

Second Sunday in Lent  
March 10, 2019

Text: Jeremiah 26:8-15  
Theme: “Mend Your Ways”

Lots of stuff needs mending—clothes, relationships, cars, appliances, bodies. We are ready for that mending to happen if we know there is a problem and a solution is within our reach. Of course we also know the expression “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Some standard is needed from which to determine if something needs mending. There are many measures. It could be blood tests, body scans, or it could be the old stethoscope. For cars a diagnostic computer will probably do the trick. It could be something as simple as a ruler to see if a board is the right length or not.

Sure, if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it, but on the other hand, it could be broke, but we don’t want to fix it. Why is that? It may be quite expensive, and we are not sure it is worth the cost. Or it could be that we don’t want it fixed, we kind of have gotten used to it this way and even like it, at least some of the time.

“You’re broken,” that’s what Jeremiah says in our text. And he’s calling his listeners to do something about it. “Mend your ways and deeds and obey the voice of the LORD your God.” (v. 13) But they are more in the frame of mind to rip the messenger instead of mending their ways. It’s can still be that way. The old nature constantly would want to bend us to that way of thinking.

Things had been broken in Judah for quite a while. Jeremiah has been pointing that out for some time. In 25:3,4 we read, “For twenty-three years...I have spoken persistently, but you have not listened.” It’s not been quite that long in our text. We look at the time references and in 25 we see we are in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Jehoiakim and in 26 we are in the first year of his reign, so Jeremiah had only been sounding the alarm for 19 years. As the prophets before him he was proclaiming, “Turn now, every one of you from his evil way and evil deeds.” (25:5) As God had instructed him to speak here in chapter 26, he is told, “Do not hold back a word. It may be they will listen, and every one will turn from his evil way.” (26:3a) And if not, “then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations.” (26:6)

So how were they broken? They had gone after other gods, deserted the true worship of the LORD God, maybe looked upon the LORD as one God among many. Maybe they could do some nominal religious duty, and all would be okay—throw him some scraps, say a lamb or two, or a kid from the goats, some grain, and he’ll be satisfied, appeased, leave us be, perhaps even do a little good for us in return. Actually, maybe he was not so demanding as other gods, some required your child for appeasement, and some in Judah had even offered such (like King Ahaz, 2 Kings 16:3). Ways and deeds that needed mending included looking upon your neighbors as so many lambs, or kids, or grain. They were there to benefit you. If the commandments needed to be stretched or reframed to make this happen then so be it.

Yes, they were broken, and God had the fix. Jeremiah proclaimed in hopes of seeing the first step of the fix, that is repentance, acknowledgement and sorrow over the problem. And then, maybe, “the LORD will relent of the disaster.” Repentance and renewal would be the fix, but things had progressed so far that repentance did not guarantee prevention of disaster.

Is there not a lot of mending that needs to be done today? We look around and what do we see? We see the truth of Paul’s words, “Many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and their glory is in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.” (Philippians 3:19) We see this in culture all around us and we see it with those who want to be within the church and want the church to conform to the culture. We see it in those modern-day foxes who like Herod want to silence any who would call them to account for sin (Luke 13:32). We see it in the pursuit of the good life, that one of advancing self, that of maximizing pleasure and minimizing any discomfort. Is it not evident?

But when it comes to us, well, maybe not so much so? Certainly, there is a difference in standing before God between those who look to Christ in faith and those who do not, a salvation and damnation difference. But as said at the beginning, the old nature always is ready to break out in brokenness. It could be in the selfish spirit. “God doesn’t need my money.” You’re right. It’s all His to begin with. He has given to us to meet our needs and so we can give to the needs of others. We give for the

spread of the Gospel in the work of our congregation and in CCA, or organizations like Lutheran Hour Ministries, and many others. We give to those who are having a hard time, falling short of meeting their needs starting with our brothers and sisters in Christ. How well are we doing? Is some mending in order?

Brokenness can show in arrogance. "I don't need anyone telling me what to do." "I have a strong faith (as much as I need). I don't need to hear the Gospel that much or receive the Lord's Supper that often. I'll be okay. Who are you to tell me God wants me in the Divine Service. I make sure I do my time." Is some way mending called for?

