

Sermon Draft

Text: Jeremiah 15: 15-21

Sermon: Genuine Love

Repeatedly it is said that our society is sick. And I think we all can agree on that. Especially with what has been happening on our streets and the world around us. There is a lack of love and a abundance of hate.

Jeremiah, too, lived in a sick society. For fifty-five years his country was ruled by an evil king, Manasseh. Under his rule, the worship of pagan gods, Baal and Asheroth, was introduced. He approved infant sacrifices and had his own son burned as an offering to the gods.

Astrology, fortune-telling, and wizardry were popular in Judah.

By word and example, Manasseh encouraged his people to sin. So many people were persecuted and killed that blood flowed from one end of Jerusalem to the other. Jeremiah had lost hope in the sick society that had rejected God.

Our society is like Jeremiah's, it is sick. Just like in Jeremiah's time people are looking everywhere but to God. Our society is sick, but how can it be made healthy again?

Many say that money will solve all our problems, that appears to be our national motto. Many spend their whole life in the pursuit of it. We spend and spend.

Our craze for material possessions is expressed in our living beyond our incomes. Why are we going in debt and living beyond our means? Greed and even pride and envy. We are not content with what God has given us because we think that life consists of the abundance of things possessed. Money is our passion, for we think it is the answer to our problems. But material things will not bring us true happiness.

Jesus asked, "***What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?***" A psychiatrist was advising a businessman who wanted to be a billionaire. He suggested that his client work only eight hours rather than sixteen per day and spend one day each week in a cemetery. The businessman asked, "What am I supposed to do in the cemetery?"

"Just walk around," replied the psychiatrist, "and get a look at some of the fellows you'll have to compete with to be the richest man underground." Well, apparently money is not the prescription for our sickness.

So, if the solution is not in earning all we can, maybe it is in learning all we can. Many again state this is why our prison population has doubled in the last decade ignoring the fact that many who occupy those prison cells are well educated, but maybe not too smart.

Theodore Roosevelt once said that if you take a boy who broke into a railroad boxcar and sent him to college, one day he would steal the whole railroad. The wife of a former vice-president once said that sixty million Americans were illiterate, and that over half of the prison inmates could neither read nor write. (The numbers are much higher today)

The obvious assumption was: Make people literate and they will not go to jail! She also forgot that many criminals are well educated people.

In fact, our learning can be our undoing. We can be too educated for our own good. Or like I like to say people can be too smart for their own good. There is a legend about three wise men crossing a desert. To prove their knowledge, one claimed he could produce the skeleton of a lion out of the sand. He did. The second boasted he could put flesh on the bones. He did. The third claimed he could outdo the other two by breathing life into the lion. He did, and then the lion ate up the three smart scientists!

It is true that in knowledge there is power, but knowledge alone has power to destroy us. So learning is good when used and applied correctly but is it the prescription for getting our sick society well? In the Psalms we read: *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."*

And of course much of the world, even here in the United States, tries fixing society by destroying it with bombs and murder, by looting and burning. If you are unhappy with your society just riot and destroy everything.

There are many proposed solutions or prescriptions for our sick society. Even some want us to believe all is well. But all is not well in our world and in our society. And this is nothing new to our age that's why God tells Jeremiah and us: ***"If you will turn back to me, I shall take you back and you shall stand before me."***

The answer is not earn, learn, or burn but TURN! According to our text, Jeremiah was angry with God for all the pain and persecution he was enduring. He pointed out to God that he absorbed his Word and enjoyed it and that he did not participate in the people's follies or pleasures.

Yet, he was being unjustly and innocently persecuted. Jeremiah cried out, "Why is my pain unceasing?" In other words, he was asking, "Why am I being mistreated by this sick society?" God tells him, a sick person, and tells us today as a sick society that the solution to our plight is to "turn" to him and he will restore us to health.

What does it mean to "turn"? It is not a simple turn to the left toward left-wing politics or to liberalism and modernism in terms of humanism and secularism. Nor does it mean a turn to the right in terms of ultraconservatism. Here the word "turn" means a radical, full 180-degree turn in terms of "return" or "repentance." To repent means to turn from Satan to God, from self to Christ, from evil to good. The good news is that God allows U-turns.

Society and the world want us to believe that we can fix our own sick condition, but we can't. We need help, we need the Great Physician. I know it can be hard to admit we are not self-sufficient and can't cure ourselves. But through faith God can help us. When King Jehoshaphat was surrounded by three attacking armies, he and his people went to the temple and prayed, *"Lord, we do not know what to do but our eyes are upon Thee."*

We come as the hymn goes: *Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to thy cross I cling. Naked, come to thee for dress; Helpless, look to thee for grace; Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.*

Jesus repeatedly warned: *"Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."* In our text what God says to Jeremiah if he returns: *I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you.*

Paul asks, *"Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"* Joel says, "Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful ..." The Psalmist assures us, *"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."* Jesus came to redeem and save the world, us and our sick society. For God so loved the world that He gave His One and only Son. Jesus bids us come to me all who are weak and heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Amen