

"Are You Working Against Yourself?"

Text: Jeremiah 20:7-13

May the faith that has been created in your heart by God the Holy Spirit never know doubt or uncertainty, and may you never find yourself in opposition to that Holy Spirit, who intercedes on your behalf for your eternal salvation. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, I have never met a true Christian who did not very much desire to share his faith with those he loves here on this earth. When a human being truly believes that no one can enter heaven except through faith in Jesus Christ, it is natural and right to want to share that divine information with others. The age-old problem then is how to accomplish what it is we all want to do.

In many cases the solution is simple planning. That means that something as important as sharing the key to eternal life is certainly worthy of at least as much planning as we devote to other far less important things in our lives. For example, most of you have (or should have) some kind of winter survival kit in your car. Hopefully you've thought ahead to what might happen, and you prepared by carrying an extra quilt or blankets, candles, flares, first aid kit, etc. Or when you take a trip, don't you consider what you will be doing, and then pack accordingly? Sports teams make plans to counter the strengths of their opponents, the military trains our soldiers to handle the unexpected, businesses budget for unforeseen expenses, lawyers prepare their witnesses for every conceivable question – you get the picture.

Yet how do we apply this lesson about planning to our Lord's Great Commission, the sharing of our faith? It is rather startling how little planning we do for something so important, so life-and-death urgent, isn't it? This planning can begin with something as simple as identifying common forms of interaction with our neighbors. That done, consider how best to respond in an effort to turn the conversation into an opportunity to witness. It's pretty much the same thing we do when we plan the emergency kit for our vehicles. We think of what might happen and we decide how we will deal with it. What would we wish we had, for example, if we happened to get snowbound in a blizzard? That, within reason, is what we include in the kit.

Witness planning then is a matter of recognizing what happens to us all the time, and then turning that to the Lord's advantage. Some examples might help to clarify. Suppose someone asks, "How are you doing?" or "How's your day going?" What is your standard, canned answer? "Can't

complain"? "Pretty good. How 'bout you?"? Why not think of a different stock answer, like, "Great! One day closer to meeting my Savior." It is entirely possible that nothing may come of this, but then again something great just might.

Our Lord encouraged us to be wise. Would it not be wise for us to identify such opportunities in our own lives and to prepare for them? If someone asks where I work or what I do for a living, why not plan how you might bring your faith into your answer? If someone asks how many children you have, it can be as simple as answering something like, "The Lord has given us _____."

The need to witness should be a powerful, compelling force within each one of us. Our text for this morning speaks not only of this inner need to speak God's Word, but it also raises some interesting and disturbing questions, chief of which is "Are You Working Against Yourself?" Our text is found in the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, the 20th Chapter:

ESV(Jeremiah 20:7-13) O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me. ⁸ For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. ⁹ If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. ¹⁰ For I hear many whispering. Terror is on every side! "Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" say all my close friends, watching for my fall. "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we can overcome him and take our revenge on him." ¹¹ But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten. ¹² O LORD of hosts, who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause. ¹³ Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers.

These are the inspired words of our God. May that same God give us the spirit to read them with humility and reverence, and to apply them to our own lives with honesty, courage, and wisdom. So also we pray, "Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!" Amen.

What exactly does it mean to "work against yourself"? Have you ever seen one of those cartoons where someone cuts off the branch on which he is sitting, or cuts a hole in the part of the floor on which he is standing? That's the kind of thing we are talking about – struggling toward what you think will benefit you, only to find that you have been working against yourself. The question that we are going to examine this morning is therefore: *Have we in the past, or are we still today, working against ourselves?* Most significant in answering this question is the fact, made clear by our text, that the single most lethal and diabolical method that mankind has ever discovered for working against himself is to work against his God. For the Christian, the two cannot be separated, for the child of God knows that he is nothing at all apart from his God.

Bible examples are clearly better than cartoon examples, and will clarify the issue. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark both include the account of how Peter, in his misguided enthusiasm, was actually working against both himself and his Lord. Listen again to the account:

^{ESV}(**Matthew 16:21-23**) *From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

Note, first of all, just how *sure* Peter was of his actions. He was so certain that he knew what was best that he even presumed to rebuke Jesus, the very One he had just moments earlier identified as "**the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" Yet Peter's good intentions neither justified nor rectified his actions. He found himself working *against* his God, against himself, and against the eternal good of the whole human race. Peter was trying to prevent Jesus from going to Jerusalem, where he intended to reconcile our fallen race to God the Father by offering his life on the cross as payment for our sins. Peter was trying to prevent that. In the worst possible way, Peter was working against himself.

This was not the only time Peter managed to do this. Remember when Jesus came to wash the disciples' feet on Maundy Thursday, and Peter's reaction? ^{ESV}(**John 13:5-9**) *Then (Jesus) poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to*

him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Again Peter was sure, and yet again Peter was unknowingly working against himself.

Nor was the problem restricted to Peter. Remember how Paul, when he was still Saul, dedicated himself to the destruction of God's Church – all the while certain in his heart that he was doing the will of his God? What was God's position on Paul's actions? ^{ESV}(**Acts 9:4-6**) *And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." Paul (Saul) *thought* he had been working for his God when, in fact, he had been working against him.*

Remember how the other Saul (the first king of Israel) also struggled so pathetically against himself, against his God, and against the Lord's anointed replacement, David. Remember how Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish until he stopped struggling against his God. How Judas struggled and lost.

