

08.02.26 ~ Pentecost 10 & Communion Sunday

“Struggles and Judgment-Part 1”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Prophecy

Jeremiah 4:1-4, 11-14, 20-22a ^{TLB}

Pew Bible 650, 651

¹ O Israel, if you will truly return to me and absolutely discard your idols, ² and if you will swear by me alone, the living God, and begin to live good, honest, clean lives, then you will be a testimony to the nations of the world, and they will come to me and glorify my name.

³ The Lord is saying to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Plow up the hardness of your hearts; otherwise the good seed will be wasted among the thorns. ⁴ Cleanse your minds and hearts, not just your bodies, or else my anger will burn you to a crisp because of all your sins. And no one will be able to put the fire out.

¹¹⁻¹² At that time he will send a burning wind from the desert upon them—not in little gusts but in a roaring blast—and he will pronounce their doom. ¹³ The enemy shall roll down upon us like a storm wind; his chariots are like a whirlwind; his steeds are swifter than eagles. Woe, woe upon us, for we are doomed.

¹⁴ O Jerusalem, cleanse your hearts while there is time. You can yet be saved by casting out your evil thoughts.

²⁰ Wave upon wave of destruction rolls over the land, until it lies in utter ruin; suddenly, in a moment, every house is crushed. ²¹ How long must this go on? How long must I see war and death surrounding me?

²² “Until my people leave their foolishness, for they refuse to listen to me; they are dull, retarded children who have no understanding. They are smart enough at doing wrong, but for doing right they have no talent, none at all.”

Leader: These Are God’s Words of Warning.

People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Instruction

Romans 7:7-10, 14-20, 25 ^{NLT}

Pew Bible 982

God’s Law Reveals Our Sin

⁷ Well then, am I suggesting that the law of God is sinful? Of course not! In fact, it was the law that showed me my sin. I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, “You must not covet.” ⁸ But sin used this command to arouse all kinds of covetous desires within me! If there were no law, sin would not have that power. ⁹ At one time I lived without understanding the law. But when I learned the command not to covet, for instance, the power of sin came to life, ¹⁰ and I died. So I discovered that the law’s commands, which were supposed to bring life, brought spiritual death instead.

Struggling with Sin

¹⁴ So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I don’t really understand myself, for I

want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. ¹⁶ But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

¹⁸ And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. ¹⁹ I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. ²⁰ But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

²⁵ Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

Leader: These Are Apostle Paul's Words.

People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

God of all provision, we thank you for our blessings in this world even though we sometimes forget how lucky we are. Thank you for letting us worship you today and every Sunday in freedom and relative comfort. Be with our believing siblings around the world wherever they gather to worship. We love your son Jesus and thank you for sending him to teach us and go to the cross on our behalf. It has been yet another tough week, so we surrender our burdens, worries, and grief to you and the Holy Spirit for healing, sustenance, and renewal. We confess our sin and accept your forgiveness, mercy, and grace. Be with us now in this testimony, as we ponder today's Scriptures, share communion, conduct the business of the church, and come back again next week to hear from your servants Jeremiah and Paul. Keep us humble, disciplined, healthy, and faithful as we lean more on you than on our own strength. Speak through this message and messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Thank you again for your flexibility with worship. I hope you'll continue to pray for our three congregations and cooperating Mission Center partners navigating the high temperatures in the building. Please also pray for The Riverview Group as they try to find the best solutions, and for our team who gathers information to address these needs. We do need your support and prayers as we seek options.

This has been another one of "those" weeks! Much of it is good stuff yet many demands hit at the same time. As I looked at the bulletin cover and re-read the passages, it occurred to me that I could preach a

whole testifying sermon on “The War Within” after the last few weeks without even using the chosen Scripture! Such a message may or may not be helpful to you, but I wondered if you could relate to the stress such a war within produces. Scrambling to patch the Air Conditioning situation each Saturday and pastorally supporting all the members who need attention, especially a family in grief who needs major assistance to organize a celebration of life leaves little time for writing a sermon, prepping for a quarterly meeting, or getting one’s car inspected and road-ready, or managing the many loose ends to welcome a new Mission Center partner.

I am not complaining, mind you; I **love** being your pastor, facilities manager, problem solver, vision strategist, shepherd, teacher, evangelist, a personal caregiver, and a normal human with medical appointments, friends in trouble, family needs, or vacation plans. But when I finally paused last night to catch my breath, it was apparent my own sin of wanting to do and be all of what I just described is getting in the way of God working through me. My desire to fulfill the great commission and my installation/ordination “charges” as your Senior Minister has perhaps created a nearly impossible human goal. Do not be alarmed--all is good. The best news is that my honest confession both to God and to you may now clear the way for the Holy Spirit to intervene spiritually and supernaturally, if we ask for Christ’s forgiveness and bold authority to overcome these recent hurdles.

