



August 14, 2022

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Subject: The Great Divide

Scripture Reading- Jeremiah 23:23-29

BACKGROUND

When Jeremiah spoke these words, Judah was anticipating the violence of the notorious, ruthless, ruler of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar. And they wanted to know, if the Lord would perform a “wonderful deed” for them as God had done so many times in the past and as a result, cause Nebuchadnezzar to withdraw and leave them alone. But when we call on God, we don’t always get the answer we want and neither did they. Because at this point in their relationship with God, God was over it! God was done repeating God’s instructions, God was done repeating God’s **warnings** to Judah, so God would not only help their enemy Babylon and the Chaldeans align their forces against Judah but in verse 21.5 God says, *“I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm in furious anger and in great wrath. ⁶ I will strike down those who live in this city—both man and beast—and they will die of a terrible plague.”*

Then, if the plague didn’t kill them, God would destroy them by war and hunger, and still put them in the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

But here is the GREAT DIVIDE, because God gives Judah on one side an opportunity to choose DEATH and on this side of the DIVIDE an opportunity to choose LIFE.

You want death? Stay in the city, stay on the hamster wheel, stay in the “I get mine and you get yours” mode, stay in the status quo or bust, and what you are going to GET is war, world wars, civil wars. YES! Race wars! Stay in the city, and you will get pestilence and disease, more strains of COVID, Monkey Pox and diseases that haven’t even been named yet. Stay in the city, and you are going to STARVE not just for food and water, but for a connection to GOD, not because GOD has walked away from us, but because WE have walked away from God.

BUT on THIS side of the Great Divide, if you surrender to the Chaldeans Judah, 24.5 *I will see you as GOOD, I will watch over you for your good, and I will bring you back to this land. I will build you up and not tear you down; I will plant you and not uproot you. 7 I will give you a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. You will be my people, and I will be your God, for you will return to me with all your heart.*

Even still, King after King; Zedekiah, Shallum, Jehoiakim, Coniah all chose death and God goes against them because they refused to execute justice, to deliver those who had been robbed by the oppressor, refused to stop doing wrong, continued to be violent to immigrants, refused to stop their violence against orphan and widows,

kept shedding innocent blood, kept FORCING people to work for nothing, while they built and expanded their OWN homes with ill-gotten gains. And after reading this, I thought to myself, “LORD have mercy because WE ARE DOOMED! Because here we go again!”

The Lectionary scriptures this summer have been like a broken record, a “song that never ends”, as God keeps warning us over and over again because we CONTINUE to be VIOLENT and OPPRESSIVE to folks on the margins of our churches, our communities, and across this nation over and over again.

ILLUSTRATION: Just look around us locally, nationally and across the globe. INJUSTICE and VIOLENCE is lurking around every corner and yet HIDDEN in plain sight. DECADES of disenfranchising public schools, especially black schools, black neighborhoods and black businesses from the basics of a quality education, healthy food, dependable and accessible transportation, safety, and just having ENOUGH to LIVE. **That’s Violence.** The recent move of Madison County, N.C. to arm Resource Officers with AR15s to protect WHITE children from “shooters” as mass shootings increase BUT, for decades, ignoring the safety and well-being of Black, Latinx, Indigenous students across this region and the nation. **Violence!** As of last month, every school district, college and university in Florida is prevented from telling the truth of racism and white supremacy or providing a more inclusive and

expansive education because if they do, they risk losing State funding per House Bill Seven, when many school districts are ALREADY struggling. **VIOLENCE!** And IF you think, “Oh that is Florida and not here,” then you don’t know this country who **historically** has adopted oppressive policies and practices **one-state- at- a- time**. American chattel slavery, Jim Crow, convict leasing, the spread of confederate monuments, anti-gay, anti-immigrant, anti-abortion legislation, and prohibiting interracial marriage **ALL** happened one state at a time, **ALL** of it is **VIOLENT** and **ALL** of it is **SYMPTOMATIC** of the **GREAT DIVIDE AND WHITE SUPREMACY**.

A great divide of power and wealth in our systems, in our institutions including our churches, in our homes, in our relationships with one another, but most of all in our relationship **with GOD**. A GOD who is sovereign, who holds ALL power and is BIGGER and GREATER than anything and anyone that divides us, and STILL wants to be ONE with each and every one of us despite the way we have treated God AND each other.

So when we fast forward to our passage for this morning in the 23rd chapter of Jeremiah, JEREMIAH’s renewed mission is not to warn the Kings and their successors, but to WARN those who made a commitment to SERVE God as pastors and priests and prophets.

Because they were no better than the Kings in the way they treated the marginalized and uplifted their own agendas over and above God's will.

