

Lenten Devotional March 18, 2023

Scripture

Jeremiah 13:1-11

1 Thus said the LORD to me, "Go and buy yourself a linen loincloth, and put it on your loins, but do not dip it in water." 2 So I bought a loincloth according to the word of the LORD, and put it on my loins. 3 And the word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, 4 "Take the loincloth that you bought and are wearing, and go now to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a cleft of the rock." 5 So I went, and hid it by the Euphrates, as the LORD commanded me. 6 And after many days the LORD said to me, "Go now to the Euphrates, and take from there the loincloth that I commanded you to hide there." 7 Then I went to the Euphrates, and dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it. But now the loincloth was ruined; it was good for nothing.

8 Then the word of the LORD came to me: 9 Thus says the LORD: Just so I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. 10 This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own will and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing. 11 For as the loincloth clings to one's loins, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says the LORD, in order that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory. But they would not listen.

Devotional

The Rev. Catherine (Kay) Day '97

In this story of the ruined, useless belt, we see a contrast between Jeremiah and the proud of Israel. Look at the instructions given to Jeremiah: *Go and buy . . . So I bought . . . Take the loincloth . . . and hide it . . . Go now to the Euphrates and get the loincloth . . . I went to the Euphrates and dug.* (vv 1-2, 4-7). In all of this, Jeremiah promptly obeyed God. The belt is symbolic of Israel's holiness as a kingdom of priests, a symbol of the intimate relationship between God and Judah. It becomes dirty and useless. The symbol of obedience and faithfulness becomes worthless. The contrast with Jeremiah's obedience is striking.

This image is discouraging and encouraging at the same time. Here were a people created in the image of God, created to be his faithful servants, his obedient and grateful people, and they became proud and arrogant. They easily tarnished and abused the privilege that God had given them as those created in his image. We, too, can lose ourselves in pride that we are God's people. We can abuse that position. The contrast is Jeremiah's faithful obedience, even when he didn't fully understand what was meant by all of this. We can choose to obey, to hear God's voice and follow. The choice is ours to hold onto the image of God, or to tarnish that image. Choose wisely.

Prayer

Holy God, you have created us in your image, but we know that we have a choice to honor your image and to be faithful to you, or to tarnish and abuse your image. Give us the strength and the wisdom to uphold your image within us, to honor you in all we do. Amen.