

Sermon: Outside the Camp

By Rev. Sheryl Stewart

Jeremiah 2; 4-13

Hebrews 13: 1-8, 15-16

Luke 14: 1, 7-14

Jeremiah, maybe because he was young, put God's message flat out. God is mad over two sins. First verse: we aren't paying attention to God! It isn't that God is vain, demanding attention and control. God created people to be like Him. By turning away from God, we lose ourselves as we lose contact with God.

Second verse: same as the first, a little bit louder and a whole lot worse! As they turned from God, people turned to idols. Using magic, flattery, lies, and bribes, they tried to influence what was no more than a collection of imaginary friends.

Jeremiah said, "You're trying to carry water in cracked cisterns." A cistern is a pot. What he was saying was: "You're all crackpots!" Today he might say: "That went over like a lead balloon, was as useful as a screen door on a submarine, and as natural as an udder on a bull."

Jesus was just as direct when He spoke to the guests and host of the dinner party. Both were trying to force their own blessing: the guests by trying to push themselves to the head of the line and the host by just inviting people he knew would invite him in return. Jesus said, instead of trying to force things, let God provide any blessings.

When Paul wrote about these ideas, he reminded us that Jewish priests are careful to avoid any profit from a ritual sacrifice to God. When an animal is offered, the sacred blood is offered. The rest of the animal is taken outside the camp and burned to ashes. That is where we get the word, holocaust.”

Pagans would have a feast and eat any meat not offered to their idols, but no free steak dinners for the Jews! Any hope for personal gain is sacrificed outside the camp.

Paul, then, reflects that Jesus was slain outside the city. Perhaps, it would be better for us to leave the city and share Christ’s shame instead of trying to one up each other all the time.

We are not self-made men and women. God made us, our city, our efforts, our nation, our race, our position, our wealth, our authority, our fame, our anything. Don't let these imaginary friends become an idol and make you a "cracked pot!" If we go anywhere except outside the camp to the Cross of Christ, we wander.

We cannot lead unless we are led. And, the only water that won't leak through our fingers is the living water that springs up from deep inside us, given by that man who died for us outside the camp. We have to stop seeking love because we already have it. We are not called to seek love, we are called to be love, and we are so called by the God Who became flesh and sought us.

So, stop trying to put yourself first when God has already put you ahead of Himself. Stop trying to establish your will when Jesus gave His will over to God. Our own hands can't hold our lives nor build them up. The only hands that can do that are a carpenter's, pierced for us. Go outside yourselves, outside the camp, and find your holiness!

Amen.