**Jeremiah 23:16-29 August 14, 2022**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Old Testament lesson, Jeremiah chapter 23 here re-reading these words. “Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth?” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever had an “everything you know is wrong” moment? When you thought you knew something very well, but after time it has changed and therefore, “everything you know, is wrong”. I remember this happening to me when I had to do CPR training a few years ago and I learned that the way that you do CPR had changed from when I learned it when I was younger. Whether I was taught wrong at that time and was now doing it right will remain to be seen, if in another 10 years the procedure of doing CPR changes again. But this isn’t the only example of procedures and norms changing. We know that we live in a constantly changing world in more ways than one. It’s amazing to look back at times and see those changes. The moments in history when everything that we thought we knew, was wrong. The information wasn’t always accurate was it? For those of my generation or younger it may be hard to believe this, but back in the 30s, 40s, and 50s cigarette advertisements were doctor approved. Smoking was allowed everywhere, you would pick the smoking or non smoking section in a restaurant, and it was even allowed in hospitals. As information came in about the dangers of smoking though some doctors told the truth of the detrimental effects smoking has on your lungs and health, but also as this information became available, and the public started to worry, the tobacco companies used other doctors, the authorities on health, and they told the people that smoking was actually harmless. While only a few doctors lied, too many doctors who knew the truth and the adverse effect smoking has on people’s health, said nothing.

Knowing the truth, yet saying something contrary, that’s the scene we find in our Old Testament lesson from Jeremiah. The true prophet of God, as we learn from the book of Jeremiah, was treated shamefully for speaking the truth to God’s people. At times he was beaten and even put into stocks. But those who spoke lies to the people were treated better. This shouldn’t come as any surprise to us. These were the ones who didn’t have the authority to speak to the people, who hadn’t been given prophesy, yet spoke from their own minds. In their despising of God’s Word they don’t come with the truth but instead the messages that Jeremiah records that they were saying were “It shall be well with you” “No disaster will come upon you.” and “I have dreamed! I have dreamed!” They were not the truth speakers, instead they were liars. Their lies were heard by the people and if they took the time to actually look into the credentials and authority by which these men spoke they would have exposed them as liars themselves, but they enjoyed the message. It was easier to take and understand, it was more pleasing to their ears than the truth. The truth that disaster is coming to God’s people. That Judah had sinned against God and rejected him. Therefore, the storm of Yahweh goes out in rage. The people of Israel will suffer the consequences for their sin. That was the true message that the true prophet of God was bringing, but not the one the people wanted to hear. Instead they turned to their “experts,” professional prophets, the ones who were oblivious to the truth or who just flat out ignored it. These false prophets continue to tell the people not to worry or be afraid. Go on as you were. These prophets don’t want to upset the status quo. They claim to be from God, but they speak from their own hearts.

One man was telling the truth: Jeremiah. The one called and put in that place to speak on behalf of God through visions and the Words that God gave him authoritatively to speak on His behalf. The truth wasn’t easy to say, nor was it easy for the people to hear. It’s a difficult truth for anyone to hear. It’s a bitter pill for us to swallow even here today, but one that we must be reminded of and continually told. The truth says that the sin of God’s people has consequences. This Word of God will break the people to their very core. “Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?” The hardened hearts of sinful and stubborn rebellion, up against the true Word of God is destroyed into pieces, the ego is shattered, our pride is laid to waste. This harsh Word of God may hurt the listeners of Jeremiah and cut them to the core, but it will also save them. By alerting them to the impending doom, they can turn away from their evil deeds. It’s not a message that they want to hear, but the one they need to. It’s not pleasing and easy on their ears, but it’s what needs to be said in order to save them from destruction.

The people faced a harsh truth, and were being fed lies from those who falsely claimed to know the truth. We don’t have to look very hard to see the same thing happening today. False prophets and false authorities when it comes to God, and our soul are all around us. Those who will tell us that “It shall be well with you” “No disaster will come upon you” and “I have a message from God” are found in different places but their message is the same. That message is kind, sterilized, and politically correct in every way, the message of the world that says “do whatever you want and don’t let anyone tell you otherwise”. But what’s the hard truth for today? In our society, “sin” is a word that is no longer popular, or honestly even understood, even inside the church. Many people don’t believe that sin is even real. If it is, it’s those “really bad” things—mass murder and terrorism, domestic violence, child abuse. Those “things” we do, things the church used to call “sin”—well, most people don’t believe they have any real consequences. God’s wrath against sin, the fire, the smashing, the division and apocalyptic, Church militant language that we find in our Gospel lesson, Jesus himself saying “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!”—that’s nothing but a fairy tale. Jesus was obviously just having a bad day, he woke up on the wrong side of the bed. He’s talking about someone else, or something else. He’s not talking about me. He’s not talking about you. And we go on living the way that feels good.Neglecting God’s house. Living in open unrepentant sin. Failing to give back to God the things he has blessed us. Ignoring His commands. Doing whatever we want. There’s nothing to worry about. Everything will be just fine. “No disaster will come upon you.”

In the midst of these false prophets, there is one group that must tell the truth: the Church which contains God’s true prophets. There is one place to find the true Word of God, as spoken to Jeremiah here in our Old Testament lesson, the truth that is revealed in how God feels about unrepentant rebellion and those who would speak on his behalf. It is here, in His presence, that God has given the Church his Word. He has spoken to us. We then are called to speak this Word with faithfulness and refute the claims of those prophets who say they speak for God but instead speak a lie. We are called to know the truth instead of joyfully being fed lies. We are called to put the words of Church leaders and officials up against the unaltered and inerrant Word of God so that we can call them out when they speak in error. The cigarette companies knew that their product was detrimental to the health of those who used it, but they spent a lot of money to tell a lie. Society spends a lot of money and resources so that the Word of God is drowned out. They continually work to downplay the true Word of God and what it says in the lives of those who have been taught the truth. These pop churches, mainline places of worship, and spiritual centers often leave out sin and only talk about the good life that God rewards his faithful people with, completely ignoring the truth that our Epistle lesson from Hebrews told us this morning. The stories and witness of those who accomplished great things by faith, doing it all to the glory of God, and were used as His instruments even facing persecution and death. That we may, as the writer of Hebrews says, “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.” We, the Church, must call out sin for what it is. We must draw attention to the ugliness that all humanity carries. We must say that because of sin, disaster is coming. Not because it’ll make us popular. We’ll surely upset those who have heard these false teachings and upset today’s false teachers. We do so that people can turn and repent.

God sends his Word made flesh, Jesus. In a world full of false teachers, and false truths; He is the truth. He has taken the wrath of God against sin upon himself on the cross. By Jesus taking our wrath, we are now forgiven. By him being broken we are made whole again from the effects of sin. When we are baptized into Christ by water and the Word, the old Adam is drowned and dies and a new man arises in his place. But this death and destruction is for a purpose, because when the old life of sin is gone, we will receive the new life in Christ. God’s Word Speaks the Hard Truth about Sin So That We Are Saved.

Hearing about our sin and its consequences is never easy, but it is lifesaving, because it turns us away from destruction and to the arms of Jesus. Jesus takes our sin and gives us forgiveness. For God’s plan and his desire are not to condemn us, but to save us through his Son, Jesus Christ. So come, hear the hard truths, don’t take the easy way out, don’t fill up only on the happy words that you’ll find in other places, hearing only what you want to hear, following those who would gladly lead you down paths of destruction and never upset you with a Word that challenges your life of sin. Instead come to hear the truth, and by it be set free. Come and receive, and seek the kingdom of God. Find an everlasting peace from God, heard through the Word of the prophets who speak the truth to you.

Amen

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.