

*Jeremiah 11:18-20. <sup>18</sup> Because the LORD revealed their plot to me, I knew it, for at that time he showed me what they were doing. <sup>19</sup> I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me, saying, "Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more." <sup>20</sup> 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.*

### **Humbly serve the LORD**

- 1. Innocent like Lambs**
- 2. Strengthened by Testing**
- 3. Trusting Our God**

Last week the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary hosted a Symposium on Shepherd Leadership. At this gathering a large group of pastors and seminary students listened as three excellent papers were given. The men who wrote these papers were highly respected pastors with years of experience in the parish ministry. While delivering concrete principles from Scripture about how ministers are enabled by God to humbly carry out the gospel ministry, they shared stories of how God blessed their personal ministries. However, they did not just speak of one success story after another, but each one of these men also spoke of times of vulnerability, awkward moments of inexperience, and times of testing and frustration. And as they spoke of such instances they acknowledged that through such trials the LORD strengthened their faith and blessed their ministry.

This portion of Jeremiah's ministry would have been such a seminal moment which the LORD would use to strengthen the faith of his servant Jeremiah, so that the prophet would be enabled to humbly serve the LORD. And as we ponder this portion of Scripture together we are reminded that God protects and strengthens his people. God even uses suffering to build up our faith, as we serve our LORD in thankfulness and humility.

Jeremiah recounts for his readers what must have been quite the ministry experience. People were *actually* plotting to take his life. God sent Jeremiah to speak of the coming judgment that would be poured out on them as the nation of Babylon would come down from the north to bring about the destruction that God had promised. This, of course, would not be a popular message, and the people would not be kind to God's prophet, to say the least. Even the priests and leaders of the church would reject his message, speak out against him, and as it turns out that would only be the half of it.

But the LORD had promised to protect his servant and Jeremiah would trust in the promises of protection. God says this to his newly commissioned prophet in Jeremiah chapter 1. ***Jeremiah 1:8, Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you,***

**declares the LORD. *Jeremiah 1:18*. Now behold, this day I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land--against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land. *Jeremiah 1:19*. They will fight against you but never overcome you, since I am with you to rescue you," declares the LORD**

The LORD would protect his servant and make him to be a fortified city, and iron pillar, and bronze walls against the people. There would be nothing to fear; and that very much appears to the case here. Jeremiah trusts that the LORD would protect him; and he was so locked into that promise of protection and so locked into that task of sharing the message that God had given him, that Jeremiah was largely unaware that the people had plotted against him. Unafraid of what they might say or do to him, Jeremiah simply went about the task of sharing the message of repentance and judgment. In a somewhat naïve way, he didn't dwell on or even think much about the ramifications that would come from speaking such a message, instead he faithfully, humbly, served the LORD. He spoke the message that God gave to him.

Here in chapter 11, however, Jeremiah looks back and with the gift of perspective and now realizes how dangerous that actually was. ***I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me.*** I suppose Jeremiah should have suspected some sort of resistance or been on the look out for such hostility, but there was surely some benefit in how all this transpired. Unaware of the plotting, unaware of the deadly animosity that was building against him, Jeremiah was enabled to speak the word of the LORD unabashedly, without hesitation or reservation, and there is something wonderful about that.

God had promised to be there to protect his prophet, and so with innocent trust and faith, the prophet went about his task. You can almost imagine Jeremiah's faith-filled logic. *God said he was going to protect me, so God will protect me. God told me to speak this message, so I am going share this message.* With such a simple childlike faith and trust, Jeremiah humbly served the LORD.

I say childlike because there is something simplistic and wonderful about the faith of a child, and Jesus highlights such a faith in our Gospel lesson for today. Just think about a grandchild or a child and how children are known to boldly express their faith, often without reservation or hesitation. Unhindered by the social pressures that limit our expressions of faith in the adult world, such children point out matters of spiritual significance in mixed company, without much care for where they are or who is around, not even thinking twice about how this message might be received, because they are eager to share what they have learned about their God and Savior.

LORD give us such a faith that so boldly proclaims your word both law and gospel boldly, confidently, and without reservation! Enable us to serve you LORD with childlike faith and humility!

I can think of a great example of this from the past winter, when a member of St. John's Redwood Falls brought his 7-year-old son with him to skate on the ice here in Danube. While dad got ready to play hockey with the guys, the son was busy skating around from player to player asking each one the question, "Do you believe in Jesus?"

What a fearless expression of faith that seems so contrary to how grown-ups and even older children so often live! Lord give us a such a childlike faith that is so bold and so innocent!

And so it was for Jeremiah that in the innocence of a bright and new calling he went about his task with such a childlike faith that he was oblivious to the danger that was rising around him. Not all of the people would take so kindly to this message and receive it, but in his case, many would reject it, and that rejection would transfer over to him. Not only would they dream up ways to silence his message, but they sought to cut down the **“tree along with its fruit”**. To silence and get rid of Jeremiah altogether so that they wouldn't have to worry about being bothered again by this 'meddlesome' man and any of his troubling messages.

