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

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

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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

people. If one focuses on brother-to-brother confrontations, this week could focus on pastors as “the prophets of doom.”

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.