So, what does this mean? Before we exegete (interpret) this week’s passages, I decided to risk sharing my own testimony as an illustration of how the chaos of human willpower can overtake the glorious intercession

of Christ's hope for our lives and this church. I will continue next week with Part 2, using the same passages, but more theology; so, bear with me, and see this not as failure or weakness in my story, but as my permission for **you** to reflect on your lives and how you are serving God in this world, the local community, and in this church.

If you ever wondered about a typical pastor's day, let me share my week. Monday was a normal workday to start preparing for Sunday, both worship and our meeting, plus communication with Sally Norris' family. They had not yet met with the funeral home, so I couldn't do much to prepare and frankly, I was tired from the previous hectic week of Air Conditioning and CLCEB conversations. Tuesday, I took a comp time day off to get my car inspected and road ready for Sally's graveside service out of town and catch up on household chores (yes, this pastor, like you, has to do laundry occasionally!) Then Wednesday, I sorted blueprints (thanks to Charles' help they were labeled) and met with Kyle and their Vice President for Sales & Service of The Riverview Group about our Air Conditioning repair/replacement options. We gave him a tour of the key building areas (boiler room) and asked many questions. It took half a day prepping, meeting, and discussing with Kyle next steps. That afternoon, I learned about Sally's service to be Thursday, so stayed late making more calls/texts, preparing the MailChimp announcement, her bulletin, and gathering photos. Gratefully, she had written much of what she wanted, so my task was healing time as I composed my remarks to expand the family's obituary. Thursday the service was two hours away, so we got home around 6 pm. Thank you to Debbie, Elmer, and Bill for travelling to attend. It was beautiful with military honors. Ask us

about the crazy no cell service or GPS situations in the country! Friday was the day to finish all reports and motions for the Quarterly Membership Meeting. Poor Roudaina was so patient and efficient, even after major dental surgery and pain! Saturday was to be a personal day for chores, some rest, caregiving, and sermon prep. You see, I was behind on my sermon writing. At 4 pm, I went over to the church to turn on the Air when I realized the choir room and that floor was 90 degrees too. After calling two resources and troubleshooting for an hour, Kyle and I agreed to call our techs, so we didn't have to cancel church. He was able to come, so last night, I was here from 8:45-10 pm with Cody, a skilled young technician but new to our facility. My diagnosis was correct and he was able to get this room cooled down. Then, we discussed the larger room options, and he was able to get the one working compressor online with no guarantees. So here we are.

As I began to write my sermon at 11 pm, it was apparent that I was exactly the person Paul was speaking about: how the sin was the cause of his doing what he hates yet he really wanted to do good things. I am still contemplating, but I think my sins are procrastination and denial of certain realities. There are too many priorities and not enough people or capacity to do all I want to do. And as a leader, it is my responsibility to remain calm in the midst of turmoil, to be that non-anxious presence in the middle of anxious times or situations. While I do strive to be that leader, refining my character through discipline, education, and writings from strong leaders, do I truly allow or ask God to intervene? Rarely do things pile up exponentially like they did this week. Although my faith did not waver, my energy, mental stamina, and physical capacity did, so

if your request or call was not handled, I am sorry. I could not possibly satisfy all the demands, and thanks to some of you who stepped in to help visit and care for Ruby and Aubrey or make phone calls to check on other people. Linda had a critical water drainage situation in her home, and she cannot attend our meeting, but has a repairman there this morning. It is not just us, guys!

When we got slammed with so much last week, I was reminded of Psalm 46, and asked for strength:

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
- ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
- ³ though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging . . .
- ¹⁰ He says, “Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.”
- ¹¹ The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Because of my trust in God, I received God’s prevailing fortitude, which through the Holy Spirit allowed me to honor our good friend and encourager, Sally Norris, nurse, Air Force veteran, exceptional CROP Hunger Walk fundraiser, loving mother, and much more. It was a life-giving joy to share all the ways she influenced and cared for others in times of crisis or in calm. Then I started thinking of Ruby’s stamina and positive Christ-like attitude. How much she has seen and experienced and yes, how many burdens she has borne in her lifetime. We will carry on, folks, and I will build more margin into my duties and my days. We will be fine, but we must pray together for that supernatural intervention and be creative offering help where we can. I cannot lead alone, so thank you

for stepping up and participating. Thank you for allowing me to share my week and pray that it is not a typical one. God's got this, I am sure; he is our main priority. Keep praying, keep asking, keep studying, keep serving, and keep coming back to worship. Amen. ||

Please pray with me: Thank you Lord for the guidance you give us. May we never forget that you are our strength and deliverer. Help us to obey and live out our faith sharing it with others. Transform our hearts and minds, Lord, to be centered on you rather than on the many details of life. Remind us that you took mercy on us and we celebrate undeserved grace. Thank you for your forgiveness and for your son, Jesus. Please bless these elements as we remember your sacrifice on the cross. We pray these things in your name, Amen.