

Sermon: Make your own gods

Jeremiah 2:1-13

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They have forsaken me

If you apply to work in a bank, imagine what happens if after two days you tell the bank manager: I am glad to work here, but I do not want to work with money. Exit!

Imagine that you have gone through the long application process of becoming a policeman or woman, and after a few days at work, so decide that you refuse to wear a uniform. Impossible.

Imagine that you are a member of the Church of Jesus Christ and you say, but I will not be involved of the mission of the church.... impossible!

As church of Jesus Christ we are called to mission. If you work in a butcher shop, you butcher, if you work as a hairdresser, you dress hair, if you are part of the church, you are involved in mission... no way around it.

God called Jeremiah for mission. God spoke to him, and he had to go. Jeremiah wrote down, 'the word of the Lord came to me.' If our Lord speaks, we better listen well.

We do not know how the word of God came to Jeremiah, Jeremiah does not give us the details.

How did God call Jeremiah? We do not know. It is clear, however, that God spoke to him as part of the spiritual fellowship Jeremiah had with his Lord. If you desire to know what God wants from you – He will find a way.

But make sure you are close to Him. If you are far away, like Israel in the chapter we read, if you are far away from God, God may need a prophet like Jeremiah to speak to you; God prefers the soft whisper.

Mission is not only to people in other countries, or to people from other religions. It is also a responsibility of the church for those who are nearby. Jeremiah was sent to Jerusalem and Israel's tribes – he did not have to travel far for this. The apostles were sent by Jesus to Jerusalem, then to Samaria, then to the whole world.

As churches we often think of mission as ministry in other lands – and we must do that. Go into the whole world, Jesus said. But it starts here, in our own midst.

As churches we often focus on getting new people in church through the front door. We often spend much less time to make sure people do not leave through the back door. Our first

responsibility here in Cairo is, to keep our backdoor closed. To make sure that all people who enter into our community feel at ease, feel close to God, serve our Lord.

And it is very easy, it seems, that even people who belong to God, leave him again. Jeremiah tells Israel, on behalf of God: (vs. 13) "My people have forsaken me."

Jeremiah reminds them of their beautiful youth of devotion to God, in verses 2-3.

Once, long ago, Israel was the bride of God. When God called Israel out of Egypt and led her through the desert into the Promised Land, the bride, Israel, was fully dedicated to God. There was love and devotion for God.

And God took very good care of his bride. Israel was special to the Lord. Holy. And Jeremiah calls Israel the 'firstfruits of the harvest'.

What is that, firstfruits? The ancient laws of Israel assigned to God a portion of the harvest that ripened first. That portion was called the firstfruits. It could not be eaten by anyone – it had to be brought to the temple as a sacrifice for God. It was a reminder to Israel that all good things in life come from God... we must thank him for it all!

Jeremiah said to Israel: you were God's firstfruits. Firstfruits of what? Of all nations that would eventually be welcomed into the family of God. Israel was the firstfruits – and no-one could eat it – harm it – and God defended it. But it was also supposed to be holy, dedicated to God – and Israel had forsaken God. It had left its first love.

We know how this works. Many people, maybe even some of us, we started when we were younger with such deep devotion to our Lord – and then? Troubles of life begin... Too much work. Children are born... Worries of buying a flat... Worries of politics... and it is so easy to lose this love-relationship with God.

Do you not remember? He was there in the past. He can be with you in the same manner today. The church is the bride of Christ, and He desires our full commitment.

2 ...and hewed out broken cisterns that hold no water

Instead of trusting God in times of problems and troubles, Israel took matters in its own hands.

They did not say: 'Where is the Lord who helped us so much in the past...' In times of troubles, we must think and remember. How was God your helper in other situations? Why not trust in Him today for your problems, instead of looking elsewhere.

Why go to other gods, like Israel... Israel adopted other gods, more convenient gods, as a shortcut to success. Instead of trusting in the God of Israel, JHWH.

They trusted Baal to give them a good harvest – after all, Baal was specialised in harvests. Jeremiah says, 'they went after worthless things', the gods of the nations around them. Worthless. Jeremiah points to the gods of those nations and says: 'they are no gods...'

Who else but the creator of heaven and earth can be our helper, our support, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, close to us in times need.