God has not left us in the dark as to what mended ways and deeds look like. We read in Deuteronomy 12:28, "Be careful to obey all these words that I command you, that it may go well with you and with your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God." God said through Moses, "Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'<sup>7</sup> For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?<sup>8</sup> And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?" (Deuteronomy 4: 6-8) Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:24, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will

be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” God gives rules for a reason. The Giver of life know best how this life is best to be lived.

“Mend your ways and your deeds.” God says this is where you see if they measure up, His rules, His commandments. But maybe what I need is a slide rule, no, not that kind that used to be used for mathematical computations. No, I need a rule that will slide to fit the behavior. Who doesn’t need that! (who doesn’t do that). “No other gods,” should be no other gods most of the time. I might find value in a little divinity of money or scheming or pleasure. “Give of my firstfruit,” first of all I think I need to be fruitful in giving myself the good life, and then if there is something left over, god’s turn. “Do not neglect the assembling together,” well, not total neglect, once or twice a month, or at least biannually.

The slide rule, it’s the rule that needs mending (bending). So, I take these two blocks and I want to bridge the gap between them. I see they are about 15” apart, but the board I have is only around 14”, what can I do? I can measure with this rule (a sliding middle) and now I can adjust it to get the same measure on the board. So, I’m good, right?

If you say no then maybe you need to rethink that. What Jeremiah kept on saying was not going to happen, not going to work and they were getting more than a little tired of listening to it. ‘Enough of your words and enough of you!’ “You shall die” for prophesying against God’s temple! (26:8, 9) They take Jeremiah in hand and bring him before the officials of Judah and say as much. Who was leading the charge, those entrusted with

the matters of God, the priest and the prophets. Mend the rule, not my ways, and if the messenger persists, then rip the messenger.

No, these prophets and priests did not mend their ways, but there would be mending. The civil officials will not put him to death. Jeremiah said, ‘Kill me, if you want, but you will be bringing innocent blood upon yourselves. God has really sent me to speak these words.’ (vs. 14, 15) The officials will not allow his death. They give an example of the prophet Micah saying in the days of Hezekiah that Zion would be plowed like a field (16:18, Micah 3:12) and Hezekiah did not have him put to death. God is keeping his word to Jeremiah. “I make you an iron pillar, bronze wall against the kings, officials, and priests—they will fight against you but not prevail.” (Jeremiah 1:18-19)

Mending the rule to fit the ways really didn’t and doesn’t work. It did not work for Judah. God’s words of coming destruction will come to pass. There will be death, destruction, and exile. The city would be desolate, like Shiloh (former place of Tabernacle, but emphasis on the former). Mending, bending the rule did not fix the brokenness only invalidated the rule. Mend the measure but the deed will still come up short and disaster ensues.

Mending will come. It will come in the Mender Jeremiah spoke of, “The LORD our Righteousness.” (23:5-6) He comes and proclaims the Kingdom is near, casts out demons, and heals the sick. He came not let things slide or to advocate slide rules, but to fulfill all God’s rules. He does, always. He tells those who think they are steeped in righteousness of

their unrighteousness. He comes to bind up the hearts of those who know they are broken. Look who fights against Him, see how similar to Jeremiah. It's those who are charged with the affairs of God, the chief priest, and the teachers of the law who take Him in hand. Mend the rule, not their ways, and if the messenger persists, rip the Messenger. They accuse Him of speaking against the Temple, a charge that was not true. They take Him to the civil official and say, 'this man deserves to die!' The civil official examines Him and declares, 'no, nothing worthy of death, he's innocent,' but then in the end hands him over to die anyway.

He dies in this horrible way on the cross. He didn't deserve it. We did, but He endured in our place. Jesus faces what we had coming to us for our ways, our deeds, our hearts. It seemed as though the enemy(ies) had prevailed. But they had not. He does. He lives. He reigns. He returns! He has, He does bridge the gap between us and God. In Him we have life everlasting, a gift. On Him we build our lives now. He is the sure foundation. We conform our ways and deeds to His will, a conforming showing on the outside that can only come because of a transformation on the inside. We set our feet to walking in His ways and our hands to doing those deeds, those good works He has prepared beforehand for us to do. It is for the good of our neighbor and the honor of God.

Mend your ways and your deeds. They are in need of daily mending. We praise God that in Christ not only do we see the brokenness, we see the mending that is pleasing in God's sight. For Jesus' sake. Amen