Now in our time, pastors and priests in this church and most churches of varying denominations typically go through multiple steps, processes and procedures before they are positioned to lead a church. In my tradition we are required to go through several processes including training and education, but our bishop appoints us to pastoral charges. Many churches have the equivalent of a search committee, who are faithful, usually trusted leaders of the church who will review resume's and CV's..., read or listen to prior sermons the prospective pastor or priest has preached. They will review writing samples, check references, do backgrounds check, interview former staff or colleagues, congregants... sometimes check their credit and still others include psychological evaluations. Then final candidates are often interviewed by the leadership of a church, may have to preach more than once at that church before the final decision to make them the new pastor or priest. So, it can be intense! But God requires so much more because pastors and priest represent God and God's word.

PROPHETS are a little different in our context because we don't have Schools of Prophets in our country. But prophets in our context MAY be called forth within their current denomination or faith traditions to share words of edification or warning. More often than

not, like me, and Rev. Marcia, Rev. Richard and so many others, we are called to serve in multiple roles as prophet's, priests and sages.

But in JEREMIAH'S day, the prophet had an important role in communicating directly from God to the kings of nations and priests as they governed the PEOPLE and were having to make strategic decisions about how to engage in war with other nations, or whether to engage in war at all. Following the words of the prophet could literally mean life or death to thousands of people so they needed to be upright, faithful, trustworthy and willing to say whatever God told them to say. But SOME prophets would align themselves with the evildoing of kings, of presidents, of governors for a promise of wealth or power, so they LIED and told them what they wanted to hear AND tried to INFLUENCE or manipulate the leadership of the nation with THEIR agenda over and above God's will.

ILLUSTRATION:

- Like Amaziah who lost touch with the word of God himself and when God sent God's word to King Jeroboam through the Prophet Amos, Amaziah tried to block that too.
- But let's bring it closer...like Jerry Falwell who from the 70's to the late 80's imposed a highly conservative agenda of the so-called Moral Majority to control the political agenda that helped to seat former President Reagan and H.W. Bush and was becoming

increasingly powerful...**UNTIL** all of those hypocritical bones started falling out of the closets of evangelicals and the Moral Majority wasn't looking too moral anymore and had to close shop. But not without planting some nasty, divisive seeds first, that are **STILL** growing.

- Let's bring it even closer...like Franklin Graham who lobbied for former President Trump in 2016, upheld his blatant immorality as the president, supports his evildoing of attempting "allegedly" to lead an insurrection **AFTER** the people voted him out and just four days ago is claiming that Trump is being **PERSECUTED** because his home was raided in Mar-a-lago by the F.B.I., **AFTER** Trump refused to give them the documents they asked him for.
- And so there is this narrative that folks need to get out and vote this November because the country is being controlled by Leftists, will be in complete chaos and the F.B.I. will come for **YOU** next. But many of these same people were old enough in the 60's when the F.B.I. instituted **COINTELPRO** and illegally infiltrated, maligned, jailed and even killed members of any groups they didn't agree with...**NAMELY** the Black Panther Party and they said and **DID NOTHING**. And **NOTHING** was or is being said about **TRUMP's** pathological lying, the bullying, the demeaning language, the misogyny, the racial micro-aggressions, the **REFUSAL** to

acknowledge the harm done to the climate, and just VILE behavior in general. Nothing! Instead, they are using their energy to put him back in the presidency in 2024 while undermining every accomplishment of Civil Rights along the way.

And so as we finally land at Jeremiah 23; this Great Divide continues to be a common thread, but the Good news is that 1. God Sees it All 2. God Hears it All and 3. God's Word Answers it All

GOD SEES IT ALL! V.23-24

God lets us know through the prophet Jeremiah in verses 23 and 24 that God is everywhere, and God SEES everything. So, whether these injustices are front and center, tucked between legislation, orchestrated in back door or parking lot meetings. GOD declares that God FILLS the heavens and the earth so there is nowhere any of us can HIDE to do our DIRT. There is nowhere that God CANNOT see us.

Illustration:

David understood this well as he asks, and then answers his own question in the 139th Psalm, v. 7b-13:

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, [1] you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

*If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"
 even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.
 For you created my inmost being; YOU knit me together in my mother's womb.*

You see, David KNEW there was no place in the UNIVERSE that he could GO that God would not already be there. And whether folks know for themselves or believe it for themselves TODAY or NOT, God is still God. God is still omnipresent-everywhere at the same time. God is still sovereign-in control of it all. GOD SEES it all! And EVERYTHING that is done in the dark WILL absolutely come to the light.

