

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF END TIME
(LAST JUDGMENT)

Jeremiah 26:1-6

It May Be They Will Listen

“He’s preaching to the choir.” I’ve always marveled at that statement, because its often said as if to imply that one should not be preached to precisely because they showed up in church. As a Lutheran, I have always thought that the very reason we Lutherans show up on Sunday is to be preached to and communed. Our Lord agrees, because in our text He tells Jeremiah, *“Stand in the court of the LORD’s house, and speak to all the cities of Judah that come to worship in the house of the LORD all the words that I command you to speak.”* *“Speak to all...that come to worship in the house of the Lord.”*

Today is the Second Sunday of End Time, Last Judgment Sunday. Our Holy Gospel describes the accounting we will give to God on Judgment Day. Our second lesson describes that day, its terrors for the unbeliever and its splendor for the believer. In our sermon text, the LORD urges repentance before the Last Judgment; and, contrary to what we might expect, these words are addressed to the very people who come to bow down and worship before the LORD. There is no choir to be preached to today; there is just you and me, and God tells me to preach *“all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not hold back a word.”* Will this call to repentance make a difference? The LORD says, *“It may be they will listen.”* Let’s pray that’s the case.

“It may be they will listen, and every one turn from his evil way.” Oh how these words struck me when I prepared for this text. *“And every one turn from his evil way.”* There is no generic law here. This is specific: *“his evil way.”* Whose evil way? Mine. Yours. That is personal. That demands examination and introspection. So examine, because when the Last Judgment comes the time for confession will have past, which means no hope for absolution. Consider your day, your week, your month, your year. What roads have consistently led you from the Lord? Where have they taken you? The best way to tell what your evil way has been is to find where you experience the most stress and feel the most regret in your life. Has work or sports or other activities drawn your family in too many directions? Have your relationships broken apart while you were too busy and distracted to even notice? Has the material choked the spiritual as “give us this day our daily bread,” has been replaced with “give us this day a whole lot more”? Have your dreams in life become nightmares as you’ve sought fulfillment in objects too empty to provide it? Has the internet information superhighway provided too many exit ramps to sin? Do you know more about the latest developments on your favorite television shows than you do about the content of the Bible you so piously claim to believe?

Sin is not what abounds outside our doors; it is what too often rules in our hearts. You did not make mistakes or give it a good try; you sinned. I sinned; and if we will not consider and confess that truth, the threat of the LORD for Judah will be just as true for

us: *“If you will not listen to me, to walk in my law that I have set before you, and to listen to the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently, though you have not listened, then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all nations of the earth.”* When the tabernacle, God’s presence, was removed from Shiloh the city was destroyed. It could not stand apart from the LORD. Jerusalem too would seal its own destruction by ignoring the preaching of the prophets. The LORD would withdraw His gracious presence and leave the capital to what it deserved all along: complete ruin. The case is no different for us. We too cannot withstand God’s Judgment if He’s not present by our side.

My friends, do you see how your God loves you? Do you see how throughout history He has pleaded with His people to turn from their evil ways while there is still time? Do you see how He pleads with you today; how He sets a table of grace for you and bids you to turn from your sin to His mercy? And not only does He bid you, but He has brought you to this place. He has graciously extended your time of grace that there may still be time for mercy. He has placed His Body and His Blood before your eyes and, by means of the liturgy, welcomed you to it through confession and absolution. He has placed the promise before the threat in our text, emphasizing the predominance of the gospel, saying to you, those gathered to worship, *It may be they will listen, and turn from their evil ways, that I may relent of the disaster that I intend to do to them because of their evil deeds.*

In the Hebrew, the text says God caused His prophets to rise early. That is, He wanted them spreading His Word early and all day. They were men on a mission because God does not want Judgment Day to be disaster a for you, but rather the first day of an eternal day of grace and new life. He does not want His justice to be the chief attribute expressed toward you, but His mercy, which has overcome our sin by His grace on Christ’s cross.

“Thus says the LORD.” Thus every good sermon should speak, because every good sermon is not man’s word, but God’s. St. Augustine coined the dictum, “What counts in the church is not: This I say, this you say, this he says, but: *Thus says the Lord.*” The LORD has spoken clearly today, and He has spoken to us, the gathered faithful. He’s told us that we have traveled evil ways, with evil thoughts, evil words, evil deeds, all which have led us from Christ and from the faith. For this we’ve deserved the destruction God’s justice has prepared for us. But that’s not all the Lord has spoken. He has called us to turn. In fact, He Himself has turned us. He has turned us by the Holy Spirit, through His powerful Word, which does what it commands and creates what it demands. Keep your eyes on God’s promise of mercy, to which the Holy Spirit has turned your eyes. Speak with joy, “Come, Lord Jesus, come!” because you know He is coming for the same reason He came the first time: to bring lost sinners as saints to His Father. *“It may be they will listen.”* Listen, because God is speaking to you, and His words, like His Son, were sent to bring mercy. Amen.