

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost, Old Testament, Year C

THE END HAS ALREADY STARTED

Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-22

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 25)

Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

7Although our iniquities testify against us, act, O LORD, for your name's sake; our apostasies indeed are many, and we have sinned against you.⁸ O hope of Israel, its savior in time of trouble, why should you be like a stranger in the land, like a traveler turning aside for the night? ⁹Why should you be like someone confused, like a mighty warrior who cannot give help? Yet you, O LORD, are in the midst of us, and we are called by your name; do not forsake us!

¹⁰Thus says the LORD concerning this people: Truly they have loved to wander, they have not restrained their feet; therefore the LORD does not accept them, now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins.

¹⁹Have you completely rejected Judah? Does your heart loathe Zion? Why have you struck us down so that there is no healing for us? We look for peace, but find no good; for a time of healing, but there is terror instead.²⁰We acknowledge our wickedness, O LORD, the iniquity of our ancestors, for we have sinned against you. ²¹Do not spurn us, for your name's sake; do not dishonor your glorious throne; remember and do not break your covenant with us. ²²Can any idols of the nations bring rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Is it not you, O LORD our God? We set our hope on you, for it is you who do all this.

DIAGNOSIS: You Were Told This Would Happen

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): We Think We Always Have Enough Time

There is a famine in the land (Jer. 14:1-6), the land is cracked, cisterns are empty. So the people turn to God, confessing their wrongs, and honoring God as the God who brings rain and causes the heavens to shower. The people want rain. They act like the drought is a warning. But the warning was given long ago.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): No One Took God Seriously

The problem started long before the drought. The people followed their own will, they went after other gods to serve and worship (Jer. 13:10). God has seen their abominations, their adulteries (like in Hosea, adultery is God's people having an affair with other gods), and their shameless prostitution on the hills of the countryside (Jer. 13:27). Prophets had told the people again and again to return to God, but they did not. The people did not take the law of God seriously. They had no fear, no rightful respect for God. They had what they needed, they had more; they had their lives and their fun and entertainment to make their lives feel good. Their hearts were depending on other gods for good things and for comfort. No one cared about God. God was not needed, not important, and not worth depending on when there were so many other nicer and more fun things to chase after.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): This Is Not a Warning

This excerpt from Jeremiah is not the beginning of an event, but the end has already begun. God had warned the people that they would be punished for their adultery, but the law's warning did not change their hearts. The law warned the people that they had a problem with God, and they didn't think that warning worth heeding or that unheeded it would result in their death. So now

the drought has dried the land. Now the people suffer and die. Now God is doing what God said he would. For hearts that wander, that do not honor God, remember, the soul that sins shall die. When one is dead, one cannot praise God. To God this people (no longer his people) was already dead.

PROGNOSIS: You Are Promised Mercy by Jesus

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): This Is a Gift of Mercy

The time came when Jesus too was already dead, put to death on a cross and laid in a tomb carved out of stone. But his judgment was from people, from us. His condemnation came from this people who did not take God seriously. Jesus had promised that in him, the Son of God, not even death could take people away from God. No, said the people: As God punishes those who do not obey his law—and the people had seen that and had never fully recovered—the same will happen to Jesus. Referring to Jesus, the people said it is not allowed to announce mercy from God. It is God's law that happens to people. After all, the experience of the people Jeremiah spoke to seems to say that God does not listen to sinners. Yet now God raises Jesus from death into a new creation! That final word of God—death—is no longer final, no longer the last word, no longer eternal. Death has been ripped open by God—the same God who lay dead in its belly but is raised up. Death can no longer hold us. Jesus has ripped death open so we can go through death with him into his new life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution): Faith Takes God Seriously

The promise of Jesus to pull us with him through death is the means by which the Holy Spirit creates faith in Jesus in our hearts: We take him seriously, we depend on him for our own goodness and life. We depend on him for comfort and hope and meaning. We do not just say Jesus can bring rain, he can

overcome death, overcome our wandering hearts, our self-will, and Jesus overcomes not only judgment but also God's final judgment against us. Instead of demands and threats and warnings, Jesus gives us mercy and forgiveness and peace, not just for us, but for us to give to others, as Jesus has told us to do, "You shall proclaim repentance and forgiveness in my name to all nations."

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): We Have Time Now To Serve

Each day is a new event, a new day to trust Jesus, to live in his mercy, while always struggling against the judgment that is thrown at us, struggling against the deaths of loved ones we witness and grieve. Each day is a time to take Jesus seriously, to trust him for goodness instead of hiding of death and pretending it is far away; instead of the need to be entertained to make life seem good and to be content with amusements, not paying attention to the needs of neighbors; instead of laboring to get at least something to eat for today and worry about rent when the end of the month comes. The spring rain of Jesus' promises falls, so why wouldn't we drink it when it rains here? This story of Jeremiah was written for our instruction. God is serious about giving us mercy. In Jesus, he died and rose for us.