

## Lenten Devotional March 17, 2023

### Scripture

#### Jeremiah 11:1-8, 14-17

*1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2 Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 3 You shall say to them, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Cursed be anyone who does not heed the words of this covenant, 4 which I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron-smelter, saying, Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So shall you be my people, and I will be your God, 5 that I may perform the oath that I swore to your ancestors, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day. Then I answered, "So be it, Lord." 6 And the Lord said to me: Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. 7 For I solemnly warned your ancestors when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. 8 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of an evil will. So I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not.*

*14 As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble. 15 What right has my beloved in my house, when she has done vile deeds? Can vows and sacrificial flesh avert your doom? Can you then exult? 16 The Lord once called you, "A green olive tree, fair with goodly fruit"; but with the roar of a great tempest he will set fire to it, and its branches will be consumed. 17 The Lord of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced evil against you, because of the evil that the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done, provoking me to anger by making offerings to Baal.*

### Devotional

#### The Rev. Greg Steible '14

There's grace here, you know.

These are some hard words from the prophet Jeremiah. But then again, prophets are good at that: sharing hard words with people who need to hear them. I suppose sometimes we need to hear it. Many of us have people in our lives who will call us to task, lovingly, when we do something wrong. Occasionally, trusted friends will say things to us like, "Hey, maybe you need to apologize to that person." I hope you have a friend like that.

But here, the prophet is sharing this message of God with the people, and it's more than, "Hey, maybe you need to apologize." This is a message of cursing and condemnation for unfaithful people. Even gentle corrections are hard to hear, but this is eardrum-piercing. The people have shown covenantal infidelity, and the Lord is furious.

And yet, there's a subtler side to this passage as well. God is faithful to the covenant. God is gracious. Just like when our friends don't write us off when we put our foot in our mouth, neither does God. God doesn't abandon the people. God calls them to task. At their core they are God's people, as are we. We are made in God's image, with goodness and mercy in us. It doesn't always shine through, but instead of abandoning us, God graciously calls us to task, graciously calls us to change, graciously calls us to something new.

### **Prayer**

Covenant Lord, we look to you for help. We, your faithless people, turn to you because you continue to be faithful to us, and we are grateful. Guide us this season as we turn our hearts and minds to you. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.