

J.j.

HAVE YOU EVER WORN A YOKE?

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 57th & Broadway, Sacramento, CA

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, 2. July, A.D. 2017 ☩

Jeremiah 28:5-9 5 Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Hananiah the prophet in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord, 6 and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord make the words that you have prophesied come true, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the Lord, and all the exiles. 7 Yet hear now this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. 8 The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. 9 As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet." (ESV)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ. *Rm.1:7*

The first word I want to say to you today is 'WELCOME.'

Our Service Folder cover says welcome twice and today's Gospel says it six times.

But St. Paul frightens me when, in Romans, he says 'slave' *seven* times.

Then there's Jeremiah the prophet who 2,700 years ago was having an interesting life.

Let me ask you—have you ever worn a yoke? Jeremiah did.

In the chapter just before our text it reads, *Jer. 27* 1*In the beginning of the reign of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord. 2 ...: Make yourself a yoke of straps and bars, and put them on your neck.*

But strangely enough, old Jeremiah from thousands of years ago helps us with the words 'welcome' and 'slave.' First, let's see just why - - -

Part I, Jeremiah Wore a Yoke—Was That a Welcome Thing?

Point 1, Strange Way to Make a Prophetic Point—What Was the Point way back then? Jeremiah lived through one of the most troubled times of the ancient Near East.

During his 40 years as a prophet, great empires rose and fell—Jeremiah saw Assyria fall when Ashurbanipal died (circa 633 B.C.), and saw Babylon take its place.

And even though Jerusalem resisted Babylon, they were invaded, and King Jehoiakim and many leaders in Judea were carried off to Babylon in 597 B.C.

Soon after that, Jeremiah put on his yoke—A YOKE! Like a team of oxen would wear—across his shoulders—a symbolic act of submission.

Why? Because of false prophets who said everything was going to be OK now.

Jeremiah knew better—the people had still not put away their false gods, nor had the priests purified themselves according to Levitical Law.

Judges took bribes—there was economic injustice—and they refused to repent.

Jeremiah's yoke was strange, but his point? *God would put the yoke of Babylon about their necks—his judgement was still on the way—they would become slaves!*

Could it be that God's judgement is being visited upon us, U.S.?

Consumer confidence has grown, but many do not have jobs because the recovery is still slow, why?—our most abundant source of energy, coal, is now in favor again, but the electric grid could be attacked by an Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) and millions of us would die—why are we vulnerable?—high gov't. elected officials are being lied about every day—obstructionism is rampant—and worst of all, our children are not learning right from wrong in government schools.

We should ask ourselves if we have refused to repent as a nation.

Abraham Lincoln said, "*America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves.*"

Our country needs another Jeremiah with his yoke of warning today.

Point 2, False Prophets Get Us to Trust a Lie

In August 594, three years into exile, the prophet Hananiah confronted Jeremiah. He took the yoke off Jeremiah's shoulders and broke it.

According to Hananiah, God said, *"Within two years I will bring back to this place King Jehoiachin, and all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon, says the Lord, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon."*

Jeremiah answered in the words of today's text—he said, (I'm paraphrasing here) "May the Lord do as you say. I hope you are right, but precedent is on my side. ... The only way we will know if you are right is if what you say comes to pass. And there has been no mention of repentance out of your mouth. Meanwhile you already have seen the outcome of my prophecy. Our leaders are gone and the vessels of gold & silver have been carried off to Babylon."

OK, whom do you trust? Which prophet? Jesus said in today's Gospel: ***41 Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward;...*** Wait a minute, are there still prophets today? Yes, you're looking at one. And whoever fills the twofold office of prophet and priest today is called a pastor—this congregation welcomes five pastors—five prophets and priests to preside at the holy sacraments and to proclaim the saving Word from this pulpit. How do we know whom to trust? Only time will tell—and learning how to test them.

Point 3, Here's Jeremiah test of a True Prophet.

This is what happened after Jeremiah said these words of our text,

"9 As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet."

