

**August 14**

**Jeremiah 23:23-29**

<sup>23</sup> “I am a God who is everywhere and not in one place only. <sup>24</sup> No one can hide where I cannot see them. Do you not know that I am everywhere in heaven and on earth?

<sup>25</sup> I know what those prophets have said who speak lies in my name and claim that I have given them my messages in their dreams. <sup>26</sup> How much longer will those prophets mislead my people with the lies they have invented? <sup>27</sup> They think that the dreams they tell will make my people forget me, just as their ancestors forgot me and turned to Baal. <sup>28</sup> The prophet who has had a dream should say it is only a dream, but the prophet who has heard my message should proclaim that message faithfully. What good is straw compared with wheat? <sup>29</sup> My message is like a fire and like a hammer that breaks rocks in pieces.

**Psalm 82**

God presides in the heavenly council;  
in the assembly of the gods he gives his decision:

- <sup>2</sup> “You must stop judging unjustly;  
you must no longer be partial to the wicked!  
<sup>3</sup> Defend the rights of the poor and the orphans;  
be fair to the needy and the helpless.  
<sup>4</sup> Rescue them from the power of evil people.  
<sup>5</sup> “How ignorant you are! How stupid!  
You are completely corrupt,  
and justice has disappeared from the world.  
<sup>6</sup> ‘You are gods,’ I said;  
‘all of you are children of the Most High.’  
<sup>7</sup> But you will die like mortals;  
your life will end like that of any prince.”  
<sup>8</sup> Come, O God, and rule the world;  
all the nations are yours.

**Luke 12:49-56**

**Jesus the Cause of Division**

<sup>49</sup> “I came to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already kindled! <sup>50</sup> I have a baptism to receive, and how distressed I am until it is over! <sup>51</sup> Do you suppose that I came to bring peace to the world? No, not peace, but division. <sup>52</sup> From now on a family of five will be divided, three against two and two against three. <sup>53</sup> Fathers will be against their sons, and sons against their fathers; mothers will be against their daughters, and daughters against their mothers; mothers-in-law will be against their daughters-in-law, and daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law.”

**Understanding the Time**

<sup>54</sup> Jesus said also to the people, “When you see a cloud coming up in the west, at once you say that it is going to rain—and it does. <sup>55</sup> And when you feel the south wind blowing, you say that it is going to get hot—and it does. <sup>56</sup> Hypocrites! You can look at the earth and the sky and predict the weather; why, then, don't you know the meaning of this present time?

### **Wishful Thinking**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

You can look at the earth and the sky and predict the weather; why, then, don't you know the meaning of this present time?

Finding meaning, interpretation – that’s the common theme in our readings. In the church we have a special word for certain kinds of interpretation – we call it discernment. Discernment means to separate out – it is the ability to recognize distinction or difference.

Now, discernment does not necessarily carry any judgement – it is simply the ability to recognize realities. These wrenches are metric, these are standard. They are similar, but they are different. A discerning eye recognizes the difference between similar things.

Cal makes a lot of wine – and some pretty good ones I might add. To do so he must discern – as he selects ingredients, as he tastes the wines he has to be able to separate out the different flavours to know that this batch needs just a little more black currant, or maybe some oak shavings. Discernment is recognizing reality.

A lot of the discerning we learn about in the bible has to do with discerning between spirits. In First John we read ‘Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.’

It is this last part of the sentence I would like to come to, for it brings us to the reading from Jeremiah. We need discernment because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is exactly the message that Jeremiah was trying to share. He was saying to the people: there are false prophets among you – they are preaching a message and you are lapping it up – and there is no discernment going on around here.

You see, the problem that Jeremiah was pointing out was that the popular prophets – those people who were tasked with bringing God’s message to God’s people – were no longer doing their job.

These prophets were not discerning the word of God, they were discerning word of the world – they were simply telling the people, especially the important people, whatever they wanted to hear.

The normal task of a prophet is to speak God's word to God's people. That's their calling, that's what they do.

The Word that the prophets speak to God's people is pretty simple, and it is meant to bring the people back into a right relationship with God; the basic message is this: 'You are my people who are meant to be a shining example to the rest of the world. If you follow my commands, if you live the way I have shown you, then you will live well in the land that I am giving to you. But if you do not, if you become corrupt as the other peoples around you are, if you no longer stand for justice, then you will become just like those other nations in all their ways, and eventually you will become swallowed up by them.'

That is the consistent message that God's prophets spoke - but here's the problem – this is not the message that the prophets in Jeremiah's time were spreading. There was widespread corruption and oppression in the land, but the prophets were doing nothing but saying how great Jerusalem was and predicting how much greater it would become. It was not the message of God, it was the message of the world.

You see, God's word is not always what we want to hear. Especially if we are living lives that are not pleasing to God, we don't want to hear anything that would get in the way of what we are doing. The word of God should always challenge us, it should confront power, it should question motives.

Here's how I see it. Today, compared to ten years ago, I am a much better man. The fruits of the spirit have been growing in the last decade, some more than others for sure, but I can say with certainty that I resemble Christ more today than when I was thirty. There is growth – there is movement in the right direction. But here's the thing – while I may have moved from here to here – the standard set by Christ is through the roof. That is why God's word will always challenge us, will always confront us, and will always question us. God's revelation is always going to be disruptive to our lives.

If you are faced with a prophet of God and don't feel uncomfortable, then you are faced with a prophet like the ones Jeremiah was speaking against. We all need and we should expect encouragement from God's people, but we should never be told that we are just fine the way we are. We should never align ourselves with people who tell us that we have made it and that now it's time to sit back and just enjoy our own goodness.

