



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

August 24, 2008

15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 15:15-21

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Jeremiah 15:15-21

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 121

Second Lesson: Romans 12:1-8

Gospel: Matthew 16:21-26

### Examples of Faithfulness

Impressive Faithfulness

Gracious Faithfulness

This last week listening to the radio as I was driving to various places, I heard a couple of different commentators talking about the political season that we are in, and all the advertising and all the campaign speeches you hear from both candidates. They said they are getting tired already, and we aren't that close to the date yet, but they are tired already of hearing both candidates talk about our country as though it were a dictatorship or a terrible place to live where everyone is dying and there is blood in the streets. When you stop and listen to the candidates, after a little while you hear them talking about the country and how bad things are and of course, they are the only ones that can fix them, which is what you would expect a candidate to say. But sometimes you don't think that you live in such a wonderfully, blessed, affluent country if you listen just to the candidates.

Does that bug you? Does that annoy you to hear people talk about how our country isn't all that great? Do you get irritated by hearing that? How do you think you would feel if one of the candidates, or someone giving speeches at the upcoming convention, stood in front of the people and said, "You know what, not only are the Chinese going to win more gold medals than we are, in a short time they are going to come and conquer us and carry us away and that's the way it is and that's the way it should be. And there will be no hope for you because you've turned away from the living God." Would you immediately brand him a kook and think he's nuts? Would you think he should be locked up in a padded room? And if he kept saying that day after day after day, do you think he'd get your blood boiling a little bit?

On the other hand, how would you like to be the one that had to speak that message day after day after day after day? If God came and told you, "That's the message I want you to speak," how do you think you'd like it as people reacted to what you told them? The guy that we heard talking to God in what I just read to you, that was his life. You want to hear the words that he had to speak, his political commercial? In Chapter 15, the start of what we read, he said, <sup>1</sup>*Then the LORD said to me: "Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!"* <sup>2</sup>*And if they ask you, 'Where shall we go?' tell them, 'This is what the LORD says: Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity.'"* <sup>3</sup>*I will send four kinds of destroyers against them," declares the LORD, "the sword to kill and the dogs to drag away and the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth to*

*devour and destroy. <sup>4</sup>I will make them abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what Manasseh son of Hezekiah king of Judah did in Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup>"Who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Who will mourn for you? Who will stop to ask how you are? <sup>6</sup>You have rejected me," declares the LORD. "You keep on backsliding. So I will lay hands on you and destroy you;"* (Jeremiah 15:1-6). "I am Jeremiah the prophet, and I approve this message."

How would you like that to be your life? Those are the words that he had to speak to the people. You can imagine how they would be received. He wasn't a very popular guy.

He was faithful, but as we see this morning, even his faithfulness had its limits. Just like you and me—we seek to be faithful, but our faithfulness has its limits, doesn't it? Maybe some days we are a little more faithful than others, but there are limits. This morning we also see our God and His faithfulness and how once again He reminds another struggling prophet like we heard a few weeks back—we heard Elijah, when he was struggling, God reminded him that He was still in control. We hear God this morning tell Jeremiah, "I'm still in control and I know what I'm doing."

I can't imagine what it must have been like for Jeremiah to day after day deliver a message like this. His book in the Bible, the prophecy of Jeremiah, it's the longest book of the Bible. It has more words than any other book in the Bible, and yet, in that whole thing he lists for us three people that were his friends. When he said, "I never sat with revelers. I never made merry with those people;" he probably isn't exaggerating at all because no one wanted him around. He was the guy that always brought the bad news that said everything was going to hell in a hand basket, right?

On the other hand, you had guys like Hananiah and some other false prophets that were saying, "Oh, Jeremiah, he's just a nut job. He's wrong. God loves us. Look at how He is blessing us. Look at how things are. God certainly loves what we are doing. Jeremiah is just nuts." They also claimed to be prophets. Guess which ones the people liked better. Yet, Jeremiah had to continually speak God's Word. And he describes what is going through his head as he talks here. He says, "You understand me God. You know me inside out. Remember me. Bring to mind what I am going through right now. Focus on what I am going through and care for me. Help me because I am at the end of my rope, God. Avenge me on my persecutors." He was always under the threat of death. He once stood in front of the king and read the prophecy that God had given him to speak to the king. As he read it, the king just took a couple columns of the scroll, cut it off, and threw it in the fire. Jeremiah kept reading. The king took the next columns, threw them in the fire, and did this all the way through the whole thing. Not exactly warmly received by the king he was admonishing, right?

He was being persecuted. He was being threatened with death fairly often. So he says, "Lord avenge me." Then he says this interesting phrase, "You are long suffering God. Do not take me away. Lord, I know you are patient and forgiving, but don't be so patient and forgiving with those who are persecuting me that they kill me or that they take me away. Don't let that happen to me Lord. I ate your Word with joy. When it

came, I ate it. I devoured it. It brought me joy. And God, you filled me with indignation. That's why I wasn't with these people. That's why I wasn't making merry. That's why I wasn't rejoicing in what they rejoiced in. You filled me with a righteous anger at the sins of these people and how they had turned their back on you. I've served you. I spoke your Word. I've been filled with the anger that you gave me over their sins. And all it's gotten me is threats. All it's gotten me is to sit alone in my life. What's going on God? Are you just a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails? Are you like a mirage that's there in the desert and I get closer to it and it's not there? I go to the spring expecting water for myself and my animals and there is nothing. You say you are going to be there Lord, but right now, I'm not feeling it."

