

Jeremiah 15:15-21

August 24, 2008 – 15<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

## Trust the LORD'S Promise to Rescue and Save

‡ Bearing His Name (vv.15-18)

‡ Return to new life (vv.19-21)

In the name of Jesus, our best and truest Friend, dearly redeemed believers:

These words of the “weeping prophet” Jeremiah contain one of the most ironic lessons of our Christian faith. Just ask yourself, “When do I most need to repent of my sins?” Answer #1: When I do not feel I need to repent. Answer #2: When the world insists I do not need to repent. If all we had were the decades of angry words God spoke through Jeremiah to his fellow Jews and her kings in Jerusalem, we would all do a bush run like Adam trying to hide from God after his fall into sin. But the LORD does all His servants a big favor with the Law and Gospel lessons of our text. We don't have to be like Moses who lost the Promised Land of Canaan because he lost his temper and dishonored God. We can put ourselves in the sandals of Jeremiah and see how firmly and lovingly God helped him. The world and our own sinful hearts will feel otherwise, but we can learn God's Word and repent. Then it will be our good health and glorious pleasure to **Trust the LORD's Promise to Rescue and Save**, first...

‡ Bearing His Name (vv.15-18)

We can all relate to Jeremiah's frustration. Something is really bothering him: *“You understand, O LORD; remember me and care for me. Avenge me on my persecutors. You are long-suffering—do not take me away; think of how I suffer reproach for your sake. When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.”* God's Word was Jeremiah's joy, but it was also his problem. God kept commanding him to prophesy destruction on Jerusalem, her king and His own temple by the cruel Babylonians. Seventy years of captivity would follow. None of his fellow Jews liked to hear God calling them to repentance with such angry words.

But Jeremiah is slipping into the sin of blasphemy. *“I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me and you had filled me with indignation. Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?”* Didn't God's Name do him any good?

It happens to all of us if we take our eyes off Jesus and trust our own works and resources. We look at our personal sacrifices for God, then get upset if people seem ungrateful or life turns hard. How would you feel if you faithfully got your family to church and even volunteered your time and talents, only to have a couple storms damage or destroy your home? Then a valve burst forces a bathroom remodeling with more insurance headaches. Your car is just out of the shop, you're happily headed home from church, and a deer runs full tilt into the other side to crinkle shiny metal from stem to stern. One superstitious insurance agent asks about bad luck. But is your mind and heart doing worse like Jeremiah questioning God's wisdom or love for you? When we bear God's Name in Baptism, do we expect better?

The Apostle Peter felt himself sinking when he focused on the wind and waves instead of Jesus. He cried out to Jesus who *immediately...reached out his hand and caught [Peter]. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”* (Matthew 14:31 NIV) According to her published letters, Mother Theresa also felt as if God had abandoned her as soon as she began her famous work in India. She wrote that her pain grew worse over the years. The more the world marveled, the more unloved and distant she felt from God. We can only hope that in her heart of hearts she knew what the LORD God was about to teach Jeremiah and us. When our worldly hearts think we have reason to complain and accuse God, **Trust the LORD's Promise to Rescue and Save**. Because we are **Bearing His Name**, He calls us to...

## † Return to new life (vv.19-21)

*“If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them.”* The only way for us to find comfort and peace, especially at times like this, is to admit our sins and focus on our Savior Jesus Christ. God says, *“There is no one who does good, not even one.”* (Romans 3:12) That includes all of us here. God says, *“The wages of sin is death.”* According to God all of us deserve eternal death in hell. God is holy and can only have the holy with Him. But you and I can’t even obey the First Commandment because we cannot love the LORD our God with all our heart and soul and mind. As soon as I stop thinking about God or get upset with Him, I’ve broken God’s Law and all His commandments. God does not discriminate. If He calls His own prophet to repentance then He calls every pastor and all the people away from sins of greed and materialism, pride and prejudice, theft, false witness, blasphemy, not only homosexual and heterosexual sins, but even coveting our neighbor’s spouse or possessions.

Yes, *“the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 6:23) And *“God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.”* (John 3:16) According to Jesus’ own words, *“Who believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”* (Mark 16:16) God obviously wants all of us to believe and be saved because He already washed away all our sins with the guilt of the entire world. Not a sin remains except unbelief, for *“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”* (2 Corinthians 5:19-20 NIV)

One of our most vulnerable members was laid to rest this past week. William Snow was a ward of the state ever since someone dropped him off at the orphanage in Hennepin County, December of 1928. We don’t know the details, but I can easily imagine a young woman, perhaps still in her teens, struggling up the slippery steps with a little bundle close to her heart. Eyes full of tears she leaves the baby just inside the door and disappears into the swirling flakes. In her heart she says a little prayer for the son she cannot keep that somehow God will guard and protect him and care for him as she is unable to do. Did someone have a favorite brother named “William”? That time of year his last name had to be “Snow.”

William and so many like him truly are vulnerable. But someone had him baptized in the Name of the Triune God. I could see it in his eyes and hear in his answers from the Simplified Catechism that although he was learning, I was not really teaching him anything new. Jesus was William’s Savior who personally cared for his physical and spiritual welfare according to this promise spoken to Jeremiah, and through him to us: *“I will make you a wall to this people, a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you,” declares the LORD. “I will save you from the hands of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel.”*

The God of the Bible is the LORD, the Savior-God, who redeemed us all with His own precious blood and promised, *“Because I live, you also will live.”* (John 14:19) And William publicly confessed his faith in Jesus as His Savior. He voluntarily joined New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church as a communicant member, much to the joy of his brothers and sisters in Christ. Who can forget how William humbly received Christ’s body and blood – in, with and under the bread and wine. While I gave him the Lord’s blessing, William also made the sign of the cross. I was blessing him, and he was blessing me. William kept telling staff and residents at his group home how much he loved his church. And the Lord moved Anna, his caregiver, to help him **Return to new life** after another hip surgery.

William surely believed. And now he is home with the Lord who will also keep his promise by giving him a resurrected and glorified body like Jesus’ body. Never again subject to sickness and death, weaknesses or pain, William will kick up his heels like a frisky calf in a spring green pasture. **Trust the LORD’s Promise to Rescue and Save**, first from our stubborn sin, then for **new life** everlasting. Amen.

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