

Sermon for 28 September 2025 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore, Maryland

Scriptures: Jeremiah 32:1-31, 6-15; Psalter: (*Insert, alternate leader/people*) Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

Sermon:

Finally, a promise of hope shows up in our readings of Jeremiah. Just as specific as all the gloom and grief we've had so far, we get an order to buy a field from a relative, and it's confirmed by God, so Jeremiah does it. Don't get relaxed just because of a promise, though. Next week we go a step deeper into darkness. Read up on the Book of Lamentations in your devotions this coming week.

The Psalter follows suit, with a beautiful song of hope: "Those who love me, I will deliver." History does that, again and again. The Bible records, and promises, and teaches us how to sing even as we grieve and endure. Thanks be to God.

And, as usual, we listen to one of the most admirable teachers and preachers in the whole Bible. Timothy, disciple of Paul, learning step by step and then following through as he assumes leadership, eventually becoming a bishop. Humble, yet firm, he reminds us all that how we live, and share, and guide by example, is what Jesus' presence among his people is all about. Thank God for modest, honest, clear-speaking and kind-leading women and men who founded the church, as their descendants continue to serve the Lord and each of their fellow members, now, here.

But this is not just a feel-good message we're asked to share today.. In fact, this gospel reading is not one of Jesus' lovelier lessons. Like last Sunday ... how did that one go? The dishonest manager ... "You cannot serve God and wealth." The dishonest steward is praised Do what's right, even if you have to be crooked about it first. I hope we got that point... It's not a comfortable lesson, any more than today's is.

How do we take away something helpful about that, or this today's message either? "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." Whoooh! How do we refrain from judging even as we confess our own sins? Shouldn't we pray about our leaders here in church? Pray for wisdom, even as we pray for forgiveness?

This is not an easy Sunday. These are not safe times. Every step of the way is dark and broken. And the great challenge is how to talk and not just to slide into insults and blaming, like our top elected official does so constantly. Honestly, to be able to come together and PRAY is more of a privilege than I believe we have ever known. Not to solve things. It's becoming more obvious that we can't solve much. Things truly are in God's hands. That doesn't simplify things for us. We have to think, and watch, and rework all the common assumptions we've held about democratic existence. One door after another closes on open discussion.

I have to say I've never been so grateful for Jeremiah before. Of course he's far away and different ... but golly, to hear how broken the Jews were, and how guilty as well, is fundamentally useful to us believer types, I find. This is the background for Jesus. Defeat and confusion went on for centuries right before him ... and then there was Rome, taking over the known world and then flopping around in all their dominion.

Jesus is among us. We are alive with the spirit of his presence. All these things he teaches leave so much unfinished ... and that, as always, is the good news. God is more accessible than ever, and love is the only answer. Can we live by that? Teach that? Trust that? What else is that but prayer?

Let us practice it now, together.

(Extemporaneous prayer by pastor)

Amen.