

Reasons For Not Giving Thanks

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[0 : 00] And we need to be able to hear it. So we ask that you will grant us, by your Holy Spirit, that we may hear into the circumstances of our very particular and individual and personal lives, the things you have to tell us.

We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. We have lots of visitors in St. John's, often from various and different places, from sister churches throughout the world.

And one recent visitor of whom I heard, though I never met the visitor, came in and concluded that we were not a Christian church.

On the grounds of the flags we fly at the front, and on the grounds of that picture up there. My sensibilities were offended, as no doubt yours are at this moment.

However, it's a different perspective and one that we need to hear. From National Thanksgiving on this first Sunday in October until Remembrance Day, one of the agonizing issues is trying to relate the dynamic and life of our country to the church of Jesus Christ, and whether they are on the same path and how they relate to one another.

[1 : 59] And so in those Sundays, this year, I want to introduce you to Jeremiah. Jeremiah. And Jeremiah is the greatest of the prophets.

You can always get somebody to say everything is the greatest. I think Jeremiah probably is. But most people never get into him very far, because he's a fairly foreboding figure.

He was in his own day, and he still is. But if you would like to find out where it all starts, it's this longest book in the Bible. It's on page 662.

And the passage which was read this morning was the first nine verses of the first chapter on page 662. And we discover that Jeremiah was the son of a priestly family in a priestly village.

You remember that all through the land of the... among the people of God, there was territory given to the priests by each of the tribes.

[3 : 09] And so this was the land of Benjamin, and the village that Jeremiah was brought up in was a priestly village. And he was brought up at a time when the great empires of the ancient world were coming under the judgment of God.

The Assyrian Empire and the Babylonian Empire and the... And all those empires were in a terrible state of upheaval, and God was delivering judgment on them.

And Jeremiah's job in the midst of this was to tell his people that God's judgment would fall on them as well.

And the danger of any Thanksgiving Sunday is that we might try and escape the fact that perhaps God's judgment will fall on us as a country as well.

Judah was doomed. And of course it thought, as religious people are inclined to do, it thought it would escape.

[4 : 24] It thought it would escape because their whole life centered on the city of David, the promised king. In the city of David was the temple of Solomon, the great king and son of David, and the center of the worship of Yahweh the Lord.

They also had the law of Moses, and they were in covenant with God as the people of God.

So whatever might happen to the great empires of the world wouldn't happen to them, or so they thought. And God's judgment is described as coming in four ways, in famine, in pestilence, in fire, and in sword, the same way it's been coming for hundreds of generations now, and the same kind of things that threaten our whole world civilization.

Famine, pestilence, fire, and sword. The people of God themselves were going to go into captivity and exile to ruin and ransack of their homes, their city, and their temple.

And Jeremiah was called as a young man to tell them that. That was his job. He wasn't to tell them to be optimistic and to be thankful and to know that they were safe even though everybody else was going to hell in a handbasket.

[6 : 00] He was to tell them that the judgment of God would fall on them, that they would be ruined, that they would be taken into captivity, that they would be exiled, and all that they had been familiar with for many centuries would be taken away from them.

And so Jeremiah was called to live the whole of his life outside the process, which most of us think is ours as a birthright, that we grow up, we receive education, we receive medical care, we marry, we have families, we go into business, we gather fortunes, we live in our prosperity, and we go on to a ripe old age, that all those things belong to us by right, and that we follow them out, and God is vindicated by our prosperity.

And that's the way the world works, and we should find what enjoyment we can in it. None of that was to happen to Jeremiah. Neither family, nor business, nor prosperity, nothing was to be given to him, because he had the peculiar difficulty of being called to be the servant of God.

And if you look at the text that's there in those first nine verses, you will find that this happened under the reign of three kings, and beyond that, Josiah and Jehoiakim and Zedekiah.

And in all those three reigns, through the whole of the life of Jeremiah, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah during Josiah's reign, and he told Josiah about it.

[7 : 50] It also came in the days of Jehoiakim, and he told Jehoiakim about it. It also came till the end of the 11th year of Zedekiah, and he told Zedekiah about it.

So he was a thoroughly unpopular person, as you can well imagine. And it was not for him an enviable task that God had set him, as it may well not be for you an enviable task to be called to be a witness.