But we worship the god called 'our own solutions'. Why live with headaches to solve your problems.

We worship the god called money. Why think that the Egyptian Pound can help you. What a god who loses value all the time.

We worship the god called stability. Or the half-god called Sisi.

Israel went after worthless things, Jeremiah says, and after things that do not profit.

Jeremiah uses very good images to explain how dumb this is. He says, you have forsaken God, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for yourself, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Instead of drinking from the everflowing fresh water from living wells, Israel had made cisterns for catching rainwater... And the were even broken so even the stale water was lost.

Israel had hewn out its own gods, bowed down before them, but these gods hold no water.

Think of your kitchen... you have a beautiful golden tap. Always fresh water available.

And in the bathroom you have a bathtub that is leaking.

In order to have water in your house, you do not turn on the tap. But instead you go to the neighbours and ask for water, you put it in the bathtub, and it leaks away immediately. So you need to run to the neighbours again, and again, and you get frustrated.

Trusting in ourselves, in more money, in Sisi, in stability, trusting in each other, it is like trying to fill a broken bathtub. It never works. You are never ready. You can never rest and enjoy deep satisfaction.

How stupid can we human beings be! We run after worthless things, we run after things that do not work.... It is like running on the treadmill in the gym... you can run as much as you like, but you do not get one meter further.

Israel worshipped worthless things, and in doing so, it became worthless itself, Jeremiah says. We became who we worship. If you worship money, money will dictate your life. If you worship a bloody god, you will become a bloody person.

If you worship the God of heaven and earth, the one who loves the world, who loves every person, who respects every individual, then you will love the world and every person more and more. This God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit loves to relate to you. He loves to relate to all people.

He is like the golden tap in your kitchen. He is there; he is not far from us; but if we do not go to him, we will always run here and there to get satisfaction – and we will never be satisfied... because all of our own own solutions are leaking. No solution satisfies but God himself.

What a good message we have! The message of our mission is really fantastic!

Fountain of living water

Our message is: you can be related to the source of living waters. Drink from the golden tap, and you will be satisfied.

In the few verses of Jeremiah 2, the prophet points us to some of the great things the Fountain of Living Waters, God, offered Israel and us.

Verse 3: if someone touched the people of God, God came to their defence. He offered security. Stability. Well, that is something we can use!

Verse 6-7: In the desert, He gave them food and drinks, and he then gave them a land, so beautiful. So God took care of their daily life.

Verse 11: The believers had glory. The glory of the presence of God. They were honoured by others for their faith, for their life, for God being in their midst.

All these blessings and more are summarised in the words that God is the Fountain of Living Waters.

We know these words also from the New Testament, where Jesus says: I am the living water. Anyone who comes to me and drinks will never thirst.

Many people in this world are very thirsty. We have a great message for the people around us. And actually for ourselves. If you thirst for truth, for security, for stability, for your daily

food and drink, if you thirst for knowing God, go to Jesus Christ. Open the golden tap, the source of all living water.

He offers us all we need and more.

He offers this to us...

And as we look more and more like the one we worship,

We also offer this goodness of God to all people.

Worship worthless things and we become worthless

Worship the most valuable in the universe, and our value increases.

Mission is not something we do because of one or two commands in the Bible to go into the world...

Mission is our natural response to knowing this good God; the Spirit of God lives in us; the Living Waters that come from Jesus Christ fill our lives; so we naturally, more and more, behave as God does – we love all people and we speak of what fills our hearts with joy.

Conclusion

our mission is to share this great gift of God with all people. There is no escaping from it. If you are a butcher you kill sheep. If you work in school you teach. If you are in church, you participate in God's great mission.

In the weeks ahead we will speak more of this mission of the church. For today, we learn that all we need, we receive from being linked to God - the source of Living Water.

And we are called to point our friends, colleagues and neighbours to this Golden Source, to God himself. All our efforts to solve our own problems just create more headache. Trusting in God opens our lives for his blessings, and it also puts us on the road to talk of our great precious Lord to all around us.

In the week ahead, speak of our Lord Jesus Christ, invite people to walk with you on the pilgrim's road. Show people the joy of drinking from the source of all satisfaction

Amen.