

## Lenten Devotional March 6, 2021

### Scripture

Jeremiah 5:20-31

*20 Declare this in the house of Jacob, proclaim it in Judah: 21 Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but do not see, who have ears, but do not hear. 22 Do you not fear me? says the LORD; Do you not tremble before me? I placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail, though they roar, they cannot pass over it. 23 But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and gone away. 24 They do not say in their hearts, "Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest." 25 Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have deprived you of good. 26 For scoundrels are found among my people; they take over the goods of others. Like fowlers they set a trap; they catch human beings. 27 Like a cage full of birds, their houses are full of treachery; therefore they have become great and rich, 28 they have grown fat and sleek. They know no limits in deeds of wickedness; they do not judge with justice the cause of the orphan, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy. 29 Shall I not punish them for these things? says the LORD, and shall I not bring retribution on a nation such as this? 30 An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: 31 the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule as the prophets direct; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?*

### Devotional

#### The Rev. Anthony Hita '13

In 1961 Stanley Milgram, a psychologist at Yale University, wondered how seemingly normal everyday people in Germany could have followed monstrous orders given to them by their Nazi superiors. Milgram noted that at the Nuremberg trials the most common defense was, "Just following orders." So Milgram developed an experiment wherein participants were instructed by an authority figure to give electric shocks of increasing intensity to a person, placed out of sight in another room, whenever he or she answered a question incorrectly. Unbeknownst to the participants, the shocks weren't real; moreover, someone else was also in that other room—an actor, wailing as though the shocks were putting him in mortal danger. Despite the audible agony, 65 percent of the participants followed the order of the authority figure by, in the end, administering the highest, supposedly fatal shock.

Milgram concluded from this test that otherwise normal people will follow the orders of perceived authority figures even when those orders may result in the death of an innocent person. Later tests by other experimenters found that when a participant was instructed to tell *someone else* to administer the shock, compliance rose to 92.5 percent. But when participants were placed in the presence of others who *refused* to obey, compliance fell to just 10 percent. In other words, the less impact a person feels personally, the more likely they are willingly to follow orders that harm someone else—but this willingness can be disrupted by just one or two others who refuse to comply.

For Christians—especially those in positions of authority—Milgram's experiment demonstrates the necessity of modeling noncompliance with systems we know are harmful. We must stand against discrimination, economic deprivation, abuse of power, corruption, and immorality as the shore resists the sea or people *will* be led astray. Right behavior issues from peers and authorities who actively resist wrong in word and deed. It only takes one or two objectors to turn aside others who might otherwise comply with wrong. Injustice in the world today is not inflicted upon us—it is allowed *by* us when we choose not to stand against it. As Christians we are all called to take that stand.

**Prayer**

Lord God, from whom all blessings flow, you have taught us by the words of the prophets and the example of Christ how we are to behave. We acknowledge that we live in a world with corrupt authorities who seek to ensnare us and lead us astray. You who control the seas, we ask that you would grant us the courage to resist oppression, injustice, and evil with our voices, hands, and feet in whatever forms they present themselves, so that we may not be false prophets but instead a people, called by your name, rightly proclaiming the Word of Truth and thus enabling others to resist with us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.