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Jeremiah 26,1-15

Lent 3 — 8 March 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Old Testament lesson from Book of the prophet Jeremiah, which was read earlier:

“Thus says the LORD: ‘[Jeremiah,] Stand in the court of the LORD’s house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD’s house, all the words which I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word. Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that I may relent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings’”

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: We live in a diet conscious age. Probably for the first time in history, people chose to be thin.

In previous ages, people who were thin were poor. They were thin because they could not afford to buy or barter enough to eat. Those who were better off were heavier. Heaviness was a sign that you had it made; you were rich enough so that you could eat properly. Heaviness was a sign that you were prosperous.

Not so today. Today you can walk down the aisles of any grocery

store and see row upon row of Lite foods; foods which are calorie reduced. Doctors tell us to watch our weight, watch our intake of sugar, watch our intake of salt, cut down on red meat, and the list goes on. It makes for a healthier life. There is nothing wrong with wanting or needing to shed a few pounds. Diet and exercise indeed make for a healthier life.

But of course there is a down side to this emphasis on thinness. While super models are pictures of thinness, the downside is an increase in eating disorders. Teenagers strive for an unrealistic degree of thinness. This striving can become a psychological and physical obsession and the result can be illness or even a premature death.

But there is an area in which diet is not good and that is in our spiritual life. In our text for today God tells Jeremiah that the prophet is to tell God's people all the words that God has given to him; indeed, the injunction is, "do not diminish a word," don't cut back, no substitutes. And that brings us to the theme of today's sermon, "**No God Lite.**" I'll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Speaking God's Word**
- 2) Listening To God's Word;** and,
- 3) Living With God's Word**

1) Speaking God's Word. Jeremiah the prophet lived some 600 years before the birth of Jesus. God called Jeremiah to tell God's people that they had sinned and unless they would repent, God was going to destroy their Temple and their city, Jerusalem. Jeremiah was to preach the entirety of God's Word – , all the Law, all the statutes, all the commandments; he was not to leave out anything. As far as God is concerned, there is no such thing as a diet or lite version of His Word.

Of course, the injunction to speak all of God's Word was nothing

new. It was not new to Jeremiah. We read of God's command to Jeremiah in the first chapter of Jeremiah; God told Jeremiah,

Now, gird up your loins, and arise, and speak to them all which I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, lest I dismay you before them.

Here, God is telling Jeremiah that he will need strength to do his job. It will not be easy. Don't be dismayed, God tells Jeremiah. In other words, don't be afraid; don't be ashamed, because if you, Jeremiah, are ashamed, I, God, will embarrass you before all the people to whom you are speaking.

Jeremiah was to get His power from the Word of God itself. This is the Word which made the world in six days. This is the Word which can slay, but it is also the Word which can make alive. Ultimately, this is the Word which became flesh to dwell among us, our Savior, Jesus Christ. And of Christ, the writer to the Hebrews says that He, Jesus, "upholds all things by the Word of His power" (Hebrews 1,3). Through that Word He will uphold Jeremiah and all who faithfully preach the full counsel of God; no God lite!

This is indeed the Word which can also slay. It is the Word of Law that condemns and places all people by nature under condemnation. It is the Word which declares, "Be perfect, because I the Lord your God am perfect." It is the Word which should confront us each and every day. But if we hear the Word of condemnation, we also hear the Word of Forgiveness. God said that if the people would repent of their evil ways then He, God, would repent of the destruction that was to come upon them and offer forgiveness in the place of destruction.

The writer to the Hebrews put it well when he wrote:

The Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to Whom we must give account (Hebrews 4,12-13).

Nothing is hidden from God. But that is not a threat; it is a promise. Not only is nothing hidden, but if we confess our sins, He is faithful and will forgive. He will forgive us for Jesus' sake.

Now, the second point is:

2) Listening To God's Word. But what was the reaction of the people who listened to Jeremiah's word? It was quite negative. Perhaps their self-esteem was being damaged, after all, who wants to be told that they sinned, sinned against their God, sinned against their neighbor, and sinned against themselves.

Now in this section of Jeremiah, there is no catalogue of specific sins, and perhaps that is just as well. Because here we can focus in on the natural reaction of people to hearing the Word of God. That natural reaction is rejection. By nature people cannot understand the things of God.

People whine. They say they aren't that bad. Perhaps they make excuses, "I can't help it, I was born that way." To that excuse, I read of a telling retort, "Well, then get born again." That is what Jesus told Nicodemus: By nature, neither Nicodemus, nor anyone else, could understand God; He had to be born again of water and the Spirit (John 3,1ff).

