

Jeremiah 7: 1 – 16; Romans 9: 14 - 26

If you didn't know, Jeremiah the prophet has some nicknames. He is known as the '**Weeping Prophet**', the '**Prophet of Tears**', or '**The Suffering Prophet**'.

Poor old Jeremiah.

And you can see why in our reading today.

We're only on chapter seven in the book of Jeremiah, but when I did a count, by this point Jeremiah has already listened to God, or has said God's words, that Israel and Judah are condemned by God, they are to be punished for their sins, and they are too far gone for anything to be done, roughly six times already.

I think that's enough to make anyone cry,

And things don't really get better for Jeremiah.

The book of Jeremiah continues, with God absolutely furious at his people for the way they are acting, and the people of Israel and Judah furious at God for being furious at them. And poor old Jeremiah is in the middle, trying to give the people God's message, and trying to get them to listen, whilst also trying to placate God, asking him to tone down the wrath and fury.

Poor old Jeremiah.

It isn't until chapter 30 that Jeremiah gets some good news from God, where God tells Jeremiah: '**For the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the Lord, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their ancestors and they shall take possession of it**'.

Happy days! But, not instant gratification – there is another twenty-two chapters of God making it very clear that those who deserve punishment for their sins will receive it.

You can see why he cried a lot.

I must say, when we had lectures and classes in theological college on studying Jeremiah, I don't think everyone ran to the lecture theatre to be in the front row. There wasn't exactly a crush at the door because everyone wanted to be the first to sit down. He is not, shall we say, the most exciting book in the Bible to read. Nor, is he perhaps the most thrilling book in the Bible to read.

But, I would argue, he is perhaps the most inspiring book in the Bible to read.

This poor man, this poor prophet, stands and does God's will, over and over and over. He delivers God's message, over and over and over, even though people aren't listening to him.

He isn't some puppet though – he complains to God, he laments to God, he tries bargaining with God – he does have his own brain. But, he does what God tells him to do. He is, incredibly obedient, in some very tricky circumstances.

After another time when Jeremiah says to God '**you know what? I've done what you said, I followed your instructions, I've been a good boy, and here I am, with pain unceasing, and a wound incurable**', we have a reply from God.

But, we see a very tender glimpse of God in the reply. God says: '**If you turn back, I will take you back... If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth...It is they who will turn to you, not you who will turn to them...they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the Lord**'.

Because, remember, the God who can be quite angry at us, is still, and always will be, the God who loves us. One and the same, not different persons or personalities.

I think for us today, we, as the Church, are often Jeremiah.

We have, on the one hand, a world stage which feels at the moment, awful. Nations are at war with other nations, genocide is being committed, countries are actively reducing the rights of women, and we are five years away from a global warming threshold.

On the other hand, and perhaps I'm just speaking for myself here, I want to say '**where is God in this?!**' Where is our God, the one who sent his only son to redeem the world? I want to say to God '**fix this!**'

And here we are, like Jeremiah, in the middle. We are standing, like Jeremiah, between chaos and anger, often on the brink of tears.

And it's that exact reason why I hold that Jeremiah is one of the most inspiring prophets. Because, let's face it, it's easy to be a person of faith when it's all going right. When everything's working out as it should do, you think 'yep, God is definitely behind this'.

It's when it seems like it's all going to hell in a handcart, that is when faith is tested. When we see God in ways that challenge, or perhaps go in completely the opposite way, to how we understand and expect God to act, that's when faith is tested. When we have to stand back, and think, like Paul tells us, we are not God, and we shouldn't expect God to justify his ways to us, that's when faith is tested.

When, like Jeremiah, we stand as witnesses, even when everything makes us want to cry, that is when we show God that we trust him.

We, as the Church, stand as witnesses when it all feels a bit wrong, and say that God is not dead, God is not asleep, but God acts in ways we do not understand.

Because it isn't our job to understand how God works. What is our job, is given to us in this passage – we are to amend our ways and our doings, we are to act justly with one another, we are to protect the alien, the orphan, and the widow, and to not shed innocent blood or to go after idols. If we do these things, God will dwell with us in this place.

So, as we all go out into our weeks, remember what we are commanded to do, and God will dwell with us. But not just that, remember that if you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, we shall serve as God's very mouth. And if that isn't the highest privilege, I don't know what is.