

## December 5, 2010 Narrative Lectionary – Jeremiah 7:1-15; 31:31-34

Would you rather be told by God to share a message of hope or a message of judgment? That's probably an easy question to answer, but we learned from last week, with Isaiah, that even if you have a good message to give – a child will be born for you – people may not believe it b/c it's not what they were expecting – even if it is good news.

The prophet Jeremiah was chosen by God to give a message of judgment AND hope to the people.

He came at the end of monarchy and before and after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem

Called by God to be a prophet and he didn't feel worthy b/c he felt that he was too young  
He spent many years as a prophet – possibly 40 years

The book of Jeremiah, as a whole, is addressed to a different audience than Jeremiah's actual sermons. It is thought that the book was put together over a 20 year period for those who found themselves in the aftermath of the destroyed temple. A people who would be in despair and distress. Does that change how the message of the book is heard?

Jeremiah's message is one of critique/judgment and hope/new life. In many ways, a fitting message for the second Sunday of the Advent season, a season that means the waiting of the coming Messiah, the season of hope.

We hear the first part of Jeremiah's message of judgment in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter, which is a part of his famous temple sermon. He is even told by God to stand at the gate to deliver this message so that all who pass by will hear the critique of God. People still go to the temple to worship God, but they are not living lives of integrity at other times. They are living lives separate from God at other times b/c see God only in the temple. Jeremiah is there to give the people God's wake-up call.

Probably the most famous part of this sermon is in verse 11 – “Has this house which bears my name, become a den of robbers to you?” It is the very passage that Jesus quotes when he is overturning the moneychangers tables in the temple. And yet, it wasn't about what business that they were doing, it was also about what Jeremiah is talking about to the people.

A den is a hideout for robbers/thieves after they have done their work. So, essentially, Jeremiah is telling the people to stop using the temple as their hideout, their den, from what they are doing the rest of their time. He is reminding the people that God's activity does not end in the temple itself; for God is active everywhere and they needed to be living Godly lives of integrity.

Jeremiah gives God's critique to the people that they're judged on all that they do and that the true God should be shaping their lives, thoughts and actions. The temple for

them, or religious life for us, shouldn't become a cover for what we do the rest of the week.

Do we hear the words of Jeremiah as a critique about our own lives? Are we willing to hear it even if it is harsh? For worship can be a time to come together not only for forgiveness, but a time to be equipped as God's people to go out to see God at work in the world. We CAN live lives of integrity because we are called children of God.

That brings us to Jeremiah chapter 31 and the second part of his message for the people – a message of hope: “The time is coming when God will make a new covenant. . . .” That is pretty exciting and probably strange to the ears of the listeners of Jeremiah's time. A covenant had already been created; what does he mean by a new covenant?

Obviously the old covenant is not working because the people continue to sin. And yet, God does not give up.

“New Covenant” is also familiar language that we hear each Sunday we celebrate Holy Communion. It is in the words that Jesus spoke to his disciples as he shared a meal with them in the upper room. “This cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for you.” Jeremiah is letting the people in on a new agreement/promise that God is establishing with them b/c God will not let human sin have the final say.

If the future were left to humans, it would've ended w/the people in exile. The only way for there to be a future is for it to be in God's hands with a new covenant.

When we hear those words today, for us, a new covenant is about Christ, a new covenant is knowing that God is the one who defines us and not our sin. A new covenant is what we take part in when we come forward invited to the Lord's Table.

God's promise remains with us – I will be your God and you will be my people.

**Helpful Resources:**

- Narrative lectionary podcast
- Terence Fretheim on Enter the Bible
- Notes from Jeremiah class with Daniel Simundson