

From The Pastor

The prophet Jeremiah is a man of passion and conviction. For those deeply rooted in God, Jeremiah is a striking figure of truth and light. The poor and the oppressed look to Jeremiah to be a voice for them, crying for justice on their behalf. Clearly, Jeremiah is a man of God who bears the heart of God for the sake of righteousness.

Part of the appeal of Jeremiah is that he is so human like us. As passionate as Jeremiah is as a voice of truth, he nonetheless feels the weight of rejection, gossip, and ridicule. Even though he is deeply committed to God's justice, he bemoans the criticism and pain inflicted upon him by his enemies.

Who would be an enemy to this man of God? Those in the seat of power or favored position have no interest in the light of truth that points to God's justice. The fear of change and the loss of their favored position make the high and the mighty reject truth in light of their own perceived power. For the fearfully insecure, there is a high need to build up walls of self-made power to cover any face of fear. In such a stance, lies and gossip become the 'truth' of the day while those who seek to stand in the truth of God bear the weight of such falsehoods.

This is the dilemma of Jeremiah. He knows he stands in the truth of God, yet he bears the heavy weight of rejection and condemnation by those who fail to see and reverence the ways of God. Despite the discouragement of his circumstance, Jeremiah remains strong by standing secure in the truth of God, and the confidence of the Lord's protection.

"I hear the whispering of many: terror on every side!" 'Denounce, let us denounce him... Perhaps he will be trapped, then we will prevail and take our vengeance on him.' 'But the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. In their failure they will be put to utter shame, and everlasting confusion.'

The circumstance of Jeremiah is not an isolated or uncommon one in the human experience. His circumstance is most poignant because he is rebuked for speaking the truth of God. Yet similar gossip and rebuke is not uncommon among many groups of people who feel the threat of losing their favored position, perceived power, or the having their defenses removed. Jesus himself was constantly on guard against just such behavior, especially from the religious establishment of his day. Many of the teachings of Jesus spoke directly to this wrongfulness and deception in the human spirit.

We are all quite aware of the Ten Commandments and what they teach. Moral formation makes it clear: thou shalt not kill, steal, covet, commit adultery, or damage your neighbor's reputation. We all stand on these as the higher moral ground, yet we often forget that the One who gives us these moral directives also taught: do not judge lest you be judged.

Jeremiah and the followers of Jesus, especially if they are vibrantly seeking to live the faith, will inevitably bear the weight of judgment and ridicule. Why does Jesus make this teaching on judging others so strongly?

Judging another is sinful not only against the one judged, but also bears a great weight on the unity of a family or community. To judge is to project condemnation on another. The one who judges takes on a godlike role claiming to know the meaning, intention, and moral stance of another person's life. It violates the person who is a creation of God.

Judging inflates the superiority of the one who judges. Such a person claims a false or self-made sense of superiority. The root of judging another is always something unconscious in the one who judges. The fear and insecurity that we feel in our self is projected onto another, forcing them to bear the weight that we are not willing to carry ourselves. This is why Jesus condemns judging: because we cast our unconscious fear, insecurity, or rejection onto another, making them carry a burden that is rightfully our own.

We all know the saying: 'the truth hurts'. The truth does not hurt so much if we can force another to carry it for us. This is the dishonesty of judging another. The reality is that it is a judgment against our self. This is the wisdom of Jesus' word: judge and you will not be judged; the measure with which you measure will be measured back to you. When a person drops their projection onto another and faces their own inner reality, judgment stops.

Jeremiah stands firm in the Lord, and Jesus teaches his followers to do the same. "Fear no one. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor any secret that will not be made known." Jesus speaks truth and the final end of human judgment. All we think we know about others will eventually be revealed in its truth, and all that is unknown about ourselves will be brought to the light in divine truth. Let us be people of the light, knowing and sharing the inner light that is ours in the Lord Jesus.

Enjoy a warm summer week,
Father John Esper