

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Old Testament, Year C

CRUSHER

Jeremiah 23:23-29

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15)

Analysis by Marcus Felde

Am I a God nearby, says the LORD, and not a God far off? 24Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the LORD. 25I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed!" 26How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back—those who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart? 27They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal. 28Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the LORD. 29Is not my word like fire, says the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?

DIAGNOSIS: PEACE TALKERS, PIECE MAKERS

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Everything's Fine! Ironically, the presenting symptom described in this passage, and echoed in today's gospel, is the attitude that everything will be all right. People are suffering from assurance. They are believing people who tell them that—based on their intuition or dreams or whatever—things are going to turn out just fine. But isn't that always a welcome message? Don't we need to stay away from alligators and pessimists who want to make us depressed?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Look Who's Talking

Trouble is, those who are providing assurances cannot back up their words with actual salvation the way God can. Their message of "Peace! Peace!" is a lie. Trusting people just because we like their version of truth is simply another way of curving the worship-arrow back towards us and away from God: "My will be done; my wish come true on our side of the fence as on the other side" is our prayer. Failure to listen to the one who truly speaks for God is the same as failing to listen to God, and "He who rejects you rejects me."

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Busted into Little Pieces

"Is not my word like fire," says the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" People at Lake Kapiago in Papua New Guinea, building the first roads in that district with hand tools, would break a boulder by building a fire against it. Weakened by the heat, the stone could be broken with a hammer. Is not the Word of God like that? Able to destroy what people think is the strongest thing around? And will not the truth eventually come out, when time expires on lying prophecies? False hopes, on which people had founded their lives and policies, will be dashed to pieces, their dreams ruined forever.

Is there hope? The "prognosis" part of this text study suggests what is not presented within the text—that, if God says there is no hope in others, perhaps we may hope in God. If so, what might that look like?

PROGNOSIS: PEACEMAKER, PEACEMAKERS

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Uncrush These Stones!

Into the vacuum of hope created when the liars' dreams fail

might step one who does not lie but is truth incarnate, who lays down his life for his friends and is crushed for their/our iniquities. Rising from the dead he could reassemble us into one body in himself. Right?

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Advanced Solution): Himself Our Wheat, Himself Our Rock

Might we not listen to (believe in) those who speak for the One who gave himself for us, knowing that our future for eternity is in his gracious hands? We would still be listening to people (they might even dress similarly to those false prophets!), but we would be paying our true attention to the one who is not only local but also "far off." (v. 23) Hearing this Word, we would cling to the Name and not forget it.

Step 3: Final Prognosis (External Solution): "Greater Works than These Will We Do" (John 14:12)

Placing our ultimate confidence in the One who alone is True, might we not have courage always to work for peace that endures, in his name? Instead of going around telling everyone "It will work out," wouldn't we bend our efforts to make it work out? Surely we wouldn't say to people (a la James 2:16): "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill." Instead, we would bear peace, blankets, justice, and food to places in the world where peace is not present. Could Jesus have been serious when he announced that those who believe in him will do even greater things than he did?