

# **Sermon for The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Date:** September 23, 2018

**Location:** St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

**Old Testament:** Jeremiah 11:18–20

**Epistle Reading:** James 3:13—4:10

**Gospel Reading:** Mark 9:30–37



**Sermon Text:** Jeremiah 11:18–20

**Sermon Title:** God says, "Vengeance is Mine!"

**Introit:** Psalm 37:5-7; Antiphon: Psalm 37:4

## **Hymns:**

LSB 664 – Fight the Good Fight

LSB 734 – I Trust O Lord, Your Holy Name

LSB 781 – We Give Thee but Thine Own (v. 1-2)

LSB 660 – Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus

## **Liturgy:**

Divine Service I, p. 151



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## **Text: Jeremiah 11:18–20**

The Lord revealed their plot to me so that I would understand. He showed me what they were doing. I was like a trusting lamb brought to the slaughter. I didn't know that they were plotting against me. They were saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit. Let us cut Jeremiah off from this world of the living so that we won't be reminded of him anymore."

O Lord of Armies, you judge fairly and test motives and thoughts. I want to see you take revenge on them, because I have brought my case to you.

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May the grace of God rain down on you all the days of your life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The world really does hate God. The world is stained by sin and as such we expect that it would fight against the truths and promises found in Scripture.

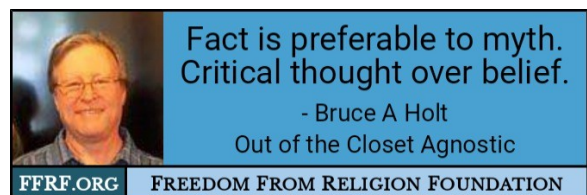
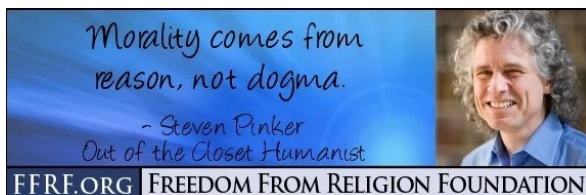
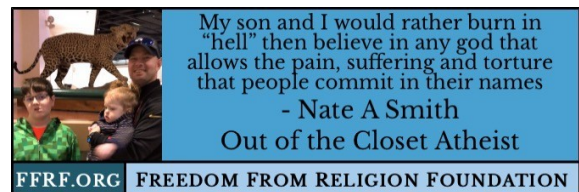
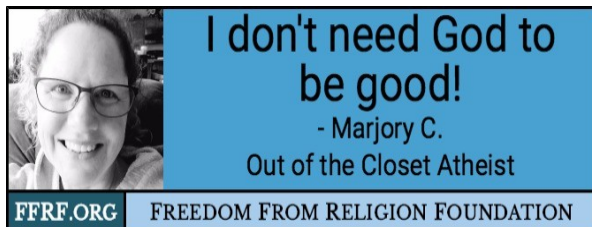
“Stained with sin.” There is a phrase we talk about in the Church but seldom take the time to explain. Even the word “sin” is probably not well understood by those outside of the Church; maybe not always so well by those in the Church.

What is sin? You have all seen those pictures of the Earth from space. It looks like a little blueberry floating in space. The problem with that blueberry is that it is rotting. It is covered by a thick syrup that stains everything it touches. That syrup is called sin and we are all swimming in it. Worse still is that we are the cause of that rotting and filth. We are the ones who made this such a stinking and deplorable place.



That sin, that stink, has stained us down to the very marrow of our bones. There is no way to wash it off. In fact the more we try to wash it off the more stained we become because everything in this world is covered by it. We are simply soaking in a sin-filled world. Ironically the only way to get clean is to get stained by the blood of Jesus. That is a stain which makes us perfectly clean before God our Father.

Every so often you will hear people say things like, “Our country is no longer a Christian Nation.” You may have had thoughts like that yourself. There are times when various institutions appear to be, or perhaps actually are, attacking the Christian faith and Christian morality. When we see these kinds of things it really should not surprise us.