So too we turn to our text and we find a man who seems to be in turmoil with both himself and with his God. Was his turmoil understandable? In human terms, clearly. Jeremiah was a special prophet of doom, sent to preach words of condemnation to the inhabitants of Jerusalem just prior to the Babylonian Captivity. No one wanted to hear the words he had been sent to speak, and they hated him for it. The result was that he was sorely mistreated and agonizingly tortured by the rulers in Jerusalem, even to the point of death. His solution, at least for a time, was to remain silent. You can imagine the powerful motivation for withholding God's Word from them. Not only would life be much easier for Jeremiah, he would also be exacting a revenge by withholding the one thing capable of converting and saving his tormentors in Jerusalem.

Yet God had told Jeremiah to speak. So what happened when Jeremiah tried to remain silent? Listen to Jeremiah's own description: "**If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.**" Jeremiah tried to avenge himself upon his tormentors by withholding God's Word.

Despite the fact that he suffered terribly at their hand, he found he could not struggle against his God and prevail: **"O LORD...you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed."** There was nothing left for Jeremiah but to walk and speak as his Lord had instructed and to leave all vengeance to that same Lord: **"O LORD of hosts, who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause."** Jeremiah stopped working against his God, and in the process he stopped working against himself.

What does this text teach us today? It instructs us to ask of ourselves: *"Am I working against myself and my God in any aspect of my life?"* We begin to answer the question by examining the various frustrations in our lives, but here the problem, the question, becomes even more complex. Frustration in my life is the place to start, but frustration in itself is not a clear indicator. The devil and his whole evil cadre work tirelessly to frustrate the efforts of the child of God. How then can I learn to recognize when and where frustration in my life is a symptom of working against my God?

This is work every Christian needs to do on their own. The first step is to identify any frustration in your life, and the second to identify the cause. There are plenty of areas that need exploration. Are you frustrated because no matter how much or how hard you work you never seem to get ahead? Are you working against yourself and your God by abandoning your God-given duties in a futile effort to gain what will harm you? You get the picture. Everyone's life and circumstances are unique. Everyone therefore needs to work individually, on the basis of God's Word, to identify their own frustrations, the root causes of those frustrations, and what, if any, steps need to be taken. Not every difficult or frustrating situation in this sinful world can be avoided or eliminated, but many can.

How do we find answers to these kinds of questions? Through God's Word, of course, but also through Christian friends. It is amazing how clearly God speaks to these questions in his Word if we would but open our Bibles – and our hearts to what our God there teaches us. Christian friends can also help, but only those who have wisdom based on God's Word and who are not afraid to tell you what you might not want to hear. One thing is certain. You will never stand in opposition to your God or to yourself when you dedicate your life to sharing with others the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. You will never err by sharing the simple truth that **"he that believes and is baptized shall be saved."** You will never work against yourself when you **"seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness"** or when you gently try to disabuse your neighbors of the idea that they can earn their place in God's heaven through their own works, rather than through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

God grant to each of us the wisdom to recognize when and where the frustrations in our lives are a result of our own foolish rebellion against the Word and will of our Savior, and the humility and wisdom to understand and submit to his holy will. Learn from Jeremiah to commit your cause to the Lord, and trust both his divine wisdom and his eternal love and mercy. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV}(**1 Corinthians 15:12-20**) Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. ²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

^{ESV}(**Luke 6:17-26**) And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all. ²⁰ And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹ "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. ²² "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets. ²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. ²⁵ "Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. ²⁶ "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets."

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

The Sixth Sunday after Epiphany – February 17, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 10 (Red Hymnal)

"This the Day the Lord Hath Made"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson (1 Corinthians 15:12-20) Large segments of even those who identify as Christians today regard the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as an optional doctrine of the Christian faith. In other words, they teach and believe that an individual can deny that Jesus rose bodily from the dead and still be a Christian. The Apostle Paul puts that notion to rest in our first reading. If Christ has not been raised, our faith is futile – in large part because without Christ's resurrection, there is no divine pronouncement that our sins are forgiven. The Resurrection is God's declaration that we are forgiven.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 85 (Page 40)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 6:17-26) Once again we are reminded that Jesus performed miracles not to entertain or impress but to offer tangible proof of the power and efficacy of his words. His words, not his works, carried the power to convert and to save. Note that in the words that followed the miracles in our second reading, Jesus teaches that it is unbelief, not wealth, that condemns. Love of earthly treasures invariably prevents or destroys saving faith in Jesus Christ.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15 (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 20 (Red Hymnal)

"God of Mercy, God of Grace"

The Sermon – Text: Jeremiah 20:7-13 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

"Are You Working Against Yourself?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 245 (Red Hymnal)

"God Loved the World So that He Gave"

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 51 (Red Hymnal)

"Now May He Who from the Dead"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (26) Average (38)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour
Monday	-10:00 a.m.	– Study Conference in Bowdle
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service w/ Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour

CLC News – Resurrection of Corpus Christi, TX has called Missionary Peter Evensen, who was recently relocated to Togo in East Africa by the CLC Board of Missions, due to the revocation of his Indian visa. Bethel of Morris, MN has called Pastor Joe Naumann. Roland Gurgel, who was recently removed from the ministerium of the CLC, has left the CLC, and his former congregation, Bethel of Humble, TX has disbanded.

Mission Helper Trip Redirected – Due to the recent unrest in India, together with the increase in persecution (against Christians in particular,) the Mission Helper Trip originally scheduled to visit India this summer will now do their work in Africa.

Study Conference – Area CLC pastors are scheduled to meet in Bowdle on Monday for a one-day study conference – leaving early and returning late in the evening.

Time Out in March – A reminder that our new Time Out program meets the first Friday of every month. The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, March 1 and the adult half of the evening will be hosted by Mick and Kristi Johnson in their home at 1727 Valle Moor Drive. For more information, please contact Pastor Roehl or Phil Pfennig.