

Scripture:

Psalm 86

Jeremiah 20:7-13

“Like fire in the bones.”

Of all the prophets ----- Jeremiah was the most poorly received.

Of all the prophets ---- Jeremiah seemed to have had the greatest difficulty gaining and keeping a faithful audience.

It was challenge after challenge after challenge for Jeremiah as he shared the words God had for the people.

And yet clearly he had something of value to say as his is the longest of all the biblical prophecies --- indeed the book that bears his name is the very longest of all the books in the Bible.

Thankfully ---- there were a few people who saw some value in what God had to say through him --- and so they preserved his preaching and teaching ---- and we have the book that bears his name.

The context in which we find Jeremiah today in our passage is somewhat typical --- the conditions are dangerous ---- and unfavourable.

Things are such that it would be understandable --- perfectly reasonable ---- if Jeremiah were to be a little bit less than enthusiastic about continuing to speak God’s word.

And yet --- once gain --- Jeremiah doesn’t falter --- and instead thanks to God --- musters up the strength to continue on in faithful witness.

Just prior to our passage today in the beginning of chapter 20 ----- we see that the priest Pashhur ---- after hearing Jeremiah preach --- has Jeremiah beaten and fastened in the stocks just outside the Temple at the upper gate.

Fortunately for Jeremiah --- he is released --- the next day --- as verse 3 says ---- and what we have in our passage today is Jeremiah lamenting ---- thinking out loud --- praying ---- and conversing with God.

But --- and this is important ---- but not before he tells the priest what will happen --- according to what God revealed to him.

And this is crucial because it's not as though Jeremiah preached --- is imprisoned and then is weakened a bit --- or made to feel timid or unsure.

Upon his release Jeremiah is fearless and tells those who imprisoned him just what is going to happen to them according to what God has revealed to him.

It is just after this brave and pointed response to his captors --- and then after his release ---- that we find Jeremiah today.

And we find him doing what he so often did --- talking with God.

And as is so often the case we find him talking with God frankly and honestly.

Many no doubt might consider the words Jeremiah employs to be a little irreverent --- lacking grace --- and tact --- this is God after all that he is addressing --- but Jeremiah is frank and honest with God about how he is feeling.

Listen again to his words --- and just imagine his tone as he speaks with God --- beginning at verse 7

“You deceived me, Lord, and I was deceived;
 you overpowered me and prevailed.
 I am ridiculed all day long;
 everyone mocks me.
 Whenever I speak, I cry out
 proclaiming violence and destruction.
 So the word of the Lord has brought me
 insult and reproach all day long.”

“You deceived me Lord --- you over powered me and prevailed.
 Your word has brought me insult and reproach all day long.”

Jeremiah feels deceived and overpowered ---- deceived and overpower by God.

And all that this deception and overpowering has brought is insults ---- insults all day long.

He is frustrated and perhaps even disappointed ---- he has been deceived and overpowered by God.

He's complaining here --- flat out complaining to God --- he is not happy and he is letting God know so.

But then things turn --- verse 9 ---

“But if I say, “I will not mention his word
or speak anymore in his name,”
his word is in my heart like a fire,
a fire shut up in my bones.
I am weary of holding it in;
indeed, I cannot.”

He thinks about stopping ----- ceasing to preach ---- ceasing to speak the word of the Lord --- but very quickly realizes that that isn't ever a real possibility.

“His word is in my heart like a fire,
a fire shut up in my bones.” ----- he says.

And then it's ---

“I am weary of holding it in;
indeed, I cannot.”

In other words he can't not speak ----- he can't hold it back --- he can do no other than share --- speak ---- preach --- as God so leads him.

Disappointed --- deceived --- frustrated --- upset or not ---- God's word is like a fire in his being --- indeed it is like fire in his bones.

It's at his very core --- and no matter what he may want to do --- speak or not speak ----- it is simply going to come out of him from deep within his very bones.

To this I can relate.

You know those times in life where for whatever reason there is something that burns within you --- and just has to be said.

Something that just has to be said --- and you are clearly the one who has to say it.

Can you relate to this? ----- times when something is put on your heart --- maybe with a co-worker ---- or a friend.

Something that may not be all that popular.

Maybe it's something to your spouse or partner.

A relative --- a neighbour ---- someone in your church perhaps even.

You get the point --- something has to be said ----- and you are the one who has to say it.

This is the reality that Jeremiah speaks about today.

Jeremiah knows that God's word --- is in his heart like a fire ---- like a fire shut up in my bones --- he says in verse 9 today.

He knows that he cannot hold it in --- he knows that it is going to come out of him.

And so he speaks it ----- well aware that he can do no other.

Oh that we all might have similar experiences.

Speaking that which God asks of us --- regardless of the circumstances of our lives.

Giving ourselves over to God that He might use us as He sees fit.

That we might be blessed with --- and recognize the fire in our heart --- the fire in our bones that is the word of God just itching to come out of us.

And if we think this was easy for Jeremiah --- we have grossly missed the point.

Whatever we do ----- we ought not to romanticize what happened here --- and to Jeremiah in general.

It was a challenge for Jeremiah to be faithful --- the reception he received was awful --- nobody --- or at least very few wanted to hear what he had to say.

Like the priest Pashhur --- most people simply wanted to lock him in the stocks ---- or throw him down a well --- shut him up somehow.

