

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Exactly six years ago today, I stood in this very pulpit for the first time. Our lessons were exactly the same lessons as we heard this morning. We had spent Saturday evening together sharing a meal and asking questions. We were all on our best behavior, not knowing what the future would hold for our ministry together, but all fairly certain that, come the end of the day, I would be called to be the third pastor of this congregation.

And, to be very honest, I was scared to death. After all, what had I gotten myself into? Was I really ready to serve God's people as a shepherd? Who was I kidding, other than myself? There wasn't anything "special" about me, and the congregation, well, the folks here had such high expectations. What was I going to do? What if I failed?

Six years later, I have some of the same questions.

But now, as then, I am comforted by the words of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah. The young prophet has some issues with which to deal. He began his ministry around 627 BC around Jerusalem, or about 100 years after Isaiah. He was from a priestly family from the territory known as Northern Israel—that is, he said "Shalom" and not "Shalom y'all" when he greeted people.<sup>1</sup> Things really weren't going well for the Israelites, and it seems that the reforms started by King Josiah based on the then-newly recovered Book of Deuteronomy weren't taking hold, and Jeremiah wasn't being very successful in his preaching that the people had to get back to doing what ~~h~~why asking them to do. In fact, by 598 BC the people were already growing tired of Jeremiah's message that God was unhappy with them and a lengthy period of exile was looming in the not-so-distant future.

Simply put, the people were not happy with the message of change that Jeremiah brought to them, regardless of why he was telling them or through whom he was receiving the message.

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<sup>1</sup> OK, not true, but it should get a chuckle out of someone.

All of the abuse—physical and emotional—took its toll on Jeremiah. As we read through the entire book, we see many times when Jeremiah gets angry with God for calling him to be a prophet and to proclaim God’s Word to an ungrateful, even hostile, people who don’t want to hear that things need to change.

But even in the face of opposition, and even his anger at God for letting all these bad things happen to him, Jeremiah doesn’t stop his ministry of preaching, teaching, and even cajoling. Jeremiah has an important message for the people, and it is a message that they ignore at their own peril, even if the people think it is Jeremiah who is the problem.

One would think that a prophet would finally get tired of the abuse and simply say, “God, you got me into this mess! Get me out of it! These folks don’t want to hear your Word, so why are you punishing *me* by telling me to stay here?” Of course, Jeremiah knew, deep down, that God hadn’t forsaken him or decided that it was Jeremiah who needed to be taught a lesson. Listen again to the words of the Lord to Jeremiah—especially how the words are in an active voice. God said to Jeremiah, “Before *I formed you* in the womb *I knew you*.” And again “*I consecrated you*” and still again “*I appointed you*.” No doubt about it, God was being active, not passive. Most importantly, God told Jeremiah, “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you.”

And that promise of God was heard not only by Jeremiah, but by the Psalmist, as we heard in this morning’s Psalm, where the Psalmist declares that he takes refuge in God’s righteousness, through which God rescues and delivers him. God does not abandon the Psalmist in tough times, nor does the Psalmist abandon God.

Even our Lord Jesus, during his time of public ministry, was subjected to abuse and ridicule long before his arrest and march to Golgatha. Early on, by no less than his own neighbors and so-called friends in Nazareth, Jesus is subjected to doubt, ridicule, verbal abuse, and even the threat of physical abuse as well. But this is God Incarnate about whom we are speaking. Jesus knew the time had not yet come for him to die or even to stop preaching. He walked past his tormenters and moved forward in his ministry.

God does not abandon His prophets, preachers, and teachers, any more than He abandons any of His Chosen People. If anything, God stands closer to those whom He calls because God has “been there, done that” in the form of Jesus of Nazareth. God Himself has been subjected to the ridicule, abuse, and whisper campaigns which have challenged all who proclaim His Word from time immemorial.

You see, my dear friends, it is even as the Apostle Paul declares in these famous words from First Corinthians. Love is indeed patient and kind, for love comes to us from the Greatest Lover of all, the Lord God Almighty. While we walk this earth in faith, that faith will come to an end with the sight of our Lord. While we live in the hope of life everlasting, that hope will cease when we are received in the Resurrection. But the love of God, that love which knows no boundaries, abides forever.

Love rejoices in the truth, which comes from God our Father in heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit, and was made manifest among us through the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.