

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. So again, we have another reading from the book of Jeremiah. And again, remember Jeremiah is the prophet who got the wonderful opportunity to see his prophecies being fulfilled.

Now, Jeremiah is telling Israel or Judah in particular, that you cannot trust in the strength of men. If you put your strength and your hope in the confidence in your own strength or the strength of those around you, it's not going to work. Now you got to remember what Jeremiah is doing at this time. Judah is a fairly prosperous nation at this time. Everything is going well. There's peace in the land. The gross national product is doing well. There's not a whole lot of inflation. Everybody is succeeding. They've got peace treaties with their neighbors. They've got mutual support from Egypt and various other places, armies and shields and swords, and they're pretty confident. They're feeling pretty good. Everything is good.

And Jeremiah is saying, "Don't put your trust in those things. Your wealth will disappear, your strength will disappear. Your allies will turn on you." You cannot put your hope in them, especially because while they were prosperous in the here and the now, their hearts were far away from God. They had ceased to worship God in truth and purity. They had gone after false gods and false idols. They put their national security, they had their hopes in the treaties of man, not in the confidence of God. And so Jeremiah is warning them. You're not going to last. When things go wrong, you will have no support. You will dry up like a tree in a salted land. There will be nothing for you.

And then we get Jesus who comes and speaks to the people. And you notice if you listen to it, "Blessed are the poor for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied." Sounds like the Sermon on the Mount, except it's not.

If you notice at the very beginning, he went down and stood on a level place. This isn't the Sermon on the Mount. This is a Sermon on the plane, which sounds a lot like the Sermon on the Mount because it's almost as if maybe Jesus was consistently speaking the same thing over and over again, like his message never changed. The Sermon on the Mount was about the same as the Sermon on the plane, is about the same as the sermon that is preached here at Faith Lutheran and Parish is the same that is preached in every Lutheran church out there. It's the same message of God. It does not change.

So this is the Sermon on the plane and Jesus is describing how we are blessed by God. We're blessed if we're poor, if we're hungry, if we weep, if people mock us and curse us and laugh and exclude us and spurn us. Those are things that we can rejoice in and count ourselves as blessed. Now, that sounds a little bit odd, that we

might be blessed when we're poor or hungry or people are reviling us and mocking us. But you see, Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul, all of them were focused upon the true strength that we have in our faith. Our nation could have the greatest army in the world, but without faith, it's pointless. Our bank accounts could be as rich and secure as possible, but without faith it does us no good. Bank accounts come and they go, jobs come and they go. Peace comes and goes. Allies change to enemies. Enemies change to allies. It's a topsy-turvy world. The world is falling apart. The devil's actively trying to help. And our own sinful nature is saying, "I'll help with that too."

We have all of these forces against us and Paul, Jesus, Jeremiah are trying to remind us that our strength is not in ourselves. We are not called to rely upon ourselves and how good we are and how well we have done and how well we are doing for our confidence because it's not about what we do, it's about what God has done for us.

And that's what Paul's trying to get at. He's trying to let us know that what he preaches is the same as what he received and the same of what he received is the same that Jesus preaches is the same that Jeremiah preaches is the same that everybody has preached. Our hope is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that is it because he died on the cross to forgive our sins.

We know that he was raised from the dead, that God counted his sacrifice as sufficient, as complete for all of us. And so we do not put our hope in the situation of this world. Some of us might tend to think about the things that we do and how we're supposed to serve God, which is true. We are called to serve God. We are called to love our neighbor as ourselves. We're called to obey His commands. We're called to reach out to our neighbors and our family members, friends we're called to give to the church and to missions and to those who are in need. We are called to do all of these things. But why? Why do we do them? That is the key.

We don't do them because we gain God's favor by doing them. Even Paul, and no one could argue that Paul wasn't a hard worker. I mean, most of the New Testament comes from his writings. And yet even he says, "I am the least of all of these apostles, and it's not I that did them, but the Holy Spirit that worked through me." So even Paul doesn't take credit for what he has done shaping the New Testament church, practically single-handed, but it wasn't he that was shaping the church. It was the word of God. It was the message that he had received that he gives to the people. And that message is Christ crucified, Christ risen from the dead.

And because of that, our vision, our hope, our confidence is not in anything that we can see. It is in the word of God, which is in our hearts and in our minds and in our souls. It's not in our bank accounts. It's not in our good behavior. It's not in

anything that we do. In fact, I just saw a recent video, kind of a funny one, has these people going up to the pearly gates and they're on this scale, have they done good enough in order to enter into heaven? People come in and they've got their plan of action. "Well, I did all of these things and I served people and everything like that," but there's nothing about God, nothing about faith. So he gets on the scale, not good enough.

Another person says, "Well, I did this bad thing, but then I did this good thing, so they probably balance out, right?" Nope, that didn't work either. So another guy comes along and he's got his file and it's just red. I mean, there's nothing good in there at all. He just got, and it's massive, and he is just, he's going to St. Peter basically, and he's got nothing to offer. And so they're looking at that going, "Why are you even here?" And then you see an envelope coming off to the side and Peter opens it up and says, "Child of God." And he looks over and he goes, "Oh, I didn't know he was with you." And there's a guy standing over there with a T-shirt that says Jesus on it. And then he says, "Oh, okay, so now get on the scale." And so the guy gets ready to get on the scale, but Jesus says, "No, not you, me." So Jesus gets on the scale, and of course he is good enough because he's the son of God, lived a perfect life.

And so the man was not judged by his activities, but rather by Christ. And so Christ gets off the scale, puts his arm around the man and brings the man into heaven. That is our hope. It's not about what we do, it's about what has been done to us. That we are children of God for the sake of Christ.

And so when bad times come in our lives and they will, let's face it, we've lived long enough to know that there are going to be bad times in our lives and frustrating times and irritating times, worrisome times, times of struggle and heartache. What sustains us through all of those, what sustains us? The word of God, the message that was preached that Paul received and he shares with us that those of us who are facing hardship can have the same confidence as those who have already fallen asleep.

I love the way the New Testament describes people of faith who have died. Those who have gone to sleep ahead of us. We're going to join them. I mean, you and I are all going to fall asleep someday. It's going to happen. But is that to be something to be feared? Because if we fall asleep in Christ, we will wake up in Christ. As another scripture says, "If we've been buried with Christ in our baptisms, crucified with Christ in our baptism, how much more will be raised to new life in a resurrection like his?" This is why we are confident that he has risen from the dead, because that is our hope. Otherwise, we're foolish. Why are we here if we don't put our absolute total and complete trust in what Christ has done for us?

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Because he has done all of that, now is the time to serve him. Now is the time to thank him, but we do it out of joy. There is no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ. We are free from the guilt, the fear, the anxiety, the judgment. We are free in Christ. And so we are blessed whether we have a lot or we have a little, because we're not focused on the here and now. If we have a lot, blessed be the name of the Lord. If we have a little, blessed be the name of the Lord. If we are in good health, blessed be the name of the Lord. If we are in ill health, blessed be the name of the Lord. If we are alive and vibrant, blessed be the name of the Lord. If we are on our deathbed, blessed to be the name of the Lord. Because in all of it, we are more than conquerors because we don't rely upon the strength of man or our own strength, but upon the strength of Christ himself.

And so we know that Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have gone asleep, who have fallen asleep. Therefore, if we don't need to be afraid of falling asleep, what else is there to be afraid of? If we don't need to be afraid of death, what else can harm us? Blessed are all of us who put our trust and our hope and our confidence in God crucified and risen from the dead. May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.