

The Lord's word anchors our life
Jeremiah 1:4-10

There are so many things that catch your eye up here as you worship... the cross... the window... the altar furnishings... a banner... the big screen when it's down... maybe you don't even notice that it's up here. Maybe it has just become a part of the background up here. Maybe it's something that you take for granted. But even though that might be the case, I have a hunch that if I took it away and hid it for a few weeks, all of a sudden you would notice. All of a sudden it would come to the forefront and I would hear about it. Wouldn't you say that's a good description of "Old Glory" standing in the corner over there? It's not necessarily the prominent furnishing up here, nor do we ever make a big deal of it. But we're glad our country's flag is there. As Americans we need it there. We're no different from Francis Scott Keyes who strained his eyes past the smoke of the bombs and rockets over Baltimore Harbor in 1812 to see that the flag was still there... or the marines in Iwo Jima who cheered to see the iconic flag raising... or the citizens who had to see the stars and stripes flying after that traumatic day in September of 2001. We don't always realize it, but that flag is our security as Americans... it's our comfort... it's our identity... it's our motivation. It's that one thing that we can always go back to whenever anything comes along. It's our anchor.

It's really a great thing to have as a country. But the flag only goes so far. The flag can't give you any answers when your heart has doubts. The flag can't heal you when you suffer. The flag can't make you persevere through trials... not on a personal level. So what's standing in the corner of your life? What is that thing in your life on which you personally can fall back... that one thing that you know is always there to give you comfort, security and motivation? The flag may anchor our country, but today, the Holy Spirit is going to help you realize what it truly is that anchors *your life*.

Sometimes the rockets' red glare and the bombs bursting in air aren't the worst things to deal with in life. Sometimes it's a more of an explosive assault on your whole being like rejection. Soldiers are prepared for bombs. People, in general, are not well-suited for handling rejection. We have plenty of good examples of that in our readings from the Bible today. Just put yourself in Jesus' sandals. In the Gospel he was in his hometown. He was among people he grew up with... friends... family. As a human being I'm sure that he wanted to do well as he preached in the synagogue. As Savior of the world I know he wanted his family and friends to believe in him and be saved. But what happened? They hated his message so badly that they wanted to shove him down a cliff! But they didn't need to; the pain of rejection had already been inflicted.

The children of Israel probably didn't think anything of it. After all, it was in their blood. It was part of their history. Many years before, their forefathers did the same to God's spokesmen... men like Jeremiah. In fact, did you notice Jeremiah's job description? Rejection was a given! As if he was going to be a lion tamer or a poisonous snake charmer the first thing God told him was, **"Do not be afraid of them."** And it only got worse when he said, **"Today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow."**

Like Jesus, Jeremiah was going to proclaim a message that people violently hated. He was going to proclaim words that uprooted the comfort of their idolatrous worship of other gods instead of the Lord... words that tore down the comfort of their sinful reliance on foreign kings for protection and prosperity instead of on the Lord. And we can only imagine their reaction. Mockery? Isolation? Threats? Abuse? So we can probably imagine how Jeremiah might have felt, too. "Am I proclaiming the right message? Am I doing the right thing? Am I missing out on what everybody else is doing? Do I really believe this?" Frustrations, suffering, despair, and doubt... how could Jeremiah possibly carry through in his job or even his life?

Jeremiah had an anchor! And the anchor of his life was the word the Lord spoke to him here. **"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart."** Could there be any doubt in Jeremiah's mind that he belonged to the Lord? **"I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."** Could there be any doubt that he was doing the right things? **"Now I have put my words in your mouth."** Could there be any doubt that he believed and proclaimed the right things? He had the Lord's own words! That was something Jeremiah could (and I'm sure did!) go back to again and again.

I am not well-suited for rejection. Once I was asked to do a funeral for a man. He had been confirmed in a neighboring Wisconsin Lutherans Synod church 35 years earlier. He had also been removed from membership a long time ago because he never cared to set foot in church a day after his confirmation. And even though I had every reason to

believe that the family was telling the truth that he was a nice man, it was a fact that his lifestyle showed that he didn't think God or his word were of any importance to him. I did not dare do the work of God and judge his heart, but I did do what God asked me to do and judged the tree by its fruit—the person by their sincere actions. I proclaimed to that family that I could not in good conscience give the man a Christian funeral and give the impression that he died with faith in the Lord. I uprooted the widely held idea that because he was a nice person he would automatically go to heaven. I was rejected. Hurtful things were said to me. Spoken threats were made. I was avoided and mocked. Guess how I felt. I felt horrible! I was sad. I was scared. And eventually I doubted. Did I proclaim the right message? Am I cut out for this work? Is this the faith I even really want to have if it involves trials like this?

I have a hunch you're not well-suited for rejection, either. When your church is called strict and stuck up because of its firm adherence to what God says in the Bible... when you have to defend or explain what the Bible teaches and we practice regarding fellowship with those who teach and believe things that are contrary to the Bible... when you have to say no to something that looks so pleasurable, but that God forbids... when you are mocked and avoided as a "Goody - goody" for trying to uproot someone's destructive behavior, or just for trying to share your faith... how do you feel? Do you have doubts that you're right? Do you have doubts that it's worth it? Do you have doubts that Jesus could possibly be the kind of Savior that allows those things to happen?

When I'm having those doubts, and when you're having those doubts, who is the one who is doing the rejecting? Are we any different from the Israelites rejecting Jeremiah for making them uncomfortable? Are we any different from the people in Nazareth rejecting Jesus for saying that he would be a humble, suffering Savior? When the Lord speaks and we doubt it because it doesn't feel good or feel right, we are sinning. We are, in essence, trying to push Jesus right off the cliff of our lives. Doubt is that dangerous... and, yes, that damning!

Fellow doubter, please listen. **"For [God] chose us in [Jesus] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."** Before God ever said, "Let there be," he thought about you. He thought about how his own Son, Jesus, would come to earth and live a holy, blameless life in your place. He thought about how his Son would give up his life and pay the punishment of death for every one of your sins. He thought about how his Son would rise from the dead to guarantee that the all of that work was acceptable and good. He thought about all of that and it made him very happy to choose you to be his own dear child. Yes, Jesus is your kind of Savior.

Fellow doubter, please listen. **"All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with."** God didn't leave his choice in the obliviousness of eternity. In a way that you could clearly understand... in a way that would allow you to see some visible proof... he made his choice known to you. When the water touched your head and when God's promise touched your heart, he set you apart from the sinful world as his very own... to live a forgiven life... for the purpose of God's kingdom. Yes, you are doing the right thing.

Fellow doubter, please listen. **"Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."** God asks you to be faithful. And he knows that when you act faithfully and when you proclaim faithfully you will suffer. Jeremiah suffered. Jesus suffered. But he gives you his words and his promises so that you can be sure that what you are proclaiming is faithful. Because he has something better than all of this in mind. For his faithful people he has Jesus' crown of eternal life. Yes, it is worth it!

Do you see what anchors your life? It is the Lord's word! But it's not an anchor like a dusty old flag in the corner of our lives. The Lord's word is the anchor that is in the forefront of our lives. It stands firm so that we can always believe the promises about our salvation—no matter what doubts may come. It's secure so that we can be sure of whom God says we are—no matter what names we get called. It's steady so that we can be bold and confident of what we proclaim—no matter how it is received. Let's give thanks that, like Jeremiah, the Lord has given us promises to go back to again and again as the anchor of our lives. May they hold you securely! And may they equip you boldly! Amen.