

Jeremiah 23:16-29
"God is Speaking"
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Our Redeemer Lutheran
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Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[God's Word is Truth]

Have you ever flown in an airplane and wondered why a full cup of coffee or soft drink doesn't spill when the plane turns?

That's right, no matter how steep is the banked turn – even if the wings are perpendicular to the ground – your beverage won't spill and the stewardesses will walk upright down the aisle as if the plane were level.

And unless you are looking out the window, you cannot tell which way the plane is turning. All because of inertia.

Pilots, too, are subject to inertia.

When flying through clouds or fog, which prevent them from seeing the horizon, pilots cannot feel the plane's wings beginning to bank to the left or right.

In fact in the early days of flight, pilots followed the myth of instinct: They believed they *could* feel the turn, and when their planes were accidentally engulfed in fog or clouds, many banked unknowingly into a spiral dive that ended in a crash. That's why pilot William Langewiesche writes, "Instinct is *worse* than useless in the clouds."

To fly through clouds, pilots must rely on instruments like the artificial horizon. The artificial horizon is a gyroscopically steadied line that stays level with the earth's surface and unerringly indicates when the wings are banking left or right.

The artificial horizon revolutionized flying, but when it was first invented, pilots resisted using it. The biggest problem flyers had was belief. They trusted their feelings more than their instruments.

In our Christian life, God's Word acts as our primary flight instrument. Our feelings can mislead us, but God's Word tells us the truth.

As we began today's Divine Service, we were reminded of this fact in the opening versicles. We spoke: ***Your Word is truth.***

[False Prophets]

The Prophet Jeremiah lived in a tumultuous time. The land was full of vices and idolatry. As true prophets were being replaced by false prophets, Jeremiah stood faithful to God's Word.

Truth was being replaced by opinion.

Today's society is not much different than the society of nearly 3,000 years ago.

Jeremiah, through Inspiration, wrote:

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes.’” (Jeremiah 23:16a).

Our Lord God is warning us to be careful of who we take advice from. Just because they say they are God's prophet or teacher, be careful.

But how do we know who is a true prophet from that of a false prophet?

A true prophet preaches the Word of God in its entirety. A false prophet contradicts the Lord and His Word.

So, what are these false prophets doing?

The Lord says: ***“They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you’”*** (Jeremiah 23:16b-17).

These false prophets gave false hope to those who despised and refused to believe in the Lord's Word. They encouraged the sinner in his sin by making it seem less sinful.

They dismissed God's threatened judgment with the words “no harm will come to you.” Through their lies, there was no reason to worry about repentance.

Instead of following God's Word, these false prophets were only following their minds. What their mind thought was good, was seen as good, right and salutary. Although, in reality, it was only leading God's people astray.

[Attack on Truth]

Today, there are false prophets who say a variety of things that are not in line with God's inerrant Word.

When it comes to salvation, there are those who say: *“If you live a “good” life apart from following Jesus that you will be rewarded with heaven when you die.”*

There is nowhere in the Bible that says that. In fact, Jesus said: ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”*** (John 14:6).

When it comes to sexual immorality, there are those who say: “Homosexuality and promiscuity are no longer considered sins.”

Again, there is nowhere in Scripture that agrees to that fact. ***“Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body”*** (1 Cor. 6:18).

When it comes to a child in the womb, there are those who say: “Abortion isn’t murder – it’s just a clump of cells.”

But why is it that when an unborn child dies accidentally – such as in a car accident – it is called murder or manslaughter?¹

Again, where in Scripture does God sanction abortion? It doesn’t. Instead, God says, ***“You shall not murder”*** (Exodus 20:13, Fifth Commandment).

Early Christians understood this to be true in “The Didache”, the earliest Christian catechism. It states: *“Commit no murder, adultery, sodomy, fornication, or theft. Practice no magic, sorcery, abortion, or infanticide.”*²

Those false prophets of Jeremiah’s time and our time are waging a vigorous campaign against the truthfulness of the Lord and His Word. They not only attack the Word of God directly, but they also undermine it by limiting the Lord and making His Word less important or applicable.

[God is Still Speaking]

Back in 2004, a mainline church body began a campaign called “God is Still Speaking.”

This church³ stated that its goal was “to make religion relevant again and to extend an extravagant welcome to all – because no matter who you are, or where you are on life’s journey, you’re welcome here.”

That church body also said that it “continues to historically re-shape our understanding of the Christian faith and proclamation.”

Those quotes sound well and good, but that mainline church is stating that in their re-shaping of understanding that Jesus now says: there are multiple ways to heaven, sexual immorality isn’t sin, and abortion isn’t murder.

But the Lord said: ***“I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart”*** (Jeremiah 23:25-26).

¹ <http://wishtv.com/2016/08/04/woman-loses-husband-unborn-child-in-crash-with-suspected-drunk-driver/>

² Early Christian Writings, The Didache (Penguin: 1968), 191.

³ <http://www.ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking>

Well, that church does have one thing right – God is Still Speaking. In fact, God has *never* ceased speaking.

He just isn't speaking what they are proclaiming, however.

The devil, through false prophets and the secular culture, is trying to cause us to doubt God's truth.

[Steeplechase of Christian Life]

Now, likely most of you have been watching the Rio Olympics.

In today's epistle, the writer to the Hebrews wrote: **"Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God"** (Hebrews 12:1-2).

I'd liken this race to that of steeplechase. In the 3,000-meter track event, the runners have to get through 28 barriers and seven water jumps to complete the course.

As we run the steeplechase of Christian life, Satan tries to trip us up with his lies – popularity, false prophets, false doctrine – and tries to get us to follow him.

Through our faith and trust in Jesus, let us ever hold fast firmly to God's Word and Truth to get us to the true finish line – life everlasting in heaven!

Yes, it isn't easy. Jesus said He would bring division (Luke 12:51).

All God asks is that we repent and follow Him!

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

The Word of God does not change.

The True God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – continues speaking through the Word and the Sacraments.

He comes to us to offer forgiveness of sins, life everlasting and eternal salvation. Yes, we aren't perfect – we sin in thought, word and deed.

That is the reason why God – in the person of Jesus – came down from heaven to fulfill the Law, die and rise again as a sacrifice to the Father for our sins so we could become perfect.

Apart from Jesus Christ, we do not have salvation.

Through our faith and repentance in Jesus Christ, we know that God continues to speak. Jesus alone is the way, and the truth and the life! Amen!

Now, let us make a joyful noise unto the Lord! Amen!