

January 24: 14:1-15:9

Highlight: 14:10-16

All! Let's begin with prayer today!

Prayer:

On Manasseh:

The passage that was just read to us comes from a long section in Jeremiah that's pretty simple to summarize. There's been a terrible drought in Judea; people are already dying, and it's clear that more people will die. Before we talk about how Jeremiah reacts to this, and how God reacts to Jeremiah, I want to mention one small part of this section, 14 through 15:9, that wasn't read to us.

There, God says to Jeremiah, "I will make [my people] abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what Manasseh son of Hezekiah king of Judah did in Jerusalem."

This is helpful to us. Manasseh was son of Hezekiah.

Now: Hezekiah was king in Judah when Assyria came and exiled the Northern Kingdom of Israel. And

Hezekiah learned from that experience. He did what he could to return Judea and Jerusalem to Yahweh. He's mentioned all over the Bible, mentioned in Jesus' own genealogy. Hezekiah was a faithful Israelite. He did have a pretty significant failure, in that he showed off all Jerusalem's wealth to some Babylonian ambassadors. It wasn't great; God sent Isaiah to tell him that this would end up resulting in Babylon exiling Judah. So his pride sort of started the inevitable path that Jeremiah has been prophesying about for so long. But by and large he guided people to serve Yahweh, to reject idols, to live faithfully. But his son Manasseh was terrible. Here's what the biblical book 2 Kings writes about Manasseh:

He built altars in the temple of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, "In Jerusalem I will put my Name." 5 In the two courts of the temple of the Lord, he built altars to all the starry hosts. 6 He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced divination, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, arousing his anger. (2 Kgs 21:4-6)

Manasseh was faithless; worse than faithless, but

antagonistic to God and embracing of other false gods worshipped by Judah's neighbors. What chapter 14 and 15 together tell us is that Jeremiah is preaching, now, during a time in which Manasseh's hold on Israel's religious life is complete. It's not just the prophets and the priests who are lying about what's to come on Judah, it's the king, too. Every institution in the life of God's People has forcefully rejected Yahweh. Everyone has turned their backs on God.

It's just Jeremiah, you know? Shouting at a concrete wall, wishing someone would listen.

A Different Concrete Wall:

And in Chapter 14 Jeremiah also shouts at Yahweh, wishing God would listen. But this section of Jeremiah is a tragedy, because God promises, instead, that He will not. At the start of 15 we read, "Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people." These are Israel's two great advocates; Moses, who guided Israel when they had no king and spoke to God as if God was his friend, and Samuel, who set up the kingship, first of Saul, then of David. God says he wouldn't even listen to them, two of those he most used to shape Israel's life.

And I want you to think about this, for a minute. Because what God's saying to Jeremiah in Chapter 14 and 15 is simply this: No one is going to listen to you. Not even me.

I mean, I can get behind the idea, or behind, behind the idea, that no one will listen to Jeremiah but he'll still have his relationship with God, at least, you know? He'll still have that. But in today's passage we realize that Israel has so deeply used up all their chances that God won't even listen to his one chosen prophet when he appeals on their behalf.

And here's character: Because Jeremiah speaks anyway. Shouts, anyway, knowing that this most-moved mover won't budge on this one.

Drought:

When God first tells Jeremiah about how terrible this drought is going to be for Judah, Jeremiah can't take it. He says:

***Although our sins testify against us,
do something, Lord, for the sake of your
name.
For we have often rebelled;***

***we have sinned against you.
You who are the hope of Israel,
its Savior in times of distress,
why are you like a stranger in the land,
like a traveler who stays only a night?
Why are you like a man taken by surprise,
like a warrior powerless to save?
You are among us, Lord,
and we bear your name;
do not forsake us!***

Jeremiah's saying, basically, "You've forgiven us before? We still are your People--in the eyes of others, at least--and can't you help us to at least protect your reputation? Aren't you committed to us? Aren't you capable? You are...so save us."

And God says,

***"They greatly love to wander;
they do not restrain their feet.
So the Lord does not accept them;
he will now remember their wickedness
and punish them for their sins."***

The answer is just a return to the first charge: There is

no self-control in Judah anymore. They take pleasure in their faithlessness. And, so...they'll get what they've proven they desire. And this is when God first tells Jeremiah: Look, don't pray for them. I'm not going to listen to you.