To the kingdom of God and to his Christ, in this world that doesn't want to hear about it. But certainly Jeremiah didn't consider it to be an enviable task.

And yet God had said to him, as he says in these verses, that before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.

It's an amazingly relevant statement, isn't it? Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I consecrated you.

[9 : 01] And I called you, appointed you to be a prophet to the nations. So even before Jeremiah had much choice, God had known him, consecrated him, and appointed him.

He belonged to God to do God's will. Now, Jeremiah didn't take this sitting down. He complained about it.

And again, you find that in the text for the day, Jeremiah 1, 1 to 9. He first said, I am only a youth. The issues that have to be dealt with are bigger than I can handle.

The wisdom that is required is more than I have. The knowledge and understanding which would be required is something which doesn't yet belong to me.

I am only a youth. Not only am I only a youth, but Jeremiah said, I don't know how to speak either.

[10 : 07] Jeremiah says, which is a very sobering reality, because a lot of people who know how to speak have nothing to say.

And that's why I think it a sobering reality, that Jeremiah says, I don't know how to speak. And so the Lord comes back answering Jeremiah's complaint and says, don't say, I am only.

I am sending you. You go. I send. You go. I command. You speak. I am with you.

Don't you be afraid. I deliver. I deliver. Don't you despair. God. I am with you. I am with you. I am with you. I am with you. I am with you. And so his orders were very clear. even though his heart may not have been ready for them, as our hearts may not be ready for the task that God has for us, as Christians in the generation in which God has called us to live and to bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So God touched him, and he says, I put my words in your mouth. You are to be the, you are to be as, for this generation, you are to be my prophet among your people.

[11 : 41] Remember how it says in Hebrews that in various times and ages God spake unto our fathers by the prophets. God didn't leave himself without a voice.

He appointed a prophet to speak to this generation, and Jeremiah was that man. And so as that happened, the verse in Hebrews goes on to say, but God has in these days spoken to us by a son, Jesus Christ.

So as Jeremiah was the spokesman to his day, so Jesus Christ is the spokesman to our day. That's why it's important for us to hear him, because God has spoken to us through him.

And you who profess and call yourselves Christians, are baptized into Jesus Christ, in the place where you live, in the place where you work, among your friends, in your community, your primary job is to be a spokesman for Jesus Christ.

Now remember that this is difficult. It's like Jeremiah's task, because his message wasn't particularly acceptable.

[13 : 11] Christ speaks to our generation through the person of Jesus Christ, to whom each of us is called to bear witness. And there's to be no excuses.

We don't sidestep the issue simply because it's unpopular. Lots of churches, I think, and perhaps the great condemnation of our own is the danger of saying the things that people find acceptable. That's not what we're to do. We're to speak the word of God as it has been spoken to us in Jesus Christ. Then on this Thanksgiving day, 1990, let's look at our country.

Ernie's a much more positive fellow than I, and he gave at 8 o'clock a sermon on five reasons to be thankful. And because I am a doom and gloom type, I want to tell you five reasons why you might not at first be thankful.

We are paralyzed and powerless in the face of the troubles of our nation.

[14 : 26] At least that's the feeling I have. We don't know what to do about the GST. Somebody's got to pay the bill, but we don't want it to be us. We don't know what to do with free trade because we think that it's just an American takeover of this country.

The pride and patronage we've had towards the aboriginal people is no longer sufficient and is being spat back in our faces.

That's not acceptable. We are a democratic country in which, according to the dictates majority rules, but somehow it happens now that the democratic system is ruled by vocal minorities.

And that's an interesting problem that we're going to have to sort out. I don't know how you do it.

We have prided ourselves on our cultural mosaic, but I think our cultural mosaic is now becoming what we might call a crazy quilt.

There's something wrong in our ideals and aspirations. Our parliamentary system, of which we are proud, certainly had a bad week.

[15 : 44] And it sure makes you wonder when the upper house is, well, it seems to have been lowered a little.

Yeah. The Vancouver Stock Exchange didn't do too well this week in terms of its publicity. We're hearing the woes of the primary industries of our country, that they are now inhabited beyond the point of ever being able to make it work.

And the prosperity, which we have enjoyed for many years from the primary industries, doesn't look like it's going to be a continuing source of our prosperity.

Now, in the midst of this, you see, the church is there as impotent idealists. That are talking about heaven and talking about another kingdom.