Remember, discernment is about recognizing reality, not living in a dreamland. The prophets in Jeremiah's day may have simply been self-interested yes-men, giving the important people what they wanted to hear so they could continue to maintain a position of respect and luxury, but these day-dreaming prophets were not simply harming themselves and the rich

and powerful who listened to them. They misled the entire population. Their speech used the name of God to lead people away from God.

The true word for that time was a word of judgment – Judah was about to fall and many of the people would be exiled, but the prophets were spreading a false word of hope. If the people believed these prophets and their message of prosperity and false hope, then of course they have no need to repent. What do they have to worry about if the future is all good? False hope precludes repentance.

The message of the prophet always contains hope for the future – but hope only comes after repentance. The first step is always facing the reality of who we are and how we are. You can't prescribe healing until the disease is diagnosed. First reality, which leads to repentance, then hope and grace and salvation. There cannot be one without the other.

This is the pattern we find in Psalm 82, written by Asaph the Seer. Asaph was like the Temple Music Director who worked closely with King David. In Second Chronicles we read that Asaph provided text for the worship music that David composed, and this Psalm is one of his.

This must have been an especially hard one for Asaph to hand over to David, for as we read it, it is a passionate condemnation of the corrupt justice system under David. Asaph puts in God's mouth the charges against those who sit in the council passing judgment on the people as if *they* were gods, handing out favorable rulings to those who buy them and ignoring the poor.

"You must stop judging unjustly;  
you must no longer be partial to the wicked!  
<sup>3</sup> Defend the rights of the poor and the orphans;  
be fair to the needy and the helpless.  
<sup>4</sup> Rescue them from the power of evil people.  
<sup>5</sup> "How ignorant you are! How stupid!  
You are completely corrupt,  
and justice has disappeared from the world.

Think of the courage needed by Asaph to hand those lyrics over to David, his King. David would have to have been either knowingly part of this corruption or at least guilty of incompetence by not seeing what was going on under his nose. Asaph, like Nathan, had the hard task of confronting his King and forcing him to acknowledge his sin.

The psalm ends with a plea for God to rise up and take the place of the unrighteous leaders, and finally bring justice - not only to the weak and needy, but also to the whole earth. Essentially Asaph was asking God to remove David from power and take over. Asaph was

definitely a prophet of God – there's no pandering to power in this psalm, Asaph lays it all on the line – he faces reality and calls it like it is.

This is what Jesus was doing in our reading from Luke – facing reality and calling it like it is. He said I have a baptism to receive, and how distressed I am until it is over! He's not talking about being with his cousin John in the Jordan river – the baptism he's talking about is his passion – his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection. And it's this crucifixion and resurrection that is going to set the earth on fire. It's Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection that is going to cause division.

Jesus' baptism of fire will split the world into those who recognize and follow the Son of God, and those who don't. The kingdom of God Jesus proclaims represents a new order governed not by worldly power but by forgiveness. Those who are invested in the present order; those ensnared by the temptations of wealth, status, and power; those who are ruling now will resist this coming kingdom for it spells an end to what they know and love (or at least have grown accustomed to).

And so Jesus – even though he came to establish a kingdom of peace and even now seeks to draw all people into unity with himself and the father – Jesus also inevitably brings division, and that division is going to split countries, provinces, cities, and even families. All of our families reflect this reality – we can see the division Jesus' name causes.

Now we come back to our theme of discernment again and we ask the question - what are today's prophets telling us?

We are swamped with voices all day – the radio, tv, movies, computers, newspapers, magazines, billboards. There are Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, Tumbler. We also have coworkers, acquaintances, friends, church and family – we're exposed to plenty of voices telling us many different things – all day, every day. Are all those things prophets? I wouldn't necessarily say so, but let me ask this - Do those voices influence us? Do we listen to these voices and make changes to our lifestyles because of them?

Well, yes we do. We do listen to many of those voices, we do what they tell us. All too often we are like those in Jeremiah's time and we listen to the voices that tell us what we'd like to hear, the voices that don't challenge us, that don't confront us nor do they question us.

We create a bubble around ourselves, and we insulate ourselves from anything or anyone that might stir that unease, that feeling that the way we are living is not the way we are supposed to, but despite everything we do we find that we can't completely silence that voice of guilt, that voice of conviction because we find out to our dismay that little voice has always been coming from inside of us, not outside.

It's God's spirit within us. This spirit is the fire that was released after Jesus' resurrection, and it is this spirit that is the spirit of unity, the spirit calling all of creation back to God, overcoming the division that was part of Jesus' first coming.

At the end of the day, we find that repeating what we want does not make it so. Instead, we are a people whose eyes have been opened, we are a people who are concerned with recognizing reality. We are God's apocalyptic people – called to strap on the belt of truth and become revealers, not concealers.

That revelation of reality begins as we look at ourselves first, but it quickly spreads as we turn our eyes of discernment on the world and become aware of the injustices that surround us. And we name those injustices, we name the oppression that we see, and we name the systems of power that chew up the weak and spit them out for the benefit of the strong.

And as we begin to reject and to name the corruption around us we quickly find that WE are becoming prophets – we are calling people back to the way of living that we were created for, the way of living that leads to unity and peace in Christ.

Once we become practiced at using the discernment that becomes ours once we are filled with the Spirit of God - then we begin to have an answer for the question Jesus put to the people gathered around him. You can look at the earth and the sky and predict the weather; why, then, don't you know the meaning of this present time?

Lord,

Grant us a willingness  
to speak out for the weak  
and vulnerable.

Grant us a readiness  
to point out the corrupt  
and indefensible.

Grant us the discernment to hear and follow the voice of the shepherd amidst all the voices  
of the world.