11 Then the Lord said to me, "Do not pray for the well-being of this people. 12 Although they fast, I will not listen to their cry; though they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Instead, I will destroy them with the sword, famine and plague."

And Jeremiah, who knows by know that God means what God says. That God knows what His People really want, Jeremiah decides to intercede anyway. We read:

13 But I said, "Alas, Sovereign Lord! The prophets keep telling them, 'You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed, I will give you lasting peace in this place.'"

Jeremiah does what everyone does who's trying to persuade someone whose decided something that they just don't agree with. I love that Jeremiah takes

the first person here, because he doesn't always, and records his speech directly. Jeremiah says, "But I said."

I spoke anyway. I spoke anyway. God said "Do not pray for the well-being of this people." And I did anyhow. Jeremiah disagrees with God here, and has the wherewithal to speak for Israel. And what he says is basically, "Look. It's not their fault. The prophets are lying to them." They've been deceived, God. And Jeremiah doesn't need to repeat his argument, again, that God is God and should do right by Israel. He knows that God knows it. And God's reply to Jeremiah's disobedience is to say, "Look, I never stop weeping about what's coming on Jerusalem. I never stop crying about what the future holds for my people."

Jeremiah doesn't want to hear that. Jeremiah wants to hear God say he'll stop what's coming on Israel. He's save them from themselves. That's what he wants God to say; but God won't say it. All he'll say, as we see in Chapter 15, is that someday, some far away day, Israel will get their place back. And having been told not to pray, and having had God ignore his request completely, Jeremiah just keeps going. And

notice first, that he speaks at all; and second, the content of his cries.

Have you rejected Judah completely?

Do you despise Zion?

Why have you afflicted us

so that we cannot be healed?

We hoped for peace

but no good has come,

for a time of healing

but there is only terror.

20 We acknowledge our wickedness, Lord,

and the guilt of our ancestors;

we have indeed sinned against you.

21 For the sake of your name do not despise us;

do not dishonor your glorious throne.

Remember your covenant with us

and do not break it.

***22 Do any of the worthless idols of the nations
bring rain?***

Do the skies themselves send down showers?

No, it is you, Lord our God.

Therefore our hope is in you,

for you are the one who does all this.

Solidarity and Advocacy:

“us, we, we, we, our, our, we, us, us, our, our.” These are the words Jeremiah uses in this lament, this angry, persistent, faithful, worshipful acknowledgement that only God can help Judah, given even after God has told Jeremiah, “Don’t bother. This is happening. Nothing you say can change it.”

“No one, Jeremiah, will listen to you, is listening to you, and I’m not going to listen to you either, so don’t pray.” And against that reality, that denial, that incredibly isolating moment, Jeremiah aligns himself with the People of God who need him and need the knowledge that only he seems to have or care about anymore, and he says, “You can still save us.”

Jeremiah aligns himself with the very people who are rejecting him and rejecting the God who has called him, empowered him, and demanded he not pray on their behalf, because it’s useless.

Jeremiah, in the face of a hopeless reality, one he cannot change, speaks with advocacy and acts in solidarity with the very people who have isolated him, who have hurt themselves and him, both.

And if that example doesn’t guide us directly to Jesus,

I mean, what does? Jesus, murdered as an enemy of the state, betrayed by those who he healed, crying out “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?”

And if Jesus’ example doesn’t guide us directly to a Christian, then what does? Except...we do not always live up to his example.

Conclusion:

And with this reminder, this way in which Jeremiah foreshadows Christ himself, I’m done preaching this morning.

All I’m going to leave us with is this: Do we act in solidarity and speak with advocacy on behalf of those who isolate us and have rejected God? Or do we make our enemies pay? If our cry isn’t “Forgive them, father, for they do not know what they do?” Then it’s the wrong one. And that doesn’t preclude lament, it doesn’t preclude fear, it doesn’t preclude any negative thing. But neither do those negative things exclude the demand of our solidarity or our advocacy. So:

Who is getting what they deserve, but still needs us to be on their side?

Who has rejected God, but still needs us to speak up for them?

Who isolates us, but still needs our voice in solidarity?

I don't have answers to this, not really. Only principles to consider. But the Spirit can bring them to each of us as we need. So let's ask them, at least.