

Ben Libby

Sermon

September 19th, 17th Sunday after Pentecost

To the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the One who is, who was, and is to come, to Him be glory forever amen. (Rev 1:8 NKJ)

Our sermon text for this Sunday is taken from the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 38, the first 13 verses:

**Shephatiah son of Mattah, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah heard what Jeremiah had told the people when he said, 2 “This is what the LORD says. Whoever remains in this city will die by sword, famine, and plague, but whoever goes over to the Chaldeans will live. He will escape with his life, and he will live. 3 This is what the LORD says. This city will surely be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it.” 4 Then the officials said to the king, “This man should be put to death because he is demoralizing the soldiers who are left in the city. He is demoralizing all the people by saying these things to them. This man is not seeking the welfare of the people. He wants to hurt them.” 5 King Zedekiah answered, “Very well. He is in your hands. The king cannot do anything to stop you.” 6 So they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king’s son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They let Jeremiah down by ropes. There was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud. 7 Ebed Melek the Cushite, an official in the king’s house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the cistern. While the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate, 8 Ebed Melek left the palace and said to the king, 9 “My lord the king, everything that these men have done to Jeremiah the prophet is evil. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he is likely to die because of the famine, for there is no more bread in the city.” 10 Then the king gave orders to Ebed Melek the Cushite: “Take thirty men from here under your command and lift Jeremiah the prophet up out of the cistern before he dies.” 11 So Ebed Melek took command of the men and entered a room under the treasury in the palace. He took some old rags and worn-out clothing from there, and he lowered them with ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern. 12 Ebed Melek the Cushite said to Jeremiah, “Put these rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes.” After Jeremiah did that, 13 they lifted him up with the ropes and pulled him out of the cistern. After this Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.**

This is the Word of the LORD!!!

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

What do you want to be when you grow up? We are all asked this at some point in our youth. I remember talking about this question with some classmates in the second grade. As I can remember, there was debate about whether we would be professional football players or baseball players. Either one of the two.

The more you grow up, the more you realize what realistic expectations for that question actually

are. If you were to ask an entire second-grade class that question today, I’m sure you would get some similar unrealistic answers. “I want to be an athlete, a movie star, an astronaut, or I want to be the president of the United States.” You know what you probably won’t get from those second graders? “I want to be a garbage man. I want to be a septic tank inspector. I want to work for minimum wage for a fast-food company.”

Those might not be dream jobs, but they pay the bills. That's why people do them. They may be dirty jobs, but someone has to do them. They may not be careers children dream about. But they are careers that adults make a living doing. They are important and need to be done.

Do you know who has an especially dirty job? YOU DO!!! I can say that confidently because you are Christians. Being a Christian is a dirty job. It is not easy. It's dirty work because of the dirt which we work with and in. It's doesn't exactly pay great. And the work doesn't really end. Those things are all true. And those things aren't even slightly true. Today, we will talk about doing the LORD's dirty work. We are not ashamed of this. Rather, it is our dream job. And so, we pray: LORD, SANTICIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH, AMEN!

**2 “This is what the LORD says. Whoever remains in this city will die by sword, famine, and plague, but whoever goes over to the Chaldeans will live. He will escape with his life, and he will live.**

The prophet Jeremiah was not a beloved figure in his day and age. He was well known, famous even. But that doesn't mean he was popular. He served as the LORD's prophet during the last days of the kings of Judah. He often fulfilled his duties by warning everyone about the impending doom that was right around the corner. This text was written while the Babylonians had surrounded Jerusalem and was lying siege to it. His message was one of surrender. He wasn't being pessimistic. Rather, he was being prophetic. He was only saying what the LORD had instructed him to say.

How did the ruling officials take to his warning? Did they listen? They never really listened to Jeremiah. **4 Then the officials said to the king, “This man should be put to death because he is demoralizing the soldiers who are left in the city. He is demoralizing all the people by saying these**

**things to them. This man is not seeking the welfare of the people. He wants to hurt them.”**

His words, which were not just his but God's, weren't just ignored. Rather, they were interrupted as seditious, and he was viewed as a traitor. His message was bad for morale, they said. It was demoralizing, they said. But that was kinda the point. The people needed to wake up and realize that they weren't getting out of this one. This judgement was a LONG time coming. If they went over to the Chaldeans (another name for Babylon) they would live. If they held out, they would die. This message of surrender was supposed to demoralize. The problem was that the officials assumed that demoralization was “hurting” the people.

“Dirty work” can mean one of two things. It is either work that is morally ambiguous/dishonest or it is work that is literally dirty. When we preach the Word of the LORD, it is always the latter. There were other prophets in the city who did “dirty work”, that is, spiritually harming false teachers. At the beginning of the reign of the King mentioned here (Zedekiah), Jeremiah under the LORD's command, put himself into an oxen yoke. This was supposed to demonstrate that Israel was under the yoke of Babylon. Another “prophet” named Hananiah came along, went up to Jeremiah, and broke the yoke off his neck. He prophesied: **“Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying: `I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. 3 `Within two full years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD'S house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. (Jer 28:2-3 NKJ)** Whereas Jeremiah preached doom and gloom, Hananiah preached that all that the Babylonians had taken from them would return in 2 years. The difference was that one of them spoke the Word of the LORD, and the other didn't. Hananiah didn't live to see his false prophecy not come true. He died 2 months later because of his false promise.

Dirty work is hard work by its nature. Preaching the LORD's Word is dirty, hard work. Why? Because, as Jeremiah is a testament to, it's not easy to tell sinful people that they are sinful. When it comes to sinners, it's the one thing that we do not want to hear. No one wants to be reminded how "dirty" they really are. They want to think that they're clean. But that's not what God says. **But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; (Isa 64:6 NKJ)**

And yet, this dirty work is easy. It is easy for several reasons. A. It is easy because it's true. The truth can be hard to hear, and that is always the case when it comes to proclaiming Law. B. It is easy because it is not us who make the case to the sinner, rather it is the Holy Spirit who works contrition and repentance. And C. it's easy because we ourselves know how dirty we are. We know it's true personally. Whatever we say about others is also true about ourselves. We know how dirty our dirty work is. Because we are just as filthy as those who don't yet know it.

How well does all this dirty work pay? Dirty work typically pays well. It is a job that most people are not willing to do, therefore it usually pays above average. I did a brief search on the internet. The average Garbage Man/Woman in Seattle makes \$48,000 a year. It's the dirty jobs that no one wants to do that usually pay pretty well.

What did Jeremiah get for doing the work of the LORD's prophet? **6 So they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They let Jeremiah down by ropes. There was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.**

This was essentially a death sentence, and a bad way to go at that. Zedekiah the king doesn't stop the officials who hated Jeremiah. He says simply, **The king cannot do anything to stop you.** This, of

course, wasn't true. But he was living in fear. He didn't want to upset his political allies, so he doesn't do anything. He just lets it happen. Jeremiah would either strave to death or sink completely into the muck and mire. It's a lot easier to let the doom-and-gloom preacher sink away than it is to stand up for him.

It's not easy to be a Christian, to stand up for the truth of God's Word. The World likes to hear "Your fine, I'm fine, everything is fine." If you stand with the message, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand", you are viewed as intolerant, stupid, and someone who thinks they are better than them. "Who says so? The world keeps on spinning. I have lived my whole life like this, and I am still here. Why would I listen to you? Where is your God?"

The problem is that the World misconstrues God's merciful and longsuffering nature as acceptance or approval. Many in the world would question whether there even is a God. If they think there is, they paint Him incorrectly. Like he's this awe-shucks type of doting grandfather. Or they claim that He is just all about love. "He loves and accepts me for who I am" is a popular sentiment. If you come along and correct these notions with His own Word, then you are hateful and unloving.

Jeremiah was very familiar with suffering for speaking the truth of God's Word. He even reflected upon the misery he seemed to bring upon himself for speaking up for the LORD. **For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, "Violence and plunder!" Because the word of the LORD was made to me A reproach and a derision daily. 9 Then I said, "I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name." But His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not. (Jer 20:8-9 NKJ)**

Where had all this dirty work that Jeremiah did get him? Sinking down in a muddy cistern. He kept on saying that judgement was coming, earnestly

warning people of the impending danger. And yet, he is the one who is about to be killed. What kind of payment is this? At least people who do physical dirty jobs get compensated well for their effort. What kind of payment do those who do the dirty work of the LORD get? Hatred and persecution! Why would anyone put themselves through this?

