

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Jeremiah's Temple Sermon"

Scripture: Jeremiah 1:4-10; 7:1-11 (Micah 6:6-8)

Opening Hymn: All hail the power of Jesus' name 363 (1,3,5)

Closing Hymn: Lord, whose love 722 (1,2,4)

Children's Hymn: Each step of the way

Choruses: Sing, sing, sing, He has shown thee, What a beautiful name

Rev. Steve Filyk

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Have you already watched a Christmas movie this season?
Anyone?

One of my favorite Christmas movies
is the 2003 film, "Elf", starring Will Ferrell.

The story is about a man named Buddy,
raised as an elf at the North Pole
Who goes to New York City to discover his true identity.

Now since he was raised at the North Pole
Buddy knows Santa personally.
And so you can imagine Buddy's disgust
When he encounters people pretending to be St. Nick.

Listen this conversation Buddy has
With one department store Santa.

Santa, it's me buddy!

Hey, buddy, How you doing?

...Who the heck are you?

*What are you talking about?
I'm Santa Claus.*

No, you're not.

*Uh, WH-why, of course I am!
Ho ho ho ho ho!*

*Well, if you're Santa...
What song did I sing for you on
your birthday this year?*

Uh, happy birthday of course!

[Santa returns to talking to the child seated on his lap]

*Don't tell him what You want. [Buddy cautions]
He's a liar.*

Let the kid talk.

*You disgust me.
How can you live with yourself?*

Just cool it, zippy.

*You sit on a throne of lies.
...You're a fake.*

*I'm a fake?
...How'd you like to be dead, huh?*

*[This back-and-forth continues
 Till Buddy grabs hold of the Santa's fake beard,
 Which is held on by an elastic
 and quickly falls off his face.*

*With this pretender exposed
 Buddy and the children all scream.]*

*He's an imposter! He's not Santa!
 He's a fake!*

It is clear that Buddy knows enough about Santa to spot the imposter.

In the same way most people know enough about Jesus
 To see whether a person is a true disciple or not.

I remember a conversation with some friends at college,
 a conversation about Christianity.

One of the group piped up,
 "I'm a Christian."
 Another retorted
 "No Curtis, I'm talking about REAL Christians."

Most people know a little about Jesus.
 And they can easily spot the pretenders.

Most people know a little about Jesus.
 And they are interested in meeting those
 Who embody his message and his life.

People who embrace Jesus' radical call to holiness
Without discarding Jesus' inherent humanity.

People who love God and love neighbor sacrificially.
People whose religiosity is more than a thin veneer.

But if our neighbors are looking for genuine followers of Jesus,
Then how about God?

Is God also wondering when we're going to take our faith seriously?

Today's Bible lesson comes to us from the book of Jeremiah.
As his call story suggests, Jeremiah is a prophet
With a difficult message to share.

"I appoint you..." the Lord says
"to uproot and tear down,
To destroy and overthrow,
To build and to plant."ⁱⁱ

Jeremiah was given this task
"in the thirteenth year of King Josiah (c. 626 B.C.),
five years after [a] great revival [swept the land].

This was a time of decision,
a time filled with both hope and foreboding.
[a time which ultimately results
in the] fall of the Hebrew commonwealth to Babylon."ⁱⁱⁱ

So what is the problem that Jeremiah is called to confront?

Hypocrisy.

People failing to walk the talk.

The people of Judah showed up at church on Sunday,
But they didn't live out their faith on Monday.

They believe that because they were God's children,
More particularly because of God's promise
To dwell in the temple,
that they had nothing to fear.

Jeremiah challenges this belief
That God's promises made them invincible.

He calls out to them:

"Reform your ways and your actions...
Do not trust in deceptive words and say,
"This is the temple of the Lord,
the temple of the Lord,
the temple of the Lord!"...

You are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless."^{iv}

In this way Jeremiah "warns against an uncritical
claiming of the promise of God's presence
for one's own sake.

God is not a security blanket,
nor [will] God be used like an amulet or magic wand
to ward off danger."^v

So what does Jeremiah want from these people?

Jeremiah calls for obedience to God's law.

Jeremiah calls the people to keep the Ten Commandments
Those laws that relate to loving God and each other.

To him this means refraining from the following practises:

Serving other gods;
Stealing, murdering, committing adultery and perjury;
Taking advantage of the vulnerable people
Such as orphans and widows and foreigners.

Jeremiah warns the people that there will be consequences
To breaking God's commandments.

While people may find it hard to stomach hypocrisy,
God finds it detestable.

Now you may be thinking,
I'm clear of those charges
That Jeremiah's lays against the people of Israel.

