Suggested Outline

In the King James version our text, with the addition of verses 7 and 8, is divided into three strophes or sections, each introduced by the refrain “Hearken unto me!”: Strophe I, verses 1–3; Strophe II, verses 4–6; Strophe III, verses 7–8. This arrangement suggested the three-part outline below (although not precisely congruent with the strophe arrangement noted above).

Three Directives from God Designed for Our Comfort and Salvation

I. Look back! (See vv. 1–3.)
   A. At how God blessed you through Abraham and Sarah.
   B. At how the garden of Eden is the pattern for the blessings God intends to bestow on you.

II. Look around—now! (See vv. 4–5.)
   A. God’s law goes out from him. (See note 4 above.)
   B. God’s justice becomes “a light to the nations.”
   C. God’s “righteousness draws near speedily.” (See note 1 above.)
   D. God’s “salvation is on the way.”
   E. God’s “arm [brings] justice to the nations.”
   F. “The islands . . . wait in hope for [God’s] arm.”

III. Look ahead! (See v. 6.)
   A. True, heaven and earth will pass away.
   B. But rejoice, for God’s “salvation will last forever,” and his “righteousness will never fail.”

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Editor’s note: The following homiletical help is adapted from Concordia Journal, July 1999.

Proper 17 • Jeremiah 15:15–21 • August 31, 2014

On the second Sunday after Pentecost we heard Jeremiah 28:5–9. Here the prophet Jeremiah must deal with the false prophecies of prosperity and peace instead of the pending judgment that he foretold. (See Concordia Journal 40:2, 173–174.)

Now, on this Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost we hear Jeremiah 15:15–21. Here the prophet is once again struggling with his call. Though the Lord “understands,” Jeremiah grieves over the persecution he is suffering and questions whether the Lord will be “like a deceptive brook.”

In the gospel lesson (Matthew 16:21–28) Jesus must confront Peter. As we heard in the previous Sunday’s text, Peter made the bold confession that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Now, immediately after, Jesus speaks of His pending death at the hands of the religious leaders in Jerusalem, and Peter says, “Never, Lord!” Jesus then must give the harsh response, “Out of my sight, Satan! . . . You do not have in
mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Jesus then says that all who would follow him must take up their cross.

One always has to consider the relevance of secular events to the liturgical events or, better, the relevance of the liturgical events to the secular, which is what our people need! Therefore, mentioning the fact that this happens to be Labor Day weekend is appropriate in that the texts deal with one’s calling before God.

Comments on the Text

In the previous verses Jeremiah delivers the word of the Lord concerning drought, famine, and sword coming to Judah. The people of Judah, however, are listening to the false prophets who claim, “No sword or famine will touch the land.” Jeremiah laments his position as the bearer of bad news in the face of prosperity-preachers and a people who would much rather hear such a message. The Lord reaffirms his message of judgment, and this brings us to our text.

Verse 15: “You understand, O Lord.” Jeremiah takes comfort in the fact that the Lord understands his position as the bearer of bad news. Jeremiah, therefore, confesses his faith in the Lord’s understanding and long-suffering and pleads for the Lord to remember him, care for him, and avenge him.

Verse 16: “When your words came I ate them.” Jeremiah pledges allegiance to the Lord (“for I bear your name”) and his word. Though the people have not taken His message to heart, he has (even as we often pray) “read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested” God’s word.

Verse 17: “I never sat in the company of revelers.” Jeremiah’s call was a lonely one; he did not marry or make merry. Moreover, he was a social outcast and persecuted because of the message he delivered.

Verse 18: “Why is my pain unending?” Jeremiah laments the fallout of his call. In his grief, he questions reliance on God’s provision for him.

Verse 19: The Lord responds that, if Jeremiah turns from such doubtful questioning, He will restore him to his call as a spokesman and to his task of delivering the Lord’s message despite the people’s opposition to it.

Verse 20: The Lord encourages Jeremiah by promising to “fortify” him against the attacks of the people, and that he will not be overcome because the Lord is with him to rescue and save. (This verse is a marvelous memory verse for the modern day persecuted prophet.)

Verse 21: The Lord promises Jeremiah that he will indeed be saved and redeemed.

Central thought of the text: The servants of God face opposition from false prophets of prosperity and from a people all too willing to listen to such prophets instead of God’s call to repentance. Nevertheless, the Word of the Lord stands firm, and His servants do too, as the Lord strengthens them through that Word.

Central thought for the sermon: The faithful people of God, especially the pastors, will always face opposition. Nevertheless, God promises to sustain, strengthen, restore, and save them.

Homiletical considerations: Both this week’s lessons and next week’s lessons focus on the call of God’s servants to deliver the message of repentance to a disobedient
A prophet of doom like Jeremiah is never a popular person. He spoke of pending death and destruction while everyone else was speaking of peace and prosperity. He is not the kind of person you would want to have around at a party, a wedding, or even to lunch. What a damper he would be on any reason to celebrate!

On the other hand, if we are serious about God's call to repentance—to follow him unswervingly, to avoid temptations of self-destructive behavior and harming others for our own gain, to grow and mature as responsible citizens and Christians, and especially to avoid the coming judgment of God—then Jeremiah just might be precisely the sort of friend to have around.

If the bearers of bad news save us from greater harm, then they are certainly welcome. The same is true for bringing God's law to a lost and dying world. The Lord's message of repentance saves people from the greater harm of God's judgment.

I actually cringe every time I encounter this text. It isn't that I don't like it, or don't understand what is being said. It is, rather, that the message is too clear. It is God's warning, repeated time and again, that we ignore his word to our own peril. And it isn't just for us preachers; it is for all of God's people.

And then I read the headlines of the day and see how bad things are in this world, and I become even more concerned. In Jeremiah the Lord says it this way, I set watchmen over you, saying, "Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet!" But they said, "We will not pay attention." Therefore hear, O nations, and know, O congregation, what will happen to them. Hear, O earth; behold, I am bringing disaster upon this people, the fruit of their devices, because they have not paid attention to my words; and as for my law, they have rejected it. (Jer 6:17–19)

But we haven't paid attention to the trumpet—or if we have we interpreted it as a trumpet of triumph, not the trumpet of warning as it is portrayed the Scriptures. We have been called to be watchmen over God's people. “Son of man,” the Lord said to Ezekiel at the time of his call in chapter 3: “I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me” (3:17). That same message is repeated here.

But notice—Ezekiel isn't expected to save the entire nation; he is expected to rescue individuals. And that is where the application becomes personal and where I begin to find comfort. Ezekiel, while he was called to preach to all the people, had a