Jeremiah was faithful. He served God faithfully. If I had to go through what he went through, I think I would probably be handing out carts at Wal-Mart instead of going through all of that. He was faithful, but in those last words that he spoke, he blasphemes, doesn't he? He says, "God, you're a liar. You said you'd be there for me and right now God, you're not." And focusing on only what he could see is faithfulness which I think is incredibly impressive came to an end and he challenged God and he sinned against God.

Think of how it must have hurt him though. His very blood, his very people, his fellow countrymen, the people that were his own, that he identified with, they had turned their backs on God. Think of how that must have hurt him. Did you ever experience anything like that? This last week I heard of something like that. It filled me with a little indignation.

This morning after the offering is brought forward, we are going to receive Morgan and Danielle as communicant members. I don't know if you know them or not, but if you don't, go up and introduce yourself to them and then quiz them the next time you see them and see if they remember your name. They have been driving up every week from Oshkosh. In a time of \$4/gallon gas, that's a long way to drive, right? Driving up so they can go through and learn what it is that we, as a congregation, as a church body, teach and believe. I heard that they shared it with someone and after they had left, that person began to laugh and ridicule them. "How silly is that to drive all that way for a silly religion class? What a fool." Then the thing that filled me with indignation is that, remember how I said Jeremiah had to suffer at the hands of his brothers? That someone else joined in that is a member of our church, talking about how silly it is to do all of that just to join a church.

When I heard that, I got upset. I could have probably spit nails. But then I moved to being maybe a little bit more upset with myself. I thought to myself, how often in my life did I make fun of someone as a "goody two shoes" or a "holy roller" or something like that when they were saying to do what is right for God and I didn't want to. How often did I do that same exact thing? How often have I heard someone else doing that directly and kept my mouth shut and instead wanted to talk about something else instead of putting myself on the line to stand up and say "what you are saying is wrong"? So all of a sudden I go from indignation at that person to indignation at myself.

Have you experienced the same thing? Have you found yourself joining in, remaining quiet as others did? Then you and I really haven't even gotten as far as Jeremiah to blaspheme God because we have served him faithfully and we've suffered for it. We've stopped on the other side of where Jeremiah was faithful, right?

Even the threat of facing what Jeremiah did at times keeps you and me silent, and that's when we need to hear what God said not only to Jeremiah, but what He also said to us, to you and to me. He said, *"If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman."* (Jeremiah 15:19.) God rebukes Jeremiah for doubting Him and tells him to repent. He then tells him to speak worthy words, not the worthless words he had finished with, and then God would strengthen him and would enable him to serve.

It's the same thing God says to us. Repent. Repent literally means to turn—turn away from that sin and turn to God as the source of forgiveness. For you and me, we turn to the cross, because in the cross we see Jesus who lived perfectly in our place, who never joined in, who never kept silent when he should have spoke, and who never accused God but served God faithfully in our place because you and I don't. We turn to Jesus because we know that He took all of our sins with Him to the cross and there they were punished and there they were taken away forever. We turn back to Him and say, "In faith, Jesus I believe you lived and died for me. Forgive me." Then we know that we are forgiven. And on this day we come and receive His very body and blood that assures us that was done—perfect life, innocent death in our place.

You and I start the service with the sign of the cross made over us to remind us of our baptism, where we were baptized into Christ's perfect life and death so that our sins would be forgiven. When we see that and when we focus on who God is and what He has done for us, He enables us to speak worthy, not worthless words. He enables us to not only rejoice in our forgiveness but to go forward and serve Him.

The service God calls you and me to might not be exactly what we want. Listen to the service He called Jeremiah to. Jeremiah had said, "Avenge me on my persecutors." What do you think he was asking? Get rid of them. Knock them down. Keep them from persecuting me. Did you hear the Lord's answer? God answers his prayer, but He says, "I am going to make you a bronze wall. They are going to keep attacking you, but they won't overcome." That was God's answer, not the one probably Jeremiah had in mind, but Jeremiah had this promise that God would be with him and make him a bronze wall so that he would be able to withstand their attacks as he served the Lord. Then he uses that word "repent." It has the word "turn" in it. "You must turn these people. You must lead them to repentance, but do not turn yourself to them."

When we are mocked or ridiculed for our faith, God calls us to endure it, but then to, in love and in mercy, seek to turn those people, not to turn to them. We have the reason to because we know what God has done for us. He has taken away our sins. He saved us and redeemed us from the hands of the wicked and the grasp of the cruel. He has redeemed us from Satan's control. He has redeemed us from heading to hell and gives us eternal life.

So we serve Him and we do it willingly. And we find joy in it when we are at our best, when we are at our strength of faith. We find joy in serving the Lord and even having the arrows bounce off the bronze wall that our God will make us. It doesn't mean it's fun. It does mean we will find joy in serving our God.

God's faithfulness will always be there for us. As Christians we rely on Him to make us His faithful servants. And on this day, we rejoice that we know again our sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ!