

## Sunday, Oct 28, 2018 - Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost – Sermon on Jer. 31:7-9

The Lord Restores the Remnant

INTRO:

I was on FB the other day and scrolling down, go figure, I saw a political post. I don't even remember what it was about, but I did the thing that they say you're not supposed to do, and I read the comments. Friends of mine, and family members all making generally the same comment, "Well, this is just the dumbing down of society!"

You've heard that before I'm sure. The dumbing down of society. As I started to think about that statement, it suddenly struck me as a bit odd. I thought, when was the last time that the collective hive mind of our society wasn't dumb? Was there ever a time when people didn't make that comment? When was the last time our society, generally speaking, did something good or intelligent? Not in my 32 years of life on this earth it hasn't.

Well, Christian friends, let me comfort you with this – as Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, there is nothing new under the sun and not much has really changed in the last 3000 years – When the prophet Jeremiah wrote the words of his Book. That's why Jeremiah wrote. He wrote to God's people. He wrote to warn them, to encourage them, to remind them that despite the worries and cares and problems with the world around them – **Their Lord, THE Lord will restore his church, he will restore the Remnant of believers – he will gather them, and he will lead them!**

CONTEXT:

See Jeremiah's ministry spanned about 50 years. And in that 50 years there were some high points and some extremely low points. He was called during the reign of the good, if not great king Josiah. Josiah had wiped out pagan Baal worship almost completely from his country. But after he died, a series of evil kings ruled over Judah. From an outward perspective – Israel was prosperous! I guess you could even say, society was pretty good!

### Part I: He will gather

Now along comes Jeremiah. And for much of his prophecy, much of his book he is either warning or condemning Israel for it's sins. He was talking about how they would be dragged off, put into captivity by a foreign nation. The mighty walls of Jerusalem wouldn't hold back the forces of their enemies. The casual observer might think, "What are you talking about man?" We aren't doing half bad for ourselves! Why are we supposed to cry out, "**Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel.**" Save us from what?? Here we are! Israel gathered together, and sure there's whispers of war between Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt – but what of it?

Their faith was in themselves. It was in their own political savvy, it was in their worship of fertility gods and gods of war. in their own mighty walls that surrounded their city. That was their mighty fortress, not their God. It was these things that they sang with joy about, they thought themselves the "foremost of the nations."

In these Words of the text for today, Jeremiah reminds them of their REAL purpose as the nation of Israel. "**Sing with joy for Jacob; shout for the foremost of the nations. Make your praises heard, and say, 'Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel.'**"

The "foremost of the nations" that Jeremiah is talking about here is not Israel, but the LORD. The Lord of the nations. And it was him they were supposed to sing about, they were supposed to praise him, and proclaim his name and all he had done for his people – but they forgot that purpose. They forgot that it's God, the Lord of the nations, the God of all promises made and kept – It's he who gathers, protects, and saves his people.

APP:

Now, as Christians in America, I think we often are tempted in the same way as the Ancient People of God. What's easier to talk to someone about – Politics or Religion?

We spend a good deal of time worrying and fretting about who will be in office. We often wonder and worry about global affairs – Oh is Russia arming up again? Is China militarizing? Is Europe as a whole even capable of defending itself? Will we be dragged into another war somewhere??? Isn't it easier to proclaim a political point of view, worry about the "dumbing down of society" or taught the laurels of a political candidate than it is to speak to someone about the faith you have in Christ?

Are we, the CHURCH, called to form a Godly nation with mighty walls around it? Is it our job on earth to create a morally upright society? No. Friends, society and the world around us changes, it's politics shift and move like sand. Nations rise against nation and peoples succeed and fail.

Like Jeremiah, we have a God who is the Lord of the nations. Nothing happens on this earth that is beyond his watchful eye. It and His Word does not change, it does not fail, it tells you of a kingdom that will never fall. It tells you how God himself has gathered you. How he has put a hedge, a mighty fortress around you. It's a kingdom created not by the strength of arms or crafty politicking. It's a kingdom created by the Lord who can save. The only one who can save his people, who has by the blood of Jesus saved you and me. And it's our purpose and privilege to Sing, Proclaim, Praise his Holy Name. This is how God gathers and protects his people – by the proclamation of his Word. It's songs of praise and shouts of Joy that gather all the people of God - those from distant lands, cultures, peoples and nations. This is how God gathers his people – by his Word!

***See, I will bring them from the land of the north  
and gather them from the ends of the earth.  
Among them will be the blind and the lame,  
expectant mothers and women in labor;  
a great throng will return.***

## **Part II: He will lead them**

How do the blind and the lame travel great distances? How does a pregnant woman, or one who is about to give birth hop on a horse or a camel or jump in a wagon and traverse a great expanse. It's virtually impossible for that to happen! Unless of course they have an excellent leader!

See, this is the reality of the situation that Israel was in! They were blind, lame and vulnerable as expectant mothers, or mothers of young children. And many of them didn't know it. God, through the prophet Jeremiah reminds his people that he is and always has been their leader.

Jeremiah writes, ***"They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble"***

Through weeping, and prayer and confessing their sins and repenting they would come back. And what a comfort and promise that God gives to his people here! It was a comfort to those living in the days of Jeremiah, those that felt helpless at the terrifying political climate. Those who were scared to death of war an exile to a far-off place. This was also a comfort to those who many, many years later – would be returning from that exile in Babylon. That their God would lead them, that he wouldn't let his people fall, he would keep his promises to them. Despite the fact they were blind, lame, pregnant – he would help them, lead them care for them and restore the remnant to their rightful home!

APP:

We have this promise too. That the Lord will restore the remnant of his church. That he will lead us on. But often times that is a difficult thing to see. We see the degradation of Christianity in America and we shudder. We see people leaving the church and we worry. We see changing attitudes in our nation with regard to religion in general and wonder about the certainty of our own future.

In preparing for the sermon for today, I ran across a quote from a Lutheran pastor living in Nazi Germany during WWII. Talk about a time of uncertainty, and worry about the church, or religion period! A time not all together different than

the one Jeremiah carried out his ministry in. This pastor's name was Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the difficult time in which he lived gave him a unique insight into how Christ our Lord gathers, leads, builds and restores the remnant. He said:

It is not we who build. [Christ] builds the church. No man builds the church but Christ alone. Whoever is minded to build the church is surely well on the way to destroying it; for he will build a temple to idols without wishing or knowing it. We must confess—he builds. We must proclaim—he builds. We must pray to him—that he may build. We do not know his plan. We cannot see whether he is building or pulling down. It may be that the times which by human standards are times of collapse are for him the great times of construction. It may be that the times which from a human point of view are great times for the church are times when it is pulled down. It is a great comfort which Christ gives to his church: you confess, preach, bear witness to me and I alone will build where it pleases me. Do not meddle in what is my province. Do what is given to you to do well and you have done enough. But do it well. Pay no heed to views and opinions. Don't ask for judgments. Don't always be calculating what will happen. Don't always be on the lookout for another refuge! Church, stay a church! But church, confess, confess, confess! Christ alone is your Lord; from his grace alone can you live as you are. Christ builds.

Christ gathers, Christ leads, Christ leads us on the straight and even path, along the streams of water of his Word.

#### CONCLUSION:

Relatively speaking, the Church has always been small, hard pressed and troubled. It exists in a sinful world, with "dumb" societies, or scary societies. Like Jeremiah, like the true believers of Ancient Israel, our job isn't to fix those things – our mission is to sing, proclaim, cry for joy because of what our God has done! He will preserve his church, he will restore the remnant – so that it is even greater than it was before! He will gather us and he will lead us to his holy mountain, Amen.