

Sermon for 24 August 2025 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore, Md.

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalter: Psalm 71:1-6 (*Insert: alternate leader/people*); Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17

Sermon:

Today we start nine weeks of reading Jeremiah and Lamentations: a somber assignment indeed.

Again and again, we will hear the fierce condemnation of Israel coming from the lips of this prophet who cannot deny what he sees people doing or hears God saying about it.

As people of faith, we hear this going on in our sanctuaries.

I never heard it as a child, in World War II. Even during Vietnam, we didn't stand here, face to face, the way you and I have heard it here in this room, within this summer.

Then today we have Jesus, calling the minister's bluff in the Gospel reading today, for telling the people not to heal one another on the Sabbath. "You hypocrites!" he says to the leader of the synagogue.

I mean, what are we supposed to be doing in church? How do you interpret the lesson?

There comes a time in a preacher's life when it gets "up close and personal," as they say.

I've tried to turn it over to the congregation in the 10:30 service by having us do more expanded praying. That way, no matter how you feel, you can spell out our wording on the topic of us versus them and God against you and me. The 8:30 crowd can still sneak past the barricade between holiness and not taking sides. The smell of gunpowder is still in the air there, though.

Soon or late, we're supposed to take sides on Sunday morning. We're a protected minority in this country, still, for the most part, although we got a letter from our bishop last week warning us not to take lightly what we ask money for grants for. There's a chance these days we may get investigated if we get too direct about immigrants

I'm not saying our great-grandfathers didn't fight the Civil War, and the Methodist Church didn't split down the middle north and south for over a hundred years; but the White House is different than it was when the British took it over for a moment, and justice and caring for the poor ... "loving your neighbor as you love yourself," as Jesus quoted God's law ... are serious topics in any true Christian worship service in this day and time.

We do a lot of good with our money and our building. We treat one another kindly in worship and meetings ... and, God willing, when we go home or to work, we apply what we learn and believe here and outside; but this, I truly believe, is a time like no other for exploring outreach

and testing the waters for our faith together. Jesus got killed for just the kind of things we ought to be saying and doing. It's always been that way, but right now is new ground for planting and harvesting in his name and with his power. Let us pray to use Jeremiah, and God's struggle with him and through him, to improve what we're in church for, and what we're in charge of, these days, through Jesus Christ.

Amen.