

Lent Devotional March 22, 2025

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?*

Devotion

The Rev. William Robbins '21

Jeremiah 5 crosses the boundaries of polite piety. While we have a few passages from Jeremiah that we keep close for comfort, the rest is, well, too close for comfort. A pastor like me (one of a declining, politically divided, and aging church) would do well to keep these words outside the boundaries of worship, because, frankly, we need hope.

Of course, that is the thing with prophets like Jeremiah. They are not called to maintain comfortable boundaries.

In Jeremiah 5, the prophet speaks of boundaries crossed geo-politically and covenantally, socially and (look out!) environmentally. Here, we have the sense of widespread chaos that results from a way of being that knows “no bounds in deeds of wickedness” (5:28). And what is Jeremiah’s call but to “stay in your lane,” to respect the theologically defined boundaries of the created (5:22-24) and social order (5:28)?

Yet we get the feeling that simply returning to one’s lane, whatever, wherever, and whenever that is, will not be enough to make things right. Like Jeremiah, we have the sense that new covenantal boundaries are needed (33:31-34). Who will set them?

Do we have to read past the boundaries of Jeremiah’s text to find the answer? One could continue past Jeremiah to Jesus, the one who redefines the boundaries of neighbors and nations, the one who ultimately redefines the boundary between death and life. Yes, that’s more comfortable, but what if you stay within the lines of Jeremiah? Is there hope there? I think so. In Jeremiah, we find one called by God to speak across the boundaries of despair and instill hope. In Jeremiah, we find one called to speak of God’s faithfulness across time, beyond individual existence, to those yet to be. Might God be calling you to do the same?

Prayer

O God, the one who through the Holy Spirit enables us to follow Jesus within and beyond our time, guide us to paths of gritty faithfulness. Lead us not into the temptations of quick solutions that betray Your truth, and grant us the patience and perseverance of Your eternity. Amen.