

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Septuagesima Sunday, February 9, 2020**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 29, 532, 141, 385:8-10, 38:4.

Lessons: Jeremiah 17:1-27, 1 Corinthians 15:12-20, Luke 6:17-26.

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 17: 5-8.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

As we approach the season of Lent, we must consider what it is that Jesus Christ has done for us.

Today is historically called “Septuagesima” Sunday, from the Latin word referring to 70 days before Easter. Next Sunday is called “Sexagesima”, 60 days before Easter, and then comes Quinquagesima, 50 days before Easter. During the week after Quinquagesima, we begin Lent by celebrating Ash Wednesday.

Today you hear Jeremiah lamenting the sins of God’s chosen people. But he is also giving hope. Today we ask

**WHERE SHOULD WE PUT OUR TRUST?**

1. ***“Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD.”***
2. ***“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.”***

Like Isaiah, Jeremiah prophesied especially to the nation of Judah. He started this chapter with the words: ***“Judah's sin is engraved with an iron tool, inscribed with a flint point, on the tablets of their hearts and on the horns of their altars. Even their children remember their altars and Asherah poles beside the spreading trees and on the high hills. My mountain in the land and your wealth and all your treasures I will give away as plunder, together with your high places, because of sin throughout your country. Through your own fault you will lose the inheritance I gave you. I will enslave you to your enemies in a land you do not know, for you have kindled my anger, and it will burn forever.”*** Jeremiah 17:1-4 (NIV)

If sin is engraved and inscribed, it is obvious and deep. It is not only on their hearts, and the word “tablets” even suggests hearts of stone, but also on their altars. The ***“horns of their altars”*** are the raised corners. Altars are supposed to be holy places. These were not. And it is not just the adults who see and feel the wickedness. It is children, too, who see, remember and are involved in the worship of false gods. Asherah poles were upright carved wooden objects or especially pruned trees representing the fertility mother goddess of the Canaanites. Such poles or trees were frequently found in Canaanite religious sanctuaries and had been accepted by many in Israel. Pagan religious sanctuaries were often located on the tree-covered slopes of Canaan and Israel.

God says: ***“My mountain in the land and your wealth and all your treasures I will give away as plunder, together with your high places, because of sin throughout your country. Through your own fault you will lose the inheritance I gave you. I will enslave you to your enemies in a land you do not know, for you have kindled my anger, and it will burn forever.”*** Jeremiah 17:1-4 (NIV)

Because their hills and groves of trees had become polluted shrines for idolatry, God will give away the land and the wealth of his chosen people. The reason? ***“Because of sin throughout your country. Through your own fault you will lose the inheritance I gave you. I will enslave you to your enemies in a land you do not know, for you have kindled my anger, and it will burn forever.”*** Jeremiah 17:1-4 (NIV)

We find words that can apply to us today as we approach God. Just like that nation descended from Abraham, God tells us: ***“you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*** 1 Peter 2:9-10 (NIV)

The descendants of Abraham were privileged and honored to have the Savior of all mankind descended from them. But when the Savior came to them, they crucified him, the very Lord of Glory. As a nation they rejected him and forfeited their special status, so that they were soon enslaved and eventually were destroyed as a nation and scattered after the time the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A. D.

In their history, we find a warning for us, too. When Jesus was on earth, five days before his crucifixion, he wept over the people of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Don't you think and realize that God also laments and weeps over your sins?

This morning you heard the entire chapter of Jeremiah 17 so that you could hear the context of our sermon text. But this is not the only place Jeremiah warns – with a curse – about putting our hope and trust and confidence in something beside the true God.

The Word of God today tells us ***“Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD.”*** Jeremiah goes on: ***“He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.”*** A bush in the wilderness does not prosper. It struggles to live. You may have seen pictures of how deserts can bloom with gorgeous flowers – for a day! The rest of the year is a struggle. Jeremiah shows the real problem. It lies in the hearts of the people. He contrasts the two ways of living – the way of unbelief and the way of faith.

