



4th Sunday after Pentecost
21st June 2026

God's Warnings Come from a Heart of Love

Greetings! It's great to be here as part of our church family, as we enter into the 4th Sunday after Pentecost. May I welcome all who are watching via 'Live screen'.

Today's readings, again challenged me, especially our Gospel reading from Matthew, the call to discipleship and about overcoming our fears!

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I must confess, following our daily lectionary readings, has helped me immensely in understanding what Jeremiah faced, as the daily readings recently from Jeremiah, gave graphic detail of what Jeremiah went through, leading up to and including the exile of the Jewish nation. The prophet Jeremiah lived through times of enormous political upheaval. His long career, lasting some 40 years, including serving a good king, a couple of bad kings and a weak king, and then the deportation of all but the dregs of the population.

Most of this period Jeremiah was warning his people in advance, but his foresight won him no friends at all. He was increasingly isolated from the people he was born to serve, and at times his life was threatened by those who could not bear to hear that the truth was so different from what they wanted.

It was not as though Jeremiah had any choice about his calling. At the beginning of the book (1.5), we hear God telling Jeremiah that, even while he was in his mother's womb, he was being prepared for the role of God's prophet.

Perhaps he could have refused to pass on what God gave him to say, but in today's lament, Jeremiah cries out that not to speak is as painful as the fear and loneliness that follows after he

has spoken. His fear burns him up, and the pain of holding it in becomes too much. Nor does Jeremiah have any choice about what it is that he has to say.

God only gives him words of 'destruction and violence', however much Jeremiah wants to speak love and reassurance. So the words we hear from Jeremiah today, are words of deep depression and despair.

We could infer that Jeremiah almost hates God, though he is at least honest about that. He accuses God of lying to him and forcing his words on him. All around him Jeremiah hears whispers, sees shadows, any one of which could mean his death, except that the God who assaults him, is also the God who protects him from others.

And if these verses remind us that this horrible picture of Jeremiah's relationship is only one side of the story, still it is the side we still need to hear, remembering that there is no hint of condemnation from God for what Jeremiah is feeling.

Perhaps God recognizes something of the truth of the accusations Jeremiah is levelling against him. If Jeremiah's people had listened to the word of God, Jeremiah's life could have been different. But at this moment, it is not the stupid self-serving people that Jeremiah hates, but the God who calls him to serve them, whether they will listen or not.

Our history shows us that Christian disciples throughout the ages have faced similar moments, as Jesus warned them they would. We could refer back to the Lectionary to see the days we celebrate the martyrs of ages past. Like Jeremiah, they had to tell the people what they are given to tell, and most of the time the audience doesn't want to hear it, any more than the people of Judah did.

Like Jeremiah, they cannot choose to soften the message if it is not to people's liking, not even if the people are their own families.

Like Jeremiah, knowing that God protects them, and that we are '**of more value than many sparrows**' (Matt v31) to him, will not always be a great consolation.

Sometimes, like Jeremiah, they will long for ordinary friends, for family life, for simple pleasures, without the awful responsibility of being God's chosen ones. The life that God offers will seem very far away and unreal compared to the life they are obviously forfeiting.

That is why Paul is incredulous when he realizes that some people have heard this message of God's free grace as a signal that they can do what they like and get away with it. Their hypocrisy is so destructive, I'm sure we can relate to these people in our life experiences!

God's forgiveness is freely offered; it does not have to be earned, and can never be!

Accepting it, means stepping out of this life into the life of the crucified and risen Christ. It may seem like a good idea when we are wretched at our own sin and failure, but then when we have to follow in Christ's footsteps, we begin to wonder if we have made the right choice after all.

From Matthew's Gospel words like **'Not peace, but a sword', 'the old self crucified', the Lord a 'dread warrior'**. Constantly beside you. Is this what we choose?

We need to hear and understand and apply to ourselves, to

- 'Hear God's silent acceptance of Jeremiah's complaint,
- To see the face of the 'dread warrior', is also the face of Jesus, and
- Remember the old life had moments like this too, but then they were meaningless.
- Now they are part of God's purpose!

Amen