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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, it never ceases to amaze me...

It never ceases to amaze me that all of you graciously and faithfully come to church to hear the word of God preached from my lips.

It never ceases to amaze me that on a Sunday morning, you get up, and you get yourselves dressed, you drive to church, and you give your attention to me.

It never ceases to amaze me.

And I am truly humbled by this reality.

I am humbled by the huge responsibility that I have then to share the Word of God.

Indeed, I need to regularly remind myself that you are not coming here to see me per se, nor have you come to listen specifically to me.

No, I remind myself that I need really to fade into the background.

I need to remind myself that I need to fade into the background so that the presence of God can be made all the more visible.

I remind myself that at best I am a conduit, an instrument for God.

I remind myself that my job as pastor is never to make myself look good by my preaching, by what I know, by my choice of 50 cent words, by my amusing stories, by my impassioned delivery...

No, it should never be about me.

My job as a pastor is fade into the background, to disappear, so as to allow for God to show up, for God to show through, for God to be showcased.

Preaching should never be about the preacher, but it should be about God.

PAUSE

And this is the case even when the necessary words from the preacher are less than appealing, less than agreeable to the listener.

Take Jeremiah for instance.

The prophet Jeremiah was the target of disdain and persecution—why?

Because he was preaching God's judgment upon God's people.

He was preaching "Violence and destruction!"

But Jeremiah says that it is not like he has a choice in the matter.

It is not like he could preach a word of comfort and solace.

It is not like he could do other than preach the word God gives him.

He says, "If I say, 'I will not mention God or speak anymore in his name,' then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot."

Jeremiah wants to refrain from preaching, especially preaching God's judgment, but he can't.

He has to speak God's word, and in Jeremiah's case, God's word is a word of judgment.

But the people who hear this word do not separate Jeremiah from his word.

No, the people do not see beyond Jeremiah to God.

No, the people see Jeremiah's proclamation as Jeremiah's word, not God's.

And so the people mock and ridicule Jeremiah.

The people persecute Jeremiah.

This is the message in our first reading this morning.

And something similar is also going on in our gospel reading from Matthew.

Jesus shares no easy message either in this reading.

Jesus says, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

"One's foes will be members of one's own household."

"A daughter will be set against her mother."

"A daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

"And man will be set against his father."

Nice Father's Day message, right?

Jesus proclaims the difficult word of God, and eventually Jesus is killed for it.

PAUSE

Now, in light of these proclamations by Jeremiah and Jesus...

In light of these most unpopular messages from Jeremiah and Jesus, I wonder about my own preaching.

I wonder, "Am I faithfully preaching the word of God?"

For I am not persecuted like Jeremiah and Jesus.

I am not mocked and ridiculed.

I am not crucified.

Although, believe me, I would prefer to avoid such treatment.

But I have to wonder.

I have to wonder if I have given into say peer pressure?

Have I submitted to the easy path, such as to preach a word of comfort and solace?

Do I preach what I feel others want to hear but not what God is actually saying to me?

This is a question all preachers struggle with or should struggle with.

This is a question all Christians struggle with or should struggle with.

As Christians we should be struggling with the question of whether we are living our lives truly by God's Word which really does challenge our easy, go-lucky life.

Are we too comfortable?

Are we too complacent?

Do we see the Christian faith as nothing more than a sort of safety net guaranteeing salvation when we die?

Or should the Christian faith mean something much, much more?

Jesus says, "Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

What does that mean anyway?

What does it mean to take up your cross?

To take up your cross and follow Jesus.

PAUSE

At the very least, it sounds like the Christian life requires at least a little bit of discomfort.

At the very least, it sounds like the Christian life requires a little bit of sacrifice.

Take up your cross and follow me.

This is a hard message.

And it is not my message to you, sisters and brothers.

It is God's message to all of us in Jesus Christ.

So don't persecute me for conveying it.

Don't crucify me for telling you.

I am only the messenger.

Separate the preacher and the word of God.

Let me fade into the background.

And when I disappear, we see this is God's message to us.

This is God revealed to us today.

This is God showing up, showing through, and being showcased in Jesus.

God in Jesus Christ tells us to take up our cross and follow him.

It is not an easy message.

Taking up the cross is not an easy pill to swallow.

This taking up one's cross is no easy matter.

Indeed, if we want to see what taking up the cross looks like today, we don't need to have to look very far.

Anytime we have turned on the television these past few weeks and we have seen the crowds of protestors, demanding justice for George Floyd...well then we have seen what it means for people take up the cross.

Taking up the cross is not easy.

It demands sacrifice. It demands discomfort.

It is not easy to protest injustice, to change a whole society's way of thinking.

Jesus had to die in order to change the world's way of thinking.

Taking up the cross is not easy work.

But this is God's voice we hear today.

This is God's message to our society, maybe not from a single preacher like a Jeremiah or a Jesus.

But this is God's voice spoken through the crowds of protestors, the voice calling for reform in our society.

We may not all like the message.

It may be hard for us to digest.

Because this message requires our society to change, it demands us to sacrifice, it demands us to be uncomfortable.

But this is exactly why there is a call for all of us to listen, to listen to the voice of the persecuted black race.

We have to listen because I believe God's voice is speaking in this moment to all of us.

And again, there will be some in our society who will laugh or mock or ridicule.

God's messenger Jeremiah suffered such hardship.

But again, even in the face of such hardship, Jeremiah continued to proclaim the word of God.

Even so, all of us need to continue to listen to God's word, and so then to speak out against injustice.

By doing so, we are lending our voices to the voice of God that is stirring among us in our society in this present day.

Can you hear it, Friends?

Can you hear the word of God being proclaimed?

These rallies have not been some sort of sideshow in the midst of a pandemic.

These protests have not been some sort of amusing pastime to take our minds off COVID-19.

No, this is God speaking through God's people.

Maybe God doesn't raise up prophets anymore like Jeremiah.

Maybe God doesn't raise up redeemers anymore like Jesus.
Maybe instead God raises up a whole people and the voice of that people is how God gets his word across.

Yes, we have to listen, for God is speaking.

And so, I come back to where I started this sermon, and that is such that we should not confuse the preacher with the message.

Listen to the message, even if it is difficult to our ears, even it is seems controversial and challenging.

Listen to the message of a persecuted people.

For the message is about the vile injustice done to a people.

And, if we truly listen to the message, we will be inclined to believe the message because of the personal suffering attached to it.

Jeremiah suffered for the message he proclaimed.

Jesus suffered and died for the message he proclaimed.

Black people have suffered for the message they continue to proclaim.

In short, the black race has taken up its cross, and we should take up that cross with them.

Because it is God's word speaking in this moment.

And sure, protesting and marching may be beyond our power.

But we can certainly attest to the fact that we stand in solidarity with the message being proclaimed.

Certainly we can say that there is grave injustice perpetrated in our country toward people of color.

Certainly we can give voice to our convictions and in so doing we will ourselves be part of the powerful voice of God.

By speaking out, speaking up, and speaking with, we will be speaking for justice and truth.

Yes, it is not easy being preachers, Friends, but we have to acknowledge that by default as Christians that is what you and I, each one of us is—a preacher, a proclaimer of the God's word.

It is not easy being a preacher, but this is what we are.

So lend your voice to the cause. Lend your voice to justice. Lend your voice to God's purpose in this day.

Lend your voice, lend your voice, because God is speaking through God's people. Thanks be to God. Amen.