"I may get mad when people cut me off.
I may yell and raise a finger.
But I've yet to kill anyone!"

Of course Jesus raises the bar when it comes
to the lives of God's people.

Jesus doesn't call us simply to refrain from bad behavior
but to positively demonstrate our love for God and neighbor
in concrete actions.

It's not just about refraining from stealing...
we are called to lives of generosity.
It's not just about *not* taking advantage
of those on the margins...

we are called to show them hospitality and care.

As for Temple worship,
Jesus wants more from us than an hour each Sunday.
He calls us to lose our lives chasing after his purposes.

These are strong words.

But even strong words can fail to penetrate
Hard hearts.

Just as the people of Israel
were fixated on their connection to God's Temple,
We can trust in our small acts of piety:
Our study and our prayers and our attendance at church.

"I was at church every week this month.
I am certainly a faithful Christian!"

Sometimes the best way to judge our own faithfulness
Is to look at our lives from an entirely different angle.

You can look at your Credit Card bills
and see where you spend your money.

What did Jesus say?

“For where your treasure is,
there your heart will be also.”^{vi}

You can pour over your calendar and your appointments
Noting where you invest your time.

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you invited me in...”^{vii}

You can also look at your upcoming plans.
Your hopes and dreams for this Christmas.
How we your planning to manage your time AND resources
This special time of year?

What are your Christmas plans?
And do they express a love for God and neighbor?

People talk about keeping Christ in Christmas...

So will you carve out space in a busy time
To ensure that Jesus is really at the forefront
Of your life.

You might pick up a devotional for advent.
Or chose a book from our library that inspires your faith.

You might convince your family to come to church on Christmas Eve
Or ask to read the nativity story before Christmas dinner.

I think I've told you before

But Stephen Farris, the recently retired Dean of St. Andrew's Hall,
Was asked to preach at a gathering
And address the topic of keeping family first.

Stephen replied that he couldn't do this.

You see the Bible talks about putting GOD first.
Every other relationship, even family,
Comes second to God!

If you determine to keep Christ in Christmas,

Then how might these same plans express a love for neighbor?

"St. Michael and All Angels Church in [the UK] will host a dinner
for people on their own on Christmas Day.

*[One member notes] We held our first Christmas Day dinner last year
and around 40 people came, including volunteers,
many of whom were on their own too.*

*...Turkeys will be cooked across the town
and vegetables prepped on Christmas Eve.*

*"Lifts are provided for people coming to the dinner
as transport on Christmas Day can be difficult.
We have a whole team of people to welcome guests
and serve them drinks..."*

We don't have any plans to serve a Christmas meal here at St. Andrew's.
But you don't need to wait for your church
To share a meal with someone who is on their own.

And if hosting others this season isn't something
That you can realistically manage,
There is a host of other ways
To share that love God has shown you in Jesus Christ.

When I 'googled'
"How to care for others this Christmas"
I found a LONG list of things we can all do.

Things such as:

- Providing food, income and medicine for families in need. Think World Vision or PWS&D.
- Donate blood.
- Drive someone to do their Christmas shopping.
- Help a senior write their Christmas cards.
- Share baking with a neighbour.

Truth be told, all of these tasks require time and resources.

But maybe they are more important
Than some of our most cherished Christmas traditions.

If our main task in life is to be re-formed into Jesus' likeness.
If as early church father Athanasius of Alexandria declared
"the Son of God became man so that we might become God"
Then changing our plans for this season
might be the best thing we can do.

PAUSE

Someone has famously questioned:

“Will there be enough evidence to convicted you as a Christian?”

People are longing to see in their neighbors

Living, breath examples of Jesus.

People who live out a holy calling of loving God and neighbor

Yet whose feet still touch the ground.

But it’s not just our friends and family that are searching.

God himself is searching for those

who will follow his son this Christmas.

As the Bible reminds us:

“Look! I have been standing at the door,
and I am constantly knocking...”^{viii}

So will you welcome him in?

ⁱ “Elf Script - Dialogue Transcript” http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/e/elf-script-transcript-will-ferrell.html

ⁱⁱ Jeremiah 1:10 NIV

ⁱⁱⁱ J. D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney “Book of Jeremiah” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary* 713

^{iv} Jeremiah 7:3,4,11 NIV

^v Juliana Claassens “Commentary on Jeremiah 1:4-10; 7:1-11” November 23, 2014

https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3836

^{vi} Matthew 6:21 NIV

^{vii} Matthew 6:35 NIV

^{viii} Revelation 3:20 TLB