

## Sermon: 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Jeremiah 11:18-20 v.19a)

Theme: The suffering servant of the Lord

Goal: We shall remain faithful to God even under suffering.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Jeremiah is known as “The wailing Prophet”, because he lived in a very difficult time and he complains and cries a lot in his two books: The Book of Jeremiah, and The Book of Lamentations. He complains about himself, he complains of his people, he complains against God. He had been chosen by God to be a prophet even before he was born, as God says when He called Jeremiah: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” And he began his ministry very young. We know it because he tried to excuse himself of God’s work saying: “Ah, Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak; I am only a child. But the Lord said: Do not say ‘I am only a child. You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you, declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 1:5-8).

He had a long ministry and prophesied during the reigns of five kings of Judah till the city was destroyed and put on fire by Nebuchadnezzar around 600 B.C. He eventually was stoned by his own people in Egypt, according to the Jewish tradition.

I – The suffering servant preaches God’s Word

The people of God had gone astray. They were worshiping the false god Baal, and this kind of worship included several sexual practices against God’s Law. The King’s family and many priests were

worshiping Baal as well. Corruption, immorality and violence were everywhere. The situation was turning from bad to worse.

Jeremiah came from a priests' family and he began to preach under God's command. He proclaimed that the people had broken God's Covenant and had rejected their Creator. God was really frustrated with His people in such a way that He said to the prophet: "Do not pray for this people nor offer a plea or petition for them, because I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their distress"

(Jeremiah 11:14). God's patience had come to an end and He had judged His people and the punishment was not far. This helps to understand *why the people were so angry with Jeremiah that some would kill him. He is conveying the bitter message of God's implacable wrath against the idolatry of the city. They did not want to hear that.* (Phil Brandt, p. 11).

## II – The suffering servant face opposition

When Jeremiah announced this, even the people of his own town, Anathoth, rebelled against him and "they had plotted against him saying: Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of living, that his name be remembered no more." A commentary wrote: *They had devised a plan to leave him childless, a terrible thing in ancient Israel. It was effectively cutting him off from the promise of Abraham, that a descendent would be the Messiah.* (Phil Brandt, p. 13).

When Jeremiah realized this, he entrusted himself to God's hands. He prayed: "But, O Lord Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause." The prophet knew that there was no chance for those people anymore, because God's judgment was around the corner. But he trusted in the Lord. And he was saved

on that occasion and even when the city was destroyed he was spared by Nebuchadnezzar.

### III – The suffering servant suffers quietly

Therefore he said about himself: “I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter.” These words link the entire suffering life of Prophet Jeremiah to another suffering Servant of the Lord: Jesus Himself!

He was the gentle lamb identified by John the Baptist as “The lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). This term was used in the Old Testament several times. The best known passage is always read on Good Friday, from Isaiah 53:5,7: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities... He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” This passage is quoted in the New Testament in the episode of the eunuch of Ethiopia. He was reading this passage and he asked Philip to explain it. “Then Philip began with this very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35).

Jesus’ own people didn’t accept His preaching on repentance either. They hadn’t accepted the call of repentance preached by John the Baptist, and he was eventually killed by King Herod; and the same happened to Jesus. Jesus knew about the plot His enemies were making against Him. And He prepares His disciples for these dark days in the Gospel for today, saying: “The Son of man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, but after three days he will rise. But they did not understand what he meant” (Mark 9:31).

As Jeremiah, Jesus relied on God and in His last moment he cried out in a loud voice: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

And God was gracious to Him and brought Him back to life on Easter Sunday. This is the core of our Christian faith: That Christ “was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Romans 4:25).

Conclusion: The story of Jeremiah is not just a story of the past, like the story of Jesus is not just part of the ancient history. This is our story as well, the story of our time. God still sends His prophets to a world where people are turning their backs to God and are following their own dark ways. Blessed are those who listen to the Word of God preached by His prophets, repent from their wicked ways and return to the God of love that accepts everyone in the name of Jesus. But wow to those who don't want to listen to God's call to repentance and just go on following their own ways. The darkness that they are following will lead them to eternal darkness, where no hope is available anymore. The judgment of God has not yet come over our people like it happened in the time of Jeremiah. We are still in the time of God's grace. He is calling and waiting patiently. Thanks to God that many are listening to the words of His prophets and are daily in repentance and faith. Thanks to God that many have been called from the darkness to His eternal light through faith in Jesus. Thanks to God that we can enjoy our fellowship around the Word and the Sacraments, being strengthened in faith, in hope and in love; in spite of all the plots that enemies are making against the Christians and against the Christian Church, trying to shake the true foundation of the Church. But, according to Jesus' promise, “I will build my church and even the gates of hell will not overcome it!” (Matthew 16:18). Some of us, and St. Thomas as a church, have suffered several attacks from enemies, but God has been faithful and will be faithful to the very end, bringing us all to His gracious presence in eternity. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 20 September 2015