While this suffering is not enjoyable to go through, it's nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, it is something to glory in! We shouldn't seek out persecution, but we also should never shy away from it. Peter said in our Epistle reading this morning: **Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.** And Peter knew what he was talking about. After the Apostles were arrested and beaten for preaching about Jesus, they went away **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. (Act 5:41 NKJ)**

No, we are well compensated for our dirty work here in this world. We look ahead for that. Here, we are ignorant and despised, just like Jeremiah. But our prize is not found in this dirty world, rather in the everlasting joys of eternal life.

Jeremiah was sinking down. But his LORD did not forget about him. A Cushite official, most likely a eunuch, stood up for Jeremiah. He, this Ebed Melek (which literally means "servant of the king") told his king that what these men did to Jeremiah was evil. He risked questioning his own king because it was the right thing to do. The king, who easily gave into the request to put Jeremiah into the cistern, also gives into the request to get him out of there. He gives Ebed Melek 30 men to get Jeremiah out of the pit. After the prophet is rescued, what does he do? His job! **After this Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.**

What a terrible experience. Jeremiah describes it in Lamentations. **The waters flowed over my head; I said, "I am cut off!" 55 I called on Your name, O**

**LORD, From the lowest pit. 56 You have heard my voice: "Do not hide Your ear From my sighing, from my cry for help." 57 You drew near on the day I called on You, And said, "Do not fear!" 58 O Lord, You have pleaded the case for my soul; You have redeemed my life. (Lamentations 3:54-58)**

You would think that after such a near death experience, Jeremiah would just wash his hands of the situation and walk away. "Well, I tried!" No! He goes back to work. The people didn't listen to him and tried to kill him. He is preserved and goes back to preaching the Word.

The work of the Christian does not end. Sure, we may retire from our jobs. But that doesn't mean we are done. We still preach. This doesn't just apply to called workers. We all have a job to do. It is to preach Christ crucified and reflect his love for us in everything that we do.

Have you ever had to do a dirty job? When I was going through college and seminary, I worked in a warehouse for Menards. I would take product of a conveyer, and place it on different pallets, until they got full, and I would wrap them up so they could be shipped out. These boxes were almost always dirty. I would just get caked in dust and dirt. When I would go home, the first thing I had to do was shower. The dust and dirt that would come off was a constant. It was a dirty job. But it paid for school.

Why do we do the dirty job of being a Christian? Well, it's not for anything we can get from this world. All being a Christian will get you is persecution and hatred. In fact, following Jesus requires you to lose your earthly life. Not necessarily dying for Jesus, although that could be a consequence. No, we give up the temporary pleasures of this world and follow Him. We don't work to gain entrance into heaven. You cannot work at being a great Christian and as a result gain heaven. Salvation is given, not earned. No, we work to serve. We preach Christ crucified at the pleasure of Christ Himself.

It's a dirty job, no doubt. But, all we are doing is following the directive and example of Christ Himself. Talk about a dirty job! Jeremiah had done just what the LORD told him to do, and he ended up in a cistern, and nearly died. But Jeremiah was just as sinful as you and I. But Jesus did everything perfect. He never had a moment of sinful weakness, something we succumb to every day. No Jesus was perfect. And what did He get as a result? He was crucified and suffered the pangs of sin and hell on the cross. The holy Lamb of God, who knew no sin, became our sin for us. He plunged his Holy hands into the filth that was our sin and rebellion. He pulled you out of the muck and the mire, washed you in His holy blood, and redeemed your soul from the pit. He took our place in hell and now our salvation and place in heaven is secured eternally! It was a dirty job, paying for the sin of the world. But someone had to do it, or else we would have been lost forever. Only one person could have done it. Jesus did it for you!

Is our job as Christians in this world a dirty one? Oh yeah. We deal with and live in dirt. Out of dirt we were created and unto dirt we return. Our sins dirty us and make ineligible for any kind of future. But our LORD delivers and preserves us. The work never stops because we could never stop praising our LORD for what He has done for us! It's never ending, but it has the ultimate retirement plan. No, not some cushy 401k. No, it's heaven. How is it that we dirty, grubby sinners get to spend eternity in heaven? It is because of our Redeemer Jesus Christ, who has redeemed our lives from the pit and placed us within the heavenly gates by His own blood. All praise and thanks be Jesus Christ, for He has done the dirty work that gets us into heaven. Amen!!!