "Here

is what God says is right or wrong. Here is how you and I break it, but here is Jesus Christ who lived and died in our place and took away every last one of our sins.” That is the most important thing for us to know, because when we know that, then we are going to want to do what is right. We are going to want to do those things. But we can never bring that about just by our own reasoning. We’ve had that opportunity, and at times we haven’t done it.

We have cried out to God, “You deceived me and I was deceived so I am shutting my mouth and I am not defending your truth. I am not speaking of your love. I am not speaking of your grace. I am not speaking of your wrath on sin. I am not speaking at all, God, because you have deceived me and I was deceived.” When you and I do that, we sin just as certainly as the people who are attacking the truth of God’s Word. We might say, “But I didn’t say anything. How could I sin?” God calls that a sin of not doing what you should do. God gave us the opportunity to be the instruments of his grace and his peace and his love and because we were worried about how we might be perceived—we were worried about opposition, we were worried about being considered a religious fanatic—we shut our mouth and we changed the topic and we sinned against our God.

This is the amazing thing about our God. Even though you and I have sinned in these ways, he sent Jesus to live perfectly in our place, to always defend God’s Word and to always use the opportunities to speak of his love because you and I don’t. Then Jesus went to the cross and died for all the sins that you and I have committed, including the sins of changing the subject and not defending the truth of God and not sharing his love. Our God has done that for us—not because we have earned or deserved it, not because we really wanted to and we would have tried harder—God did it because he is God and he loves and he forgives. He didn’t do it because of anything that we are. He didn’t do it because he knew some day along the line we would do better. He did it because he is God. But now, because he has done this, because he has taken away our sins, because he loves us so intently, when we focus on that truth, we move to the zeal of the prophets. We move to what Jeremiah talks about in our text, “I want to shut up, God, but I can’t because your Word is like a fire within me. When I try to hold it in, I cannot.” When you and I consider the love God has for us in Christ, when we consider what he has done for us, we consider what he continues to do for us and we see what he has promised to always do for us and we grow in faith. As we grow in our faith, we want to do these things. We move beyond the infancy of being a Christian where we think it is all about what we have to do or else God won’t love us. God has already loved us perfectly and he always will. When I grow to the point that I see that, now it becomes, I want to—I want to thank him. I want others to know this love and this wonderful feeling of knowing a God who loves so perfectly and so intensely and loves me in spite of who I am. I want others to know that truth. You know what, just like God loved me when I was unlovable, I want to love them because Christ died for them too. I want them to know that he died for them. I want those people I don’t like who I think are jerks to me at times to know the love of God in Christ because we want to love them.

Our God will strengthen us. That is his promise. Through his Word and Sacrament he will strengthen us so that we will have the zeal of the prophets. We will speak. The first time our stomach will be in knots and our knees will be shaking whether there is a

podium in front of us or not. We might endure opposition and we might endure rejection, and it won't be fun, but there will be times when it will be fun because God will use us.

I remember the first person that I invited to come and learn about God was when I was in high school. They ended up joining our church. There was nothing cooler in the world than seeing that person stand in front of the altar and say that they believe like we believe and they believe Jesus is their Savior. I didn't do it, but God used me to invite them. God can do that with you also.

So we do this, we grow, so that we get to the point that we want to because we want to do all things to the glory of God. We want to sing to the Lord and we want to give praise to the Lord because he has rescued us and he has rescued those people that at times attack us and we want to share the love of God in Christ Jesus with them.

As we grow in our faith, we will confess Christ confidently. It is the best way to put it—WE WILL DO IT—not we have to or we should or we ought to—WE WILL. That's what God does through us because he has first of all done it TO us. He has spoken to our hearts through someone else.

Okay, maybe some of you didn't hear a single word I said after the introduction because you are still thinking, "If he said he doesn't like public speaking, why in the world is he in a pulpit right now?" Maybe you haven't heard a single word after that and you are still scratching your head. Let me tell you why. I don't view being in a pulpit as public speaking. I don't view teaching a class as public speaking. Yeah, sure it is I suppose, but it's not my message. If I am asked to go speak at another school's graduation at a banquet and I have to come up with jokes and stuff like that—I would rather set my hair on fire than do some of that stuff because that is something that I have got to come up with and I'm not comfortable doing that. But to stand here and say, "Here is what Jesus did. Here is what God says about our sin and his forgiveness." That is not me. That is God. I don't view it as public speaking because I am simply trying to stay out of God's way and let his Word be proclaimed so that it works in our hearts.

So remember, when you speak God's Word and you strive to do it faithfully and you are rejected, they aren't rejecting you. They are rejecting Jesus. But you are serving him and you are confessing him confidently and God will grant you that grace.