

The Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 25, 2017

Text: Jeremiah 20:7-13

Theme: “Doormat?”

“Love Life,” so we read on this item I picked up at Lowes this past week. I don’t think it’s meant to an adjective and a noun that would point us to one’s amorous activities. I think it’s a verb, even an imperative, and a noun. Thus it directs its readers to have a fondness of, a care and concern for life. Life is an excellent object of love. It is a gift from God. Love the life given to every single person be that person in the womb, near the end of his present life, or somewhere in between. Perhaps the manufacturers did not have such a heavy intent in mind. It is marketing, a way to spruce up the appeal of a doormat. It did catch my eye. It’s a little catchier than “welcome,” and certainly more socially acceptable than “leave me be.”

Love life. That’s no so difficult when there is much going on in one’s life to love. It’s a lot harder when life is, well, a lot harder. It’s harder when things don’t seem to be looking up, even more so when you are looking up and what you see are the soles of feet coming down. The doormat perspective is not easy.

We may know that stepped on feeling. It comes in different ways and for different reasons. It may come with success. The reward for successful work can be more work. You are the go to person because you take what is given and go, go about the accomplishment of the task or project. Perhaps there is not much of a search to find someone else, or

you have not made it known that right now the answer is “no, I’m sorry, not this time.” So more stuff comes and you feel a little stepped on.

That doormat experience may also come in the form of kicking back. No, I’m not speaking of kick backs, some sort of reward for looking the wrong way at wrong doing. What I’m referring to resistance to the work. You have planned for the good, for advancement of the cause. You present that plan, work for its success, but it just isn’t working. It’s like kicking against the goads and after a while you begin to think, “why even try?”

And finally you can feel a little walked on for doing the right and hard thing. You have spoken the truth of God’s Word and lived it. You have refused to do what God has forbidden even though many are urging you to do that very thing. You may have spoken to a brother or sister caught up in sin in hopes of restoration, but instead of repentance there is more resistance. Ridicule and rejection of sorts may come upon you as a result. Such doormat experiences make it hard to love life.

Well if this is where you are, then welcome to Jeremiah’s life. It doesn’t sound much like he is loving life as we read our text today from Jeremiah 20. He says he has become a laughing stock. He is mocked, denounced, even close friends are whispering, “terror on every side.” (vs 10) They seem to be just watching for his fall so they can rejoice in it.

As we look at the first 6 verses of Jeremiah 20 we see the occasion of this lament. Jeremiah had been put in stocks by Pashhur the priest. He was the chief officer in the house of the LORD. It looks like Pashhur was

trying to silence Jeremiah from speaking words of coming destruction on Jerusalem. Pashhur released Jeremiah the next day. Jeremiah told him that the LORD would call him, “Terror on Every Side.” He might try to silence Jeremiah but he was not going to escape the coming terror Jeremiah was prophesying. It appears Jeremiah’s detractors were throwing this “terror on every side” back on him in ridicule.

Jeremiah had a long history of being stepped on, yes, since the days of his being called already as a youth to be God’s prophet. We are told in 1:1-3 that he was the son of Hilkiyah, one of the priest and that he worked during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. Maybe life had not been so bad, easier to love, during the reign of Josiah who was a godly king. Jeremiah even composed a lament as his death (2 Chronicles 35:25). But it was bad news the rest of the way. Jeremiah’s message remained the same, one of repentance, a call to turn from the reliance on idols and to stop dealing unjustly with one another. He also was consistent in his message of coming destruction as repentance had not happened.

Yes, he knew that stepped on feeling. It appeared he had little success to show for all his labor. In Jeremiah 25 we read these words, “For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened. ⁴ You have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although the LORD persistently sent to you all his servants the prophets.” (vs 3, 4) Jeremiah

may have been a little frustrated after 23 years. But he was to have 18 more years of not being listened to as a prophet. There would be faithful acts by individuals in the midst of this unfaithfulness on Jeremiah's behalf. There would be momentary signs of hope of getting through to king Zedekiah. But it was the same downward path of sinfulness and rebellion. There would be long and more severe times of confinement of Jeremiah. The doormat life was pretty much the way of life Jeremiah knew.

So we have spoken of the doormat and the feet of those who would step on the doormat. There is another player here we have not spoken of, the owner of the house, even it's builder. He is the one who decides about doormats. That builder is the LORD of hosts (vs 12), the One who sees the heart and the mind (vs 12). Jesus speaks of Him, "And do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28) What if the builder were working against you?

Jeremiah laments, O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are strong than I and You have prevailed." (Jeremiah 20:1) He seemed to be between a rock and a hard place. If I cry out, "Violence and destruction," then he knew the response would be reproach and ridicule upon him. But if he decided to keep God's Word to himself, then, he says, it was like a fire shut up in his bones. He was between the Rock of Israel and the hardness of hearts of the people of Israel.

What happens if we think we can just shut up God's Word in our heart and not follow it? Who do we think we are fooling? The only one

being fooled is self. We can't prevail against God. If God is for us, who can be against us, but what if we turn that around. If God is against us, who can be for us?"

No, we can't we stand against Him. On our own we have every reason to fear. The good news is He has not left us on our own. He has taken away fear and given us every reason to trust that He is for us. We read from our Gospel lesson, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." If God is for us, who can be against us? Yes, O, yes, He is for us. He did not spare His only Son but gave Him up for us all.

In Jesus the Almighty laid aside the full use of that might. The Builder of the house lays down His life as our doormat. He is reproached, derided, mocked, but He doesn't respond in kind. As our doormat all our sins are wiped on, completely, cleanly on Him. He faced the burning of God's justice as the Father turned His face against His Son.

He prevails, overcomes, has the victory over sin, death, and the devil. He is dead, buried, but no decay. The bonds of death are just exploded by His resurrection. The devil may try to stomp on us with accusations. But we know there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We can say, "Hey, Jesus took all those accusations for me in full."

In spite of the hard times, the troubles, Jeremiah knows whom to trust. "But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my

persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten.” (Jeremiah 20:11) Jeremiah calls out, “LORD of hosts, who tests the righteous...” (vs 12) God doesn’t deceive. He had not deceived Jeremiah. He had told him from the beginning how hard it would be. God has said at Jeremiah’s call, “do not be dismayed...they will fight against, you, but they will not prevail.” (1:17, 19) God has promised to strengthen him and make him like a fortified city (1:18, 19) It was all a testing that did fortify, make him stronger as that which could not support was burned away. Jeremiah would continue in faith and faithfulness all those 41 years and beyond. Right now as we consider his words we are yet benefiting.

There is another side to this mat. Yes, we may feel a bit doormat. But a life of faithfulness is one of fruitfulness to our Lord. God uses us to meet the needs of others in this life. He uses us to point to the One who brings eternal life. God gives us so many blessings that make it easy to love life on many days. Other days comes the hard times, hard days, and transitional times. These could come from evil things, even good things as good things in the lives of others takes them away from close relationship and service with us. Yet through it all God, as we look to Him, strengthens us for faithfulness.

In that faithfulness we do give an answer to the hope that is in is. Here the other side of the doormat becomes evident. We point to the door of eternal life, the One who is the way, the truth, and the life. Yes, we

may feel a bit stepped on now and then, maybe more than a bit. We know the Door. We love the life He gives. In Him we do find the fullness of life. For Jesus' sake. Amen