

## WORDS OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH FROM THE ASSIGNED OLD TESTAMENT READING FOR TODAY

Well, I did it. By the grace of God [and with the adult supervision of Ray and Pastor Olson](#), I survived the pressure cooker of the district convention. And my gut instinct tells me I'm probably not going to get any sympathy from this crowd, right? Attending a district convention is one thing, but I think we would all agree that life can be a pressure cooker.

So, Dear Child of God, where do you go? Where do you go when the pressure mounts, when the expectations rise above your abilities and strength? In our reading today, the Prophet Jeremiah reminds us that when life is beyond hard, God provides real strength. Maybe the pressure cooker is pressing in on you today.

If you are a parent, your life may be really challenging right now. Maybe it's dealing with diapers and no sleep. Maybe you're dealing with the hard work of parenting, disciplining in love, in the face of rebellion and lots of worry. Being a parent can be a great blessing, but it can also stretch you to the limit. Life can be hard!

Or if you are a spouse, maybe your marriage is difficult now. What was once a fun and carefree relationship may now be filled with the stress of disagreements, money struggles, or even betrayal and hurt. Marriage is a wonderful gift. But, even with the best spouse, life can be hard!

Or, perhaps you are enduring the challenge of being alone, because you've lost the one you love. Being alone is a challenging journey. Life can be hard.

Life can make you feel like you're living in a pressure cooker. And maybe, you might not feel up to the task. Maybe you're struggling with depression or anxiety or feelings of helplessness.

Where do you go when the pressure mounts, when the expectations rise above your abilities and strength? The prophet Jeremiah reminds us that when life is beyond hard, God provides strength.

You remember the words of the Sunday School song, "We are weak, but He is strong." God's strength shines when you are weak. When you realize the real weight of your guilt and sin, when you feel the shame of failure, that's when God's hope for you is at its best! And the GREAT joy of the Christian faith is that you don't have to be discouraged, nor despair. God is with you; He has a purpose for you; and He will give you His strength.

Today, we hear the words of Jeremiah in our Old Testament reading. Jeremiah was a young priest, from a long line of priests. Jeremiah could have been in line for a smooth life of service, respect, and prestige. Instead, God decided to give him a different job, a difficult one. In Jeremiah chapter one, we hear Jeremiah describe how God changed the course of his life:

"Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.' Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.'" (vs. 4-6).

Jeremiah knew what he was in for. As a prophet to the nations, he would not be a popular person. He would be lonely. He would be despised. He would be thrown in jail by kings. He would be banned from the temple area where he grew up. His writings would be burned publicly.

Nobody wanted to hear him pointing out how they had hurt others and been unfaithful to God. But that's the message he had to deliver. His job was to call people to repentance. They were not fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. And if they continued in their unrepentance, the Babylonian kingdom in the north would come down, take them captive, and destroy their land.

This was not an easy life. And, honestly, Jeremiah didn't want it. He didn't feel qualified for the job. He was too young and unskilled.

But, you know all-too-well that sometimes God gives you a job you didn't ask for. Sometimes, He calls you to serve in a way you don't feel qualified to do. Sometimes, your calling in life is very difficult. God reminds Jeremiah of the source of real strength in his life. He says this:

"Do not say, 'I am only a youth;' for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord" (vs. 7-8).

God provided real strength to Jeremiah, for the work he was called to do. God guided Jeremiah through the difficult challenges. And, God will do the same for you, Dear Child of God. Life may be very hard, but God provides real strength.

So, let me ask you: How's your life going? You may be at a very difficult place right now. You may be feeling weak and discouraged.

And the truth is is that you don't have crowds cheering you on. No one's cheering you on as you change a diaper or struggle with loneliness.

But the Lord of heaven and earth is with you and encourages you today, right now. It's true, life can wear you out. It can be a difficult struggle. It can weaken you. But there is an answer: God provides strength.

The pressure can be strong. The tasks can be tough. The darkness can be dark. But you're not alone. It's not all on your shoulders. God provides strength.

In fact, God doesn't merely provide strength, He sends it. We hear Jeremiah say:

"Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, 'Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant'" (vs. 9-10).

Literally, the text says that God sent out His hand and touched Jeremiah's mouth. You see, God always sends.

When God's people need help, strength, and rescue, God sends. He sent His prophets. He sent His angelic armies. He sent His Word. He sent His only-begotten Son. Helpless in our weakness and sin, God sent Jesus to shoulder our weakness, guilt, sin, and failure. God sent Jesus to the cross to pay the price for our sin and win the victory over sin, death, and hell for us.

And, He gives that victory to each one of us in the new birth of Holy Baptism. In the water and the Word, He forgives our sins and gives us eternal salvation. We can say with St. Paul, *Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Co 15:57).*

Life can be very hard. It can drain you of your strength; but God is always sending. He sends His Spirit into your life through His Word just as He did with Jeremiah. He sends the forgiving and strengthening presence of Jesus through the Lord's Supper. He sends His encouragement through the gathering and fellowship of believers. He

sends His gifts to His people to build one another up. Life may be hard, but God provides strength.

Do you need that strength today?

Then know this. Whatever is fighting against you, it will not prevail! Whatever is draining you will not win the day. Jesus has already won that battle. He guaranteed the eternal outcome. You can fulfill your calling. You can face your day because, in Christ Jesus, God provides strength. He promises that His grace is always sufficient for whatever you face.

Don't just cross your fingers for good luck, cross yourself to remember the day when God poured out His grace and protection on you in your Baptism! Remember that every time you read the Bible, those are God's promises that you can be sure of in and for your life! And remember that we worship on Sunday because that is the day Christ rose from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus comforts us that when life overwhelms us, God provides, through our Risen Savior Jesus, real strength to face the day! For if God is for us, who can be against us.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.