Now Baruch, as you may know, was Jeremiah's secretary, and he writes:

10 Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke-bars from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet and broke them. 11 And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, "Thus says the Lord: Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations within two years." But Jeremiah the prophet went his way.

Was Hananiah a True Prophet? He said, don't worry, folks—we won't be taken captive, but later that year, Baruch the scribe writes:

"...the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: 13 'Go, tell Hananiah, "Thus says the Lord: You have broken wooden bars, but ... the Lord has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. 16 Therefore thus says the Lord: ... This year you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against the Lord."'"

17 In that same year, in the seventh month, the prophet Hananiah died. (ESV)

Wow! Going Against a True Prophet Like Jeremiah Has Consequences.

Hananiah's preaching was not true—so, condemned by Jeremiah, he died.

No welcome for a false prophet there! What he preached was a "take-it-easy-gospel"—no repentance—no amending of sinful lives.

We can hear the same message from the peace and prosperity preachers today.

However, I have better news:

Part II, Our Lord Breaks Our Yoke

Point 4, A Prophecy of Hope Comes True

Hananiah was wrong—the Babylonian army came back ten years after the first siege. They destroyed the temple and most of Jerusalem, and carried off almost all the rest of the Judeans.

But now look: Jeremiah had prophesied doom, but once the worst happened he became a hopeful prophet—now he prophesied return, restoration, and peace.

Remember, he had told Hananiah, *"As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly*

sent the prophet.”

Well, it wasn't until 70 years later, but the Jews were finally allowed to return home. Jeremiah's hopeful words came to pass—peace once again prevailed—they began to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

But that's all ancient history, preacher—what's that to us today? It is simply this:

Jeremiah's prophecy came true a second time when Jesus rose from the grave. Jesus returned from death's exile, he was restored to life, he gave his disciples *peace*—*i.e., forgiveness of sins for abandoning him*.

Jesus Christ broke the yoke of sin and death from our shoulders by his death upon a cross—that's the good news of Jesus—we call it the gospel.

It is the gospel that changes hearts—when there is trouble and quarreling in our fellowship, He restores us to one another as sisters and brothers.

When there is sorrow and mourning, our Lord says, *“peace be with you.”*

He breaks the slavery of sin by forgiving us; he welcomes us to the kingdom of God.

Last Point, Have You Ever Worn a Yoke? Here's a New Yoke.

It is yoke of welcome, of apostleship. Remember when Jeremiah said to Hananiah, *“God did not send you?”* A prophet must be both called and sent.

Listen to Jesus as he calls us and sends us:

28 Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” We are being sent!—even if we carry heavy burdens!

It's kinda like this Story of the Small Tree:

I hired a plumber to help me restore an old farmhouse, and after he had just finished a rough first day on the job—a flat tire made him lose an hour of work—his electric drill quit—and his ancient one ton truck refused to start.

So I drove him home, and he sat in stony silence. On arriving, he invited me in to meet his family. As we walked toward the front door, he paused briefly at a small tree, touching the tips of the branches with both hands.

When opening the door he underwent an amazing transformation. His tanned face was wreathed in smiles and he hugged his two small children and gave his wife a kiss. Afterward he walked me to the car. We passed that small tree and my curiosity got the better of me. I asked him about what I had seen him do earlier.

"Oh, that's my trouble tree," he replied "I know I can't help having troubles on the job, but one thing's for sure, those troubles don't belong in the house with my wife and the children. So I just hang them up on the tree every night when I come home and pray God to take care of them. Then in the morning I pick them up again." "Funny thing is," he smiled, "when I come out in the morning to pick 'em up, there aren't nearly as many as I remember hanging up the night before."

Are we carrying heavy burdens? Give them to our Savior. Then when we are sent to welcome the lost, we will gladly sing our next Hymn today, “Here I Am, Lord, Is it I, Lord?... I will go, Lord, if you lead me.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

S.D.g.

The Rev. Dr. Don Schedler, Ph.D., Snowline Hospice Chaplain, retired

[1713 spoken words] Baskerville 11; Arial 10