Next, GOD HEARS IT ALL! v. 25-28a

²⁵ "I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!' ²⁶ How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds

Beloved God hears the same lies that we are hearing. God listens to the same distortion of facts and truth that we hear. God recognizes the delusions coming out of the mouths and through the policies and practices of FALSE prophets. I already told you the measure of a good prophet or a REAL PROPHET is that whatever they say will happen, HAPPENS. When Elijah said it would stop raining, it stopped raining.

When he said it would start again, it started again. Jeremiah the prophet of the hour who writes these words, is also speaking on behalf of GOD. So, when he tells us God SEES it all, it is because he has witnessed it first-hand... when he says that God hears it ALL it is because he has witnessed it, first-hand. God hears it all!

ILLUSTRATION:

- When the children of Israel cried out to God to deliver them from Egypt, it took 400 hundred years, and I am sure there were times they thought God was not listening, that God had left them, that God did not care, but GOD WAS listening and finally sent Moses to help deliver them from their bondage. **God heard it all!**
- When Hannah who was barren for years cried out to God for a child-**God heard it all** and Samuel was born.
- Personally, when I have cried out to God for or about anything, **God has heard it all!**
 - I asked for a son, God gave me twin boys. (God has a sense of humor too)
 - I asked for my own house and now I am living in it.
 - I asked for my children's healing and one by one God is doing exceedingly and abundantly above all that I could ask for... **GOD- HEARS-it ALL!**

Lastly, God's word answers it all! V. 27-29

27 They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their ancestors forgot my name through Baal worship. 28 Let the prophet who has a dream recount the dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?" declares the LORD. 29 "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"

Even though we feel surrounded, sometimes smothered by lies, and deceit and a constant twisting of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We who believe in freedom and cannot rest, we who have been freed by the Son, who have hidden God's word in our hearts have to KNOW God's word holds the answers for us all. And this passage lets us know that amazingly GOD TRUSTS US- God trusts his people to remember who God is. Because if we abide in God, God abides in US. So it does not matter what these lying prophets dream or proclaim. God Trusts us to know the TRUTH and the truth WILL set us all FREE.

There are going to be days when we feel like you have lost your mind and that you don't know what you know, but the Spirit of the Living God has a way of bringing to the surface, bringing to your memory the exact words from God that you need in the moment.

ILLUSTRATION 1:

A certain someone who will go unnamed was attempting to shame me for not having a book version of the bible in my hand when I was using the bible app on my phone. But God's word rose up in me, from Psalms 119:11 and before I could think I responded, "Thy WORD have I hid in my HEART that I may not sin against thee". Whether I have a bible in my hand or not, God's word is in ME. And which do you think God prefers? For us to kill more trees so we can carry around the biggest bible we can find and show how HOLY we are, or to embody God's word in the way we live. Because the body will follow the desires of our hearts, so if God's WORD is in our hearts, then it is more likely that we will follow God. AMEN!

ILLUSTRATION 2:

Jesus reminded the disciples and us in this week's gospel of Luke that there would be times that because we are following and doing our BEST to live out the WORD of God, to live a life rooted in love and TRUTH that there would be a GREAT DIVIDE even between us and our own families.

- Families don't always understand why you have to go to this meeting or that meeting.
- Families don't always understand why you are cultivating relationships with people who are nothing like you

- Families don't always understand why we choose to have the difficult and painful conversations about racism, really all the "isms" and white supremacy.
- Or... why we have to show up and speak up from time to time even when it is not popular

Conclusion:

Be ENCOURAGED, because whether we have to stand on God's word concerning our family or false prophets, or kings of nations, *Immanuel*, "God is with us"! And whatever WORD we need in that moment will be provided. Furthermore, when scriptures are weaponized against us (usually out of context) it makes our discernment alarms go off, so we have to test the Spirit and make sure it is God and not humankind's agenda. God gives us spiritual discernment and if you find yourself REALLY being challenged or tested, Jesus says *"When you are brought before synagogues[churches] rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the **Holy Spirit** will teach you at that time what you should say."* Luke 12:11-12

Everything we could ever need is in the Word of God. There is nothing new under the sun that is not in the Word of God. There is nothing that we are going through that is not in the Word of God. And IF God's word is HERE in our hearts, the word says it's like fire and a

hammer. The fire is a purifier that burns off all of the trash and leaves you with a pure truth, and a hammer breaks it all down in pieces so we can understand and consume it.

There is nothing that we are seeing, or hearing, that the believers in ages before us did not have to endure and it is all answered in the Word of God. AND I recognize that there are some passages in our bibles that are problematic, because it was written through human agents, but try to see it with spiritual eyes, and trust God to reveal whatever you need to know.

In closing, whatever Great Divide you are finding yourself in **KNOW** that God **SEES** it all, God **HEARS** it all, and God's **WORD** has the **ANSWER** for it all.

In the name of the Father, In the name of the Son, in the name of the Holy Ghost. **AMEN!**