You see the world hates God. The world is, to a point, under the control of Satan<sup>1</sup> and as such is in a battle against God everyday.<sup>2</sup> The truth is you are wanted dead or alive. God wants you alive in Christ. Satan wants you dead; dead in Christ, dead in faith, lost to the eternal death of Hell.

I know at times we as Christians in America feel persecuted. It is easy to get trapped up in believing that life is difficult because of those who are constantly trying to pull down, or at least push back, the Church. How should we respond to persecution like that? How should we respond to the world acting in a way that is decidedly contrary to God's Word? Should we take up arms and

<sup>1</sup> John 14:30

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 6:12

fight a holy war against all sin? Some regularly call the Church to do just that. I would challenge them to show me where it teaches us to do anything like that anywhere in the Bible.

It is true that there are wars in Scripture, even holy wars, but we need to understand how and why those took place. They were directed at a very specific group of people whom God had declared cut off. He would no longer tolerate them, and He had no more patience for them, because of a long history of horribly deplorable actions.<sup>3</sup> They had, as a nation, been judged and condemned. They were the people who were removed from the Promised Land when the children of Israel came out of Egypt. They are, as a people, no longer on this Earth. Their culture and societies have been utterly wiped out. As such there is no one left for whom we can say, “God told us to attack.”

It’s in the news all the time. I’m sure you can all remember someone shooting someone, or blowing up some building, in the name of God or proclaiming that they are doing God’s work. Never! Never under any circumstances are we to ever do such a thing. Not ever! We may all understand their frustration. We ourselves may think from time to time, ‘how much longer oh Lord until you make this horrible thing stop, or remove that horrible person from this Earth?’ However it is not our responsibility to hurry God’s plan along. I myself do not always understand the patience of God. I am sure you have felt the same way, but that does not mean that we get to take matters into our own hands.

God does not need our help. If God can create all things in six days; if He can deal with Pharaoh of Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and Xerxes of Syria, do you really think He is too weak, powerless and feeble to deal with anything that happens on this Earth? Let’s take a look at the power of God just for a moment and remind ourselves who He is. Remember the ten plagues of Egypt. God belittled the great Egyptian idols one by one. Showing Himself to be God of all gods and King of creation. Then there was the parting of the Red Sea and the Egyptian army was lost. That is our God.

In 2 Kings chapter 6 we read this:

When the servant of [Elisha] got up in the morning and went outside, he saw troops, horses and chariots surrounding the city. Elisha’s servant asked, “Master, what should we do?”

Elisha answered, “Don’t be afraid. We have more forces on our side than they have on theirs.” Then Elisha prayed, “LORD, please open his eyes so that he may see.”

The LORD opened the servant’s eyes and let him see. The mountain around Elisha was full of fiery horses and chariots.<sup>4</sup>



3 Jeremiah 19:5 – *For example.*

4 2 Kings 6:15-17

What we see here is God's Sabaoth,<sup>5</sup> God's holy army of angels which is always around us. Do you remember Jesus' words to Peter? In Matthew 26 it reads:



Jesus said to him, "Put your sword away! All who use a sword will be killed by a sword. Don't you think that I could call on my Father to send more than twelve legions<sup>6</sup> of angels to help me now?"<sup>7</sup>



God does not need our help to deal with the corruption of sin in this world. When we act like Peter, taking matters into our own hands, we do nothing to please God. He has His plan, and we are commanded to wait on Him.<sup>8</sup> So when we consider divisive subjects like killing unborn children for example. Is it wrong to peacefully protest and offer counseling to those who would consider using such services? No. By no means. It is however very wrong to use intimidation, fear and threats of harm – or worse actions of harm – to make our voices heard. Others may teach these things as an answer. We do not.

In the very early Church, which we can read about in the book of Acts, you never see Paul saying, "Boycott all things Rome!" Paul never said avoid Roman merchandise, in spite of the fact that Rome and Caesar Nero were trying to eradicate the Christian faith, and utilizing the full military arsenal of the Roman army to do it.

In fact not only did Paul not say such things he actually taught just the opposite. Paul teaches that it is perfectly fine to buy all things Roman.<sup>9</sup> He simply teaches that our witness to the world should be an example of living a better more moral life. Not one of picking on people to make our political proclamations.