Remember in addition to being help up in the stocks ----- he was also thrown down into a well ---- see chapter 38 for all the details.

His message was rarely ---- if at all ---- well received.

As verse 10 from our passage today reminds us --- there is terror on every side ----- and Jeremiah is denounced --- put down --- mocked --- derided --- ridiculed.

And then as verse 11 says --- his friends were just waiting for him to slip up --- say the wrong thing --- and be imprisoned --- or thrown down into a hole once again.

As Eugene Peterson writes in *The Message* ---- his version of verses 10 and 11 read ---

“Then I hear whispering behind my back:

“There goes old ‘Danger-Everywhere.’ Shut him up! Report him!”

Old friends watch, hoping I’ll fall flat on my face:

“One misstep and we’ll have him. We’ll get rid of him for good!”

Jeremiah can’t help but speak --- preach --- share --- bear witness ---- as God so leads him --- and he also knows that people --- his friends even --- are just waiting for him to say the wrong thing --- the thing that will land him in trouble again.

Jeremiah is well aware of the fact that the words God has for him to speak --
- will undoubtedly get him into hot water once again.

But he is also aware that he can do no other.

And he can do no other not because of some kind of outward imposition ---
as if something was laid on him from the outside --- imposed.

He can do no other because God has laid it on his heart --- branded it on his
heart --- his bones even.

Remember it is this very same Jeremiah that God gives these words to -----
“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.” --- chapter 31
verse 34

And -----

“I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my
people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their
heart.” --- in chapter 24 verse 7.

Here in chapter 20 we see God doing just that ----- writing His words ---
His will within his heart --- and bones.

It's in his DNA if you like.

It's inseparable from Him ----- he and God's word are one and the same.

Yes it's a blessing from God to have this kind of connection and
commitment.

But Jeremiah had to work at cultivating this disposition as well.

We cannot simply stand back and say something like ---

“Well Jeremiah was gifted and was blessed --- he was exceptional --- I could never do that ----- that’s a great story to listen to and see what someone else has done for --- and with ---- and in God ---- but that will never be me.”

Remember Jeremiah was as reluctant as ever ----- when God first chose Him ---- chapter 1 verse 6 we find him reluctant and unsure.

Jeremiah responds to God’s call saying --- “Alas, Sovereign Lord,” ----- “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.”

“Me --- I don’t know what to say.”

“Me ---- I’m too young.”

This is how Jeremiah first responds.

To this I can relate.

But before long --- it’s no longer ---- “Me I’m too young ... or me I don’t know what to say.”

Before long it’s ---

“Even if I tried to contain God’s word --- even if I tried not to speak it ---- it would still come out ---

“his word is in my heart like a fire,

a fire shut up in my bones.

I am weary of holding it in;

indeed, I cannot.”

Jeremiah didn’t get to this overnight ----- he started out saying ---- “Not me Lord ----- I don’t know what to say --- not me Lord --- I’m far too young.”

He had to cultivate a disposition ---- he had to let God work in him.

He had to let God have His way with him.

He had to push on over into the passenger’s seat and let God take the wheel of His life.

And so he did.

And so God did marvelous and wonderful and powerful and beautiful things through him.

God very often chooses the most unlikely of people ---- the most unlikely of vessels and He employs them in ways far beyond what they ever imagined possible.

We --- each and every one of us here today --- are all vessels that God wants to employ --- we all have gifts of God --- different gifts but all from God.

Like Jeremiah we may find ourselves --- reluctant --- “Me --- no no Lord ---- I don’t know what to say --- me --- no no ----- Lord I’m too young or I’m too old.”

But these answers are not acceptable --- or better put they’re not relevant to God.

God will decide if we are too young or too old --- if we have the words or don’t have the words.

Leave that up to Him.

God’s ways and influence and gifting and equipping ---- go far beyond what we can see or what we think we know.

It’s absolutely amazing what God accomplishes and who God chooses to accomplish His will.

Jeremiah is a poignant reminder of this truth --- that with God anything is possible.

What starts out --- “Alas, Sovereign Lord,” ----- “I do not know how to speak...”

Ends up ---- “like a fire in my bones.”

Where words were once elusive --- or at least perceived that way --- now there is a consuming and bustling fire deep within ---- just waiting to bust out.

As our voices sing today ---- there is none like our God.

And --- our God is greater.

And --- for the cause --- the cause of Christ.

For the cause of Christ we give ourselves over to He who is able to do much more than we could ever even imagine.

Jeremiah was used by God for far far more than he ever imagined.

He who began saying --- “I do not know how to speak...”

Ended up with a fire in his bones such that he couldn't not speak.

That's what happens when we give ourselves over to God completely -----
He takes and He uses us and He shows us great and marvelous things we never thought possible.

That's why God is so amazing --- because of what He is capable of doing and because of what He chooses to do.

It is always and forever all about God.

The fire in Jeremiah bones is not a spark he started --- God did.

God did it --- lit his heart and his bones afire.

Move aside and let God do as God so desires --- and He will set us on fire.

And the fire might be small and gentle and warming and subtle.

Or it might be huge and bustling and all consuming.

Either way ---- we have nothing to worry about --- God will dictate the pace.

Like fire in our bones.

May the saving Word of God be like a fire in our bones.

Make it so Lord.

Take us --- use us Lord.

Have your way with us Lord.

Amen.