

I COMMIT MY CAUSE TO THE LORD.

Sept 20/23, 2018

Pentecost 18

Jeremiah 11:18-20 Because the LORD revealed their plot to me, I knew it, for at that time he showed me what they were doing. 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." 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.

Dear Christian Friends:

Some jobs can make you unpopular. Take, for example, the safety inspector. The safety inspector watches his fellow employees to see if they follow proper procedures. He examines workspaces, lunchrooms, and cubicles looking for dangerous actions or unauthorized objects. Then he reports the violations. Then management tells the safety inspector to enforce the safety code.

That's when he becomes very unpopular. His co-workers tell him, "Who do you think you are? You don't know my job. I know what I'm doing. Take your clipboard and get lost. Stop being such a nosy tattle-tale." So, the job of safety inspector can bring a lot of resistance and unpopularity.

The job of being a prophet of the Lord brought even more resistance and unpopularity. Jeremiah is a prime example. The Lord told Jeremiah to inspect the spiritual life of Judah. Jeremiah found many spiritual safety violations. In the verses before our text, the Lord himself describes the rules the Jews were breaking. The Lord says, **You have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah; and the altars you have set up to... that shameful god Baal are as many as the streets of Jerusalem.'**

The Jews were praying to Baal. The Jews were worshiping pagan idols and not giving all praise to the true God. Their spiritual safety violations were so

numerous and so severe, the Lord was going to fire them. In the verses before our text, the Lord said, **‘I will bring on them [the Jews] a disaster they cannot escape. Although they cry out to me, I will not listen to them.**

This brings us to another unpopular job. It’s the job to inform rule-breaking employees, “You’re fired.” That’s the job Jeremiah also had. He had to tell the Jews, “You have used up the last of the Lord’s patience. The Lord is going to cut you down. He will destroy you because of your idolatry.”

That made Jeremiah even more unpopular. And the Jews had had enough of Jeremiah’s gloomy reports and predictions of destruction. So, the Jews were plotting to kill Jeremiah. But their plot would fail. Jeremiah says, **Because the LORD revealed their plot to me, I knew it.... 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.** Jeremiah was so innocent—you might even say, naïve—that he had no idea the Jews hated him so much. But an assassination plot was in the works. Only the Lord prevented that plot from killing Jeremiah.

You and I are like Jeremiah. We don’t recognize the killer out to murder our faith. You might think your assassin is that neighbor or co-worker who mocks your faith in Christ. You might think your spiritual hit man is your relative who says, “Shut-up with all that gobble-dee-gook about Jesus!” Yes, those enemies of your faith are real and they hurt you. But your true assassin is out to kill you. Your spiritual assassin is that unbeliever inside of you.

Inside you, and inside every Christian, there exists what we call, “The Old Adam,” or, “The Old Man.” This unbelieving pagan hates the Lord and he hates your faith. Your sinful nature wants to kill your faith just like the Jews wanted to kill Jeremiah.

But, when it comes to the murderous plots of our sinful nature, you and I are like Jeremiah. He was oblivious to the plot against his life. You and I are also naïve about the assassin inside us. Sure, we know that we have a sinful nature. In our epistle Lesson James describes it. James says, **... you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts...Such "wisdom" ... is**

earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

The Jews set up their idols to Baal and worshiped at the altar of a thousand pagan idols. Our sinful nature sets itself up as Baal, the Lord and master of our life. Our sinful nature bows down at a thousand altars dedicated to impure cravings, insatiable lusts, arrogant boasts, and selfish ambitions.

But, as a Christian, you agree with James. The sinful nature only creates *disorder and every evil practice*. You also agree with Jesus. In our Gospel Lesson Jesus said, **"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."** Yes, you do want to be a humble, faithful, servant of the Lord. You do want to be a loving, kind servant to your neighbor.

So, your New Man, the Christian in you, does its job of safety inspector. You use God's holy law to expose how your sinful nature violates God's laws. Then the Christian in you does its duty to fire the violator. Or as our catechism says, *[Baptism means that we drown the Old Adam] by daily contrition and repentance, and [put] all its evil deeds and desires...to death.*

Or so we think. Again, in our naïveté, we underestimate both the power of our sinful nature and the ghastly goal of our sinful nature. We are like Jeremiah. He did not suspect that his own people would plot to kill him. But just like the Jews hated Jeremiah, so our sinful nature hates the believer and will not repent. It cannot repent. But our sinful nature can swim. So, the Old Adam crawls out of the baptism font madder than a wet hen. And, freshly sprung from its watery grave, that sinner has one focus: "Kill the Christian!"

To carry out its murderous plot the sinful nature learns from its previous defeats, modifies its strategy, and launches a fresh assault to take our spiritual life from us. It says, "Don't fall for that fancy talk about dedicating your whole life to Jesus. Don't get sucked in by those guilt trips when the preacher says, *read the Bible more. Give more offerings, Come to church more.* Tell that preacher to take his little clip board of Bible verses and get lost. You are an intelligent person. You are fully capable of making moral decisions. You can set own spiritual path." And with those temptations, boasts and unspiritual

ambitions, the sinful nature poisons our faith and strangles our devotion to the Lord.

But wait. Yes, the sinful nature attacks. Yes, the sinful nature can kill faith. But the sinful nature will NOT emerge victorious on the battle field of your salvation. That's because the Christian—that's because YOU have what Jeremiah had. You have the Lord. So, like Jeremiah, you can say, **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.** Like Jeremiah did, the Christian inside you is smart enough to say, "I can't fight against my sinful nature on my own. I can't evict that soul murdering traitor from my own heart. So, like Jeremiah did, **I COMMIT MY CAUSE TO THE LORD.**"

Jeremiah committed the cause of his rescue from assassination to the Lord because Jeremiah knew how helpless he was. Concerning his helplessness Jeremiah said, **I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me.** Did you hear those familiar words? **"Like a lamb led to the slaughter."** Isaiah used those same words to describe how Jesus sacrificed his life. That's how the Lord rescues you from your sinful nature. Jesus shields you from your spiritual assassin by putting himself in your place. Jesus took the hits and the blows, the spear and the nails—all the tools of death—he took them all on himself. Jesus stopped the plot against your eternal salvation by dying in your place.

Now, of course, in this battle for your soul, don't stop fighting. Don't stop repenting. But above all, don't take your focus off of Jesus. He is your source of power to fight against your sinful nature. But he is more than that. He is your God. He is the almighty Judge. He is the innocent Lamb, slaughtered for you. Jesus is also the resurrected Lamb who lives and rules with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. To Christ and to Christ alone, commit the cause of your salvation. And God is faithful to the cause of your salvation. God is faithful and he will do it. AMEN.