Don't we repeatedly hear and see people boasting about themselves and what they have accomplished? Even more disheartening – and even terrifying – is boasting of their sins and wickedness. It is terrifying because such impenitence leads to eternal damnation in hell. We are living at a time when it is NOT a shame of which to speak of the gross, open sins people commit. They even boast about doing them! People ignore and reject God's words in Ephesians: ***“For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.”*** Ephesians 5:12 (ESV)

The words of Jeremiah we especially look at today begin with the words ***“This is what the LORD says.”*** Make no mistake, these are not just words of the opinions of one man, but these are the words of God himself. It is for this very reason that we place so much emphasis on the doctrine of verbal inspiration. Because the Bible is the very inspired word of God, we dare not add to it. Because the Bible is the very inspired word of God, we dare not take away from it or ignore any part of it. Because the Bible is the very inspired Word of God, we dare not twist its meaning in any way.

In chapter 9 Jeremiah wrote: ***“This is what the LORD says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the LORD.”*** Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NIV)

If you are going to boast about anything, boast in the Lord! ***“Boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the LORD.”*** These words remind us of Ephesians 2: ***“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”*** Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

We can't boast except in the way Scripture tells us. We read in First Corinthians that God ***“chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’”*** 1 Corinthians 1:28-31 (NIV) Paul himself said ***“when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”*** 1 Corinthians 9:16 (NIV) And he said again: ***“If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”*** 2 Corinthians

11:30 (ESV) And again: ***“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”*** Galatians 6:14 (NIV)

God says that the person who puts his hope for the future in something human, who looks for ultimate security in other human beings is cursed! But don't people put their trust and confidence in things they can see and experience? Human wisdom and human strength? Riches? Isn't this the way we feel especially in our youth? We are invincible and have all our lives all planned out – at least what we want to do and feel sure of doing next. John in the Bible speaks of this feeling of confidence as ***“boasting of what he has and does”*** 1 John 2:16 (NIV) This refers to the unshakable confidence that there is nothing we are unable to do, no problem that in the end we cannot solve, no force we cannot turn to our use. This confidence is the pride that grows from all our human accomplishments, from the monuments to human learning, technology, and accomplishments.

But what is the foundation of all this hope? Man and flesh. But man was made from dust and shall return to dust. The end of the one who trusts in flesh will be empty and fruitless. Jeremiah describes this as a desert tree growing in a wasteland.

What a contrast with the blessedness of the person who trusts the Lord. This person places his hope, his faith, his confidence for all things in the Lord. ***“But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”***

We remember the picture in Psalm 1 of a tree planted by a source of water that does not fail. You recently read a sermon on Psalm 1 – the Ministry By Mail sermon for Christmas 2, January 5, 2020. The picture of the child of God, the believer as a green tree planted by the rivers of living water comes up again in our sermon text.

That is the picture of the believer. He lives by the stream of living water, flowing from Scripture, giving him fellowship with God himself. Because of this life-giving water, this foundation of life, the believer in God can stand up under the toughest times.

Without the revelation of Scripture we could never understand how sin has corrupted us. Human nature thinks of itself as pretty good, and that anyone who does good things in this world will not end up in hell. But it is faith that saves, not good works.

The Lord knows even our hearts. Nothing is hidden from him. And the evil in the human heart especially shows itself in the attitude toward possessions or wealth. Covetousness and idolatry always go together.

We can and must and should boast in the Lord that he's saved and kept me! In verses after our sermon text, Jeremiah writes: ***“O LORD, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in time of distress, to you the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, ‘Our fathers possessed nothing but false gods, worthless idols that did them no good. Do men make their own gods? Yes, but they are not gods!’ Therefore I will teach them-- this time I will teach them my power and might. Then they will know that my name is the LORD.”*** Jeremiah 16:19-21 (NIV)

Although we cannot personally see and hear Jesus preach and heal as he did in our Gospel lesson, we can see and hear him in the Word of God. We can receive the healing of our sins by faith in what he has done for us, as you heard in our Epistle lesson for today. Our hope is in the resurrection of Christ. With Jeremiah we plead: ***“Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise.”*** Jeremiah 17:12-14 (NIV) Amen.