But the LORD revealed their plotting to Jeremiah. Would that cause Jeremiah to flee, to desert his message, to retreat or cower in fear of those that surrounded and threatened his very life? On the contrary, God would use this to strengthen his servant, through testing. It is often through the crucible of difficulty and frustration and opposition that God strengthens his believers. As the pastors at the symposium recalled past testing and trials and opposition each one cited at least a few difficult circumstances and how they could now see that God had strengthened them through such testing as they grew in their ability to carry out the ministry God had given to them. Opposition can serve to strengthen each one of us as we grow in our faith. Like resistance in physical therapy, exercise, and weight training leads to stronger muscles, sometimes the Lord calls us to face opposition as we exercise our faith so that we grow and become stronger in this testing. The picture of refining precious metal also comes to mind as we mature in our faith through such testing.

Whether it is sharing our faith with a neighbor, rebuking a fellow believer, calling a family member to repentance, explaining our biblical practice of close communion to a friend, such efforts are difficult, but with God's help we can take on such tasks. And when we do these things that God calls and enables us to do, God can use such experiences to help us grow in our faith and in our service to God. He promises to protect you, to help me, he has called us to speak, to act, according to his law and he will make us stronger for going through such a difficult experience.

Martin Luther would speak of the principles of *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *tentatio* as being vital components in a believer maturing in the faith. Along with *meditating* (*meditatio*) on the Word of God, going to God in prayer (*oratio*), there is a biblical and beneficial aspect of suffering for the gospel (*tentatio*). While we are usually very quick to agree with the first two, we might hesitate and even flat out refuse to agree with the final one. Do I really have to suffer? Why can't I just kind keep my head down and avoid such suffering for the faith? Why can't I just avoid that tough conversation, that awkward moment, that breach of my comfort zone?

Remember dear children of God that God can use even this for your good. Remember that God will protect you, he will help you, and such opposition and resistance can serve to strengthen and clarify our faith!

But while we ought not to run from such opposition and conflict for the faith, we ought not to seek it out. We might occasionally be known to dig in our heels and we have in mind that we are going to crush those that oppose us and the message that we bring. But what good would it do if we allow ourselves to be confrontational with those who oppose the message that we have? What good would it do to get in a shouting match with those we are trying to reach with the message of repentance? What good would it do for us to mudsling and name-call in return? When those that oppose the teachings of the Bible that we confess call us simpletons and bigots and backwards, what good would it do to angrily snap back? When pushed and prodded by those that oppose, that reject, that plot against God's Word and the faith that we have been called into, let us be blessed with the wisdom to leave it all in the LORD's hands as we humbly serve our LORD.

When hard-pressed by those that oppose our faith, especially by those who make it personal, we can always, always, take it to God, for God will deal with those who reject his Word. We trust him to protect us. We trust him to strengthen us. And trusting him in these matters of opposition he sets us free to serve him in thankfulness and humility.

For the LORD of Hosts, the Almighty God, who protects and cares for his children, he loves us so much that he himself was led like a lamb to the slaughter. In these words of Jeremiah there is a not so subtle echo that brings to mind our promised Savior. He too would come with the message of repentance and judgment for those who sin against God. ***Repent the kingdom of heaven is near.*** ([Matthew 4:17](#)). Sinners, each and all, were called to repentance by Jesus, the Savior. No is righteous before a holy God, only the spotless lamb of God. To those confident in their own salvation Jesus spoke in parables and plain language rebuking them for their misguided and misleading view of salvation. He too would be rejected. His message was branded as being too harsh, too critical of human sin, too foreign to mankind's concept of righteousness. Thus, evil men would plot to take his life, to cut him off from the land of the living.

Jesus knew it was all coming and yet he did not change his message, nor did he flee or retreat. Instead, he allowed himself to be that Lamb led to the slaughter for us, for all sinners. The LORD God would hear his call and review his case and yet it was the LORD's gracious will that the Lamb of God would go uncomplaining forth to the cross give his life over to death for our salvation. He committed his cause to the LORD and the LORD God would bless his work of salvation. The Lamb of God who died to pay the full ransom price for sin, was raised from the dead for us and for our salvation so that we would know full well that our God delivers on his promises.

Let us humbly serve the one who gave his life for all of us. Who forgives us for our lack of faith and enables us to serve him with a childlike faith and trust that is renewed each day by God's faithful mercy. Innocent like lambs we will speak God's Word. Strengthened by testing we will grow in our faith and in our lives of service. Trusting in our LORD we are set free to serve our God in humility and power. To our LORD and Lamb, we commit our cares, our fears, and our cause. Amen.