When it comes to revenge, God has said Himself in Romans chapter 12:

Don't take revenge, dear friends. Instead, let God's anger take care of it. After all, Scripture says, "I alone have the right to take revenge. I will pay back, says the Lord."<sup>10</sup>

Paul here is quoting the Old Testament Book of the Law. In Deuteronomy chapter 32 it reads:

I will take revenge and be satisfied. In due time their foot will slip, because their day of disaster is near. Their doom is coming quickly. The LORD will judge His people and have compassion on His servants when He sees that their strength is gone...<sup>11</sup>

God will have His way in His time. Our job is to wait patiently on the Lord.<sup>12</sup> In our Old Testament reading for today the prophet Jeremiah was preaching to the people and the king of the corruption that existed. He was preaching about how far they had gone from God's Word. He conveys to them that God had commanded him to speak these words:

5 Not to be confused with 'Sabbath' rest. 'Sabaoth' is a Hebrew word that means host or army.

6 A Legion = 10 Cohorts or 5,000 soldiers.

7 Matthew 26:53-53

8 Psalm 27:14

9 1 Corinthians 12:4ff

10 Romans 12:19

11 Deuteronomy 32:35-36

12 Psalm 130:5-8



This is what the LORD says: I'm going to bring a disaster on them that they can not escape. Although they will cry out to me, I will not listen to them. Then the cities of Judah and those who live in Jerusalem will cry to the gods to whom they've been sacrificing, but these gods will never rescue them when they are in trouble. Judah, you have as many gods as you have cities.<sup>13</sup> You have set up many altars in Jerusalem to sacrifice to Baal. You have as many altars as there are streets in Jerusalem.

Then God tells Jeremiah:

Jeremiah, don't pray for these people. Do not cry or pray for them. I will not listen when they call to me for help in times of trouble. What right do these, people I love, have to be in my house when they do so many devious things? Can the meat from their sacrifices turn disaster away from them? They rejoice when they do evil.

...

The LORD of Armies planted you. He has pronounced disaster on you. This is because of the evil things that Israel and Judah have done. They have made him furious by burning incense as an offering to Baal.<sup>14</sup>

You see we often think of God as a loving God; a kind and caring God; a forgiving and merciful God. He is in fact all of those things. All that God expects of us is to apologize and all is forgiven. However, when we refuse to apologize, when we hold God and His Word in contempt and dismiss His Words as foolish, then the time may come when God says, "for you no more."

Although it is true that God's patience is eternal it is also true that He will not be mocked.<sup>15</sup> The time does come when God will rise up and take His revenge upon those who have spit in His face. Let me assure you when God's wrath burns you do not want to get in the way.<sup>16</sup> However, let me also assure you that with repentance, with an heartfelt apology for sin, there is always full forgiveness.

In our readings today we see this same theme not only here in Jeremiah but also in Romans 12. It is also found in Hebrews 10 and many other places. Revenge belongs to God alone. That doesn't mean we should be door mats allowing everyone to step on us. We should not seek out danger and put God to the test. Jesus tells us to be as wise as a serpent but also to be as innocent as dove.<sup>17</sup>

So we use our wisdom to avoid trouble when we can. When it comes to find us we do not respond with revenge but leave that to God. That is how we, as individuals, are commanded to act. It is not always easy. It was not easy for the Christians in Rome to sit back and take what was coming to them with persecution and death looming. Yet that is just what Paul told them to do.<sup>18</sup>

That is the same thing God has told us to do. To live in peace, prayerfully holding on to the faith which has been given to us. We are to teach that faith to our children<sup>19</sup> and share that faith with those around us. We do that always in Jesus' name. Letting His name be honored, respected, and

13 Jeremiah 11:11-13

14 Jeremiah 11:14-17

15 Galatians 6:7

16 Hebrews 10:31

17 Matthew 10:16

18 Romans 13:1-7

19 Deuteronomy 11:18-20

given glory by our actions and then our words, as we wait on Him.<sup>20</sup> His day, the Last Day, will come in His time. When it does we the faithful will have peace eternal.

Amen.