Apart from that new birth offered by Jesus, the reaction is the same

reaction of which we read in Jeremiah. The reaction is to demand Jeremiah's death. It is not to repent, it is not to acknowledge that their ways were not God's ways. Rather it is to demand the death of God's messenger. Maybe they thought that if they could kill the messenger, then they wouldn't have to hear uncomfortable things.

Now if we continue to read, we find that at this point godly men persuaded them that indeed Jeremiah was sent from God, that he indeed spoke God's Words, and that death was not appropriate. Jeremiah was spared that day.

Yet on another day, 600 years later, God's own Son, Jesus Christ, heard the cries of the crowd: "Crucify Him!" And the Roman governor and Roman soldiers obliged.

In Jeremiah's day the crowd wanted to trust in the Temple and in Jerusalem itself. They thought these were akin to good luck charms, like putting a rabbit's foot in your pocket. Like getting a four leaf clover. Or, like the jingle I once heard, "I don't care if it rains or freezes, Just as long as I have my plastic Jesus, On the dash board of my car."

By nature, people would rather trust in externals rather than go through all the bother of acknowledging their sin and turning to God. Thus, today, if told of sin, people will more often than not say, "Oh, well, that's your opinion." Or perhaps, "There are many ways to God."

But there are not many ways to God, nor are there opinions when it comes to God's Word. Jesus said, "Scripture cannot be broken." It also cannot be watered down or dumbed down to people's liking.

Jesus also went on to say, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through Me." There are not many ways to God; there is only One Way, and that Way leads through the

Cross itself and not through plastic tokens.

The third point is:

3) Living With God's Word. Thus, we are called by the Holy Spirit to live with the living word of God Himself, Jesus, our Savior.

Jesus Himself gave a commission to His apostles and it is a commission given to each of us as well, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28,20)

Jesus told them, the early apostles, and He tells us, that He lives through the Words which He taught during His earthly ministry. He lives not through some of the Words, but through all of the Words.

He lives through Holy Baptism, by which we are baptized into His death and raised to newness of life through His resurrection. This is the new birth about which He spoke to Nicodemus.

This is the Word which tells us that, yes, we are sinners, but yes, there is forgiveness in the very blood of Jesus. This is the reassurance which He gives us when we celebrate Holy Communion, in which as He shares with us His true Body and Blood, He also shares with us the very forgiveness of our sins.

To receive that full assurance of forgiveness, we must also receive the fullness of God's Word. Jesus tells us to observe everything, don't leave anything out.

What is the danger if we leave things out? It is more than merely not obeying God's command, as if that were not bad enough, but it means that we have shifted the focus of our salvation on what it is we do

and what we trust in apart from Christ's work on our behalf. If we look at ourselves, then we have to realize that our strength is not what it appears. Not only that, we are left to question that strength. We can be led astray by externals – look at the idea of trusting in the Temple in Jerusalem or perhaps trusting in a particular church or perhaps trusting in the rabbit foot externals like a plastic Jesus.

But our Savior promises to be with us even in our weakness. We listen to the explanation of the Third Article of the Creed in the Catechism,

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

We don't depend on ourselves. We trust in nothing less than what Jesus has done for us. In His sacrificial and atoning life and death, He has given us life. In His Word – all of His Word – He promises to live with us until the end of the age.

Conclusion. Pity those who serve up God lite. When we were in Canada, in November 1998, a Swiss airliner crashed in the Atlantic near Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia. For a memorial service, the Canadian government told the Catholic and Anglican chaplains not to mention Jesus' name or quote from the New Testament. Unfortunately, they agreed. But without the comfort of Jesus, His Cross, and the forgiveness He gives, what comfort can be given in a memorial service. God Lite won't do. There is no comfort without the knowledge that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ, neither death nor life. Because in the face of death, God only shows us life in the Cross fo Christ. Again, God lite won't do.

God is quite realistic. There is no diet version of God's Word, no God lite. The end of that diet is spiritual anorexia or bulimia, spiritual

illness of death.

But there is a better diet. No diminishing, no omission of God's Words. This finds its fullness in the Word become Flesh, our Savior Jesus Christ. He offers us the richness of God's forgiveness, which is indeed a Word of salvation and life. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church of the East Bay & Central Valley
21290 Birch St.
Hayward, CA 94541-1538

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