

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: The Courage to be Disliked

Lesson: Jeremiah 1:4-10 & Luke 13:10-17

⁴ *Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,*

⁵ *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”*

⁶ *Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.”*

⁷ *But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy,’ for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”*

⁹ *Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, “Now I have put my words in your mouth.*

¹⁰ *See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”*

Courage. Courage is most people's favorite word or something positive word, so they want to get courage. Especially, we want to be brave in the face of something fearful and trembling. For example, people who have important things to do, such as exams or interviews, pray for courage to calm their hearts. People who are going through the hardships of life pray for courage to overcome their difficulties. Those who are fighting a disease pray for courage to fight it well. The synonym for courage is bravery. Esther and I have been told by others that we are brave about living in the states. Likewise, those who have to move to an environment or area they are not familiar with pray for the courage to settle down well in the new environment.

Additionally, we always seek and pray for many kinds of courage: the courage to love others, the courage to forgive our enemies, and the courage to accept God as the Savior of our lives. As such, we seek courage in many moments of our lives and pray that God will give us courage.

Another courage I would like to introduce to you today is the courage to be disliked.

Courage to be disliked. It sounds a little unfamiliar to us, and a little odd. Some may think: “Pastor, I agree that we always need courage. We need the courage to love others, we need the courage to forgive our enemies, and we need the courage to overcome our hardships and uncertainty. But why do we need the courage to be

disliked?” I understand this kind of question. Courage to be disliked sounds a little strange and a little weird to all of us. Actually, we were created in the image of God. And, we were born to be loved. But there are moments when we need the courage to be disliked.

With the book of Jeremiah and the gospel of Luke we read today, let's see when we need the courage to be disliked. Jeremiah was the son of the priest Hilkiah. One day, when God saw the heart of Jeremiah, God came to Jeremiah and said: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5) Then Jeremiah said: “Lord my God, truly I don't know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” (Jer 1:6) As we can see from Jeremiah 1:6, Jeremiah doesn't seem confident and has a lot of fear of being a prophet. He might have imagined situations where he was ignored by people when he stood before them as a prophet because of his weakness such as his age and lack of speaking skills. If he believed that God would make up for his shortcomings and, he had the courage to be disliked, he would have been able to obey God's call without hesitation.

Now, let's see the Gospel of Luke. Jesus was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of rest. The Ten Commandments tell us to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Jews observe the Sabbath from Friday night to Saturday night, during which no work is done.

And there was a woman in the synagogue who had been ill for eighteen years, and she was bent over and could not stand up straight. Jesus looked at the woman so pitiful that he called her and laid his hand on her and said: “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” Then immediately she was able to stand up straight and glorified God. It was great news that she was healed, but Jesus' behavior was very uncomfortable for the other Jews in the synagogue because Jesus did offer the healing labor on the Sabbath. The Jews didn't see that Jesus was keeping the Sabbath day holy. The leader of the synagogue said to Jesus: “Jesus, why do you work on the Sabbath? Why do you not keep the Sabbath day holy?”

It's not always easy to make choices that are different from the choices most people make. If Jesus didn't have the courage to be disliked, he might not have done anything on the Sabbath like other Jews. If he didn't have the courage, he might have told the woman who suffered the disease for eighteen years that “Come to me another day, not Sabbath.” But Jesus did have the courage to be disliked, and he didn't care what people thought of him and didn't mind being criticized by

people. For Jesus, it was of the utmost importance to provide a life of salvation to the sick before him.

Friends, what was the difference between Jesus and Jeremiah? What was the difference between Jesus and the leader of the synagogue? Why was Jeremiah afraid when he was called by God? Why did the leader of the synagogue blame Jesus' healing miracle on the sick on the Sabbath?

The fear and anxiety, Jeremiah and the leader of the synagogue had, covered their eyes, and closed their eyes, so they didn't know what was most important in their lives. But Jesus was different. He had the courage to be disliked because he knew what was most important. The courage Jesus had was not just the courage to be disliked, but it was the courage that was rooted in a firm belief in God. And it was the courage to be disliked as a Christian.

God is the Creator of the world, and the beginning and the end of everything. Everything came from God. There is no worry and fear, hatred and jealousy, greed and chaos in the life of a Christian who believes in God because God has saved all who believe in Him from sin and death.

Historically, there was a pastor who resisted evil. When Hitler started World War II and was killing many people, most of the German churches blessed and praised Hitler in the name of God. No church in Germany resisted Hitler's evil deeds. Except for one pastor. One such pastor is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor.

This is one of his sayings: "If I sit next to a madman as he drives a car into a group of innocent bystanders, I can't, as a Christian, simply wait for the catastrophe, then comfort the wounded and bury the dead. I must try to wrestle the steering wheel out of the hands of the driver." Dietrich Bonhoeffer had the courage to be disliked as a Christian. He knew what he would face if he resisted Hitler and the Nazis, but he didn't stop resisting with the courage to be disliked because he believed in God. And his name and the movement he led are still spoken of by many people to this day.

Friends, there cannot be any compromise on faith. Our lives are meaningful and our lives are precious because God made us in His image; because God loves us; because Jesus Christ came to this earth for us and he forgave all of our sins and debts; because the Holy Spirit still lives in our hearts every day. Thus, we,

Christians, must have the courage to be disliked that is rooted in faith, no matter what others see; no matter what others think of us.

There is a prayer meeting every two weeks on Thursday mornings in the Northwest district. What impressed me most during the past prayer meeting was my D.S.'s saying: "Sometimes I forget that I am a Christian. Sometimes I even forget that I am a pastor." After listening to her, I looked back on my life to see if I've ever felt like her. And, I realized that I also sometimes forget that I am a Christian and I am a pastor like her. Although I'm a Christian and a pastor, I also sometimes forget those facts and think negatively, and there are times when I act selfishly.

I and we and all human beings are very vulnerable. We are very vulnerable to sin. So we should always try to be awake and always invite the Holy Spirit into our hearts. I emphasized the courage to be disliked as a Christian during this time. We must never compromise our faith, but always seek and pray for courage. And one thing to remember is that God always wants to give us courage.

When Jeremiah was appointed by God as a prophet, he was afraid, worried, and anxious rather than rejoicing. Do you know what God said to Jeremiah when Jeremiah was afraid? The Lord said: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." "Do not say, 'I am only a boy,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I commend you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you." "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:4-10)

When you lose courage because of fear; when you lose courage because of difficulties; when you lose courage because of realities you are facing; when you lose courage because of worries and anxieties, try to remember that God is always with you, and He is giving you the courage to overcome the hard situations.

May we always be awakened before the Lord and seek the courage to love our neighbors, and the courage to forgive our enemies, and the courage to be disliked as the children of God. Amen.