And the church is very much like Jeremiah. I am a youth. We don't know how to speak to this situation. We are too.

[16 : 59] We're not wise enough. We're not smart enough. We don't have enough knowledge. We don't have enough understanding. Though there is some very learned and wise and important people in this congregation, I'm sure, far wiser than the one in the pulpit.

But taken collectively, we still don't know what to say as Christians to our world. We don't know how to say it.

Way back in 1960, we changed our national flag from the one that had all the crosses in it to one that had a maple leaf on it.

And I'm not about to be disloyal, but I would like just to point to you that there was a basic shift that happened then when we glory in the creation and we glory perhaps in the creator.

But in years since then, we have become more and more dissatisfied with the way the creation was put together. And we're now going to take over the creation and see if we can't handle it better than it's been handled thus far by those who claim to know what God's will for it was.

[18 : 20] And so we've moved, you see, from the cross to the maple leaf, from a sign of redemption to the glories of nature and the mountains and the rivers and the vast plains, all those things we glory in.

And we want now in our world to recreate them, to renew them all and to make them great again. And we're rather fed up with God because God's purpose is not recreation, but it is redemption. You see, there's a kind of tension in our world between those who want to recreate and the God whom we serve who wants to redeem.

when you redeem something, it means that something's gone wrong and it's got to be put right. And so the picture of redeeming is the picture of a slave bought out of his slavery and set free again. redeeming. Redeeming is taking a priceless treasure and restoring it to its proper owner. [19 : 47] Redeeming is taking a condemned man and winning for him a pardon. And so our God is in the work of redeeming our nation.

And we as a church are in the business of bearing witness to God who created us, but God whose business it is right now to redeem us.

And that redemption has begun with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. So that on this national Thanksgiving day, what we do is to recognize all the problems of our nation and all the problems indeed of our world and to recognize that God is active and present among us to redeem, to buy back, to set free, to restore life and purpose to the whole of history.

And that work he has begun in Jesus Christ. And we have the example from the ancient world of the prophet Isaiah who pointed to the redemptive purpose of God and said, that's what's going to happen.

And you see, it is our priceless privilege as those who have been called to serve Jesus Christ in this generation, to be as Jeremiah was to his generation, and to know that the redeeming purpose of God has not ultimately been frustrated by the crash and ruin of empires and the old ways giving on, failing, but to point to the ultimate and redeeming purpose of God.

[21 : 55] Let me read to you just a few verses as I conclude from Jeremiah chapter 29 in which he says, I mean, this is the thing that in the midst of all the doom and all the gloom, in the midst of disaster and failure, in the midst of all that's gone wrong, you get the wonderful verses of, from Isaiah, from Jeremiah 29 verse 10 when Jeremiah looks to the completion or the completing or the fulfilling of the redeeming purpose of God.

Jeremiah says to the people, when 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place, your country.

I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will hear you.

you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from the nations and to all the places to which I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

and you see that's, in a sense, an ancient world parallel to the message that the Christian church, this church, you, as a Christian, and we, as a congregation, that there is a hope, there is a God who answers prayer, there is a purpose, and in the midst of the chaos and confusion of our day, God's purpose will be fulfilled.

[23 : 58] So do we have reason for thanksgiving? We have enormous reason for thanksgiving. At a point when perhaps others are in despair and feel the hopelessness of our situation, we have the most profound reason to give thanks.

And in order that we might do it, at least in part, and I'll ask Karen to go to the lectern so that she can lead us in our intercessions immediately following this.

But I'd like you to turn to page 14 and to begin our intercessions by saying with me just a small part of that thanksgiving which focuses on the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Will you start just at the bottom of page 14 when it says we bless? And I want you to go to the end of the general thanksgiving and then Karen if you'll lead us on from there.

Can we pray? Can we pray? And from our hearts can we say together we bless thee for our creation preservation and all the blessings of this life but above all for thine inestimable love and the redemption of the world for the Lord Jesus Christ for the means of grace and for the hope of glory and we beseech thee give us and do sense all our mercies that our hearts may be unfaithfully thankful that they show forth thy grace not only with our lips but in our eyes for giving up ourselves to thy service by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom thee and the Holy Ghost may all honor and glory for all without end

[26 : 19] Amen