

Jeremiah 26

“Why do you keep calling out that sin pastor? Don’t you have other examples? Can’t you Move on, isn’t that what forgiveness is about?”

I’ve actually heard this type of response before. The person might even know that you, the pastor, knows that sin they struggle with, and then whenever it shows up in the sermon they are being picked on, singled out. “That’s what I get for confessing to the pastor. Even if not another soul was told, I’m still the bad example, and for those who might now... I’m sure they are thinking of me...”

I am sympathetic to this. Why berate a person for something that may be over, dealt with, forgiven, and healed? And a sermon should never be a place to publicly shame someone.

But it also raises a question. Should sermons call out sin? Specific sins? Or is it more comfortable if we speak only in generalities? My hunch is most hearers think sermons should address sin, “Call it out, Pastor, that’s right, stand for the truth, call out the evil.... As long as it is someone else’s evil.”

But what do you think? In a room with 100 sinners, is it just *your* pet sin the Pastor keeps picking on? Or is it possible someone else struggles with it as well? Paul writes in 1 Cor 10: “No temptation has seized you that is not common to mankind.”

And so if a sin is symptomatic of a people, of a congregation, or even a few in the congregation (or even 1 person in the congregation?) should that sin be avoided? Or spoken to all the more? But again, that is easy for us to say when it’s a sin we don’t struggle with.

We are not alone in this. Jeremiah speaks a word of the Lord to the people of Jerusalem. And they don't want to hear it. "Don't speak God's Word against us or this city. Why are you picking on us, we are the good-guys here, why are you telling us to mend our ways and obey the word of the Lord?!"

And who do they get mad at? Jeremiah. But it isn't His Word, it's the Lord's. So who is their real problem with? The Lord.

That realization doesn't make Jeremiah's job any easier, of course, as they debate whether to kill him or not (they actually decide not to at this juncture in our reading today...).

But little do they know, worse off than Jeremiah on trial, is them – they are in an even worse predicament. Because where does that leave them? They either have to say (1) the Word of God is wrong, which isn't a great place to be, or they (2) have to say the Word of God is right, but no one should bring it up to them... for what reason exactly?

Why do we preach the law? Those words that convict us? And yes, I say "us" because, here's another secret: Pastors put particular sins in their sermons... because they are sinners too. And we get to project our sins on you – your welcome! Or maybe to put it another way: we, having sin, can speak on our mutual sinful condition... lets go with that one! It's preaching 101, "If you, Preacher, want to know what they are struggling with, look inside and see what you are struggling with." And so your pet sin might get picked on, because it's the same as mine. You aren't alone in that spotlight, not at all.

Now, I suppose one could say, "Well that word you are preaching doesn't apply to me, Pastor."

Or, "You're using it wrong." Ok, fair enough. If this word is clearly for someone else... then why are you so defensive about it? Should we not call out all sin?

Or one could say, “But that’s not what God’s Word says, Pastor!” Ok, that’s fair. We should be able to back up our law with some verses... and so if that isn’t the case, then, and the pastor is just preaching his opinion on an issue, then, yes, you are free from judgment, and you can be the first to say it. And we Pastor’s should listen to that rebuke, far be it from us to judge based on opinion, not God’s Word.

Notice: Jeremiah’s hearers try this! They say, “Why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying ‘This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate..?’” Do you see it? They say he is *claiming* to prophecy in the name of the Lord. And we know this, because if they believed he was actually prophesying in the name of the Lord – they would listen! But they don’t listen because they don’t think it’s God’s Word. Jeremiah responds, “For in truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears....”

Jeremiah had a hard Call because any “prophet” can just “say things” that doesn’t mean it’s God’s Word... We, however, know what God’s Word is. We have the written Word. Which people still try and wiggle out of – “That was written a long time ago, in a different culture, and context...” We know better. If that judgment is biblical, if it is from the unchanging Lord, if it is a sin... and it is one that convicts you... how would God have you respond to that?

Like the people of Jerusalem? Who say, “Stop preaching Jeremiah or we will kill you!”

Or... “Now Mend your ways and your deeds and obey the voice of the Lord your God and the Lord will relent of the disaster that he has pronounced against you.” When someone says, “Stop picking on my pet sin,” it’s an indication that they don’t want to be reminded of it – because they are still in it and are not ready to own that and fight against it. Or, at the least, it’s an indication

that they still have shame in regards to it, and it has not been fully cut-open by the law and healed by the Gospel.

Because if you are convicted by the law that what you are doing is wrong, then you would know the right thing is for you to be called out on it, that it may stop, “yes, Lord, let that word come to me and let it hurt.” Or, with our habitual pet sins that cling so close and cause us so much frustration, if you are convicted that it is a sin and it is wrong, you would readily confess that you do need *continual reminders* to fight the good fight.

This is biblical folks. Paul in Romans 7 does not say he has mastered all his sin, but neither does he hide from it and say he should stop hearing about it. He says “the Good I want to do, I don’t do and the evil I don’t want to do, I keep doing” – “Me! The spotlight on me, Romans! Who will save me from this body of death? Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Even more, Does Paul not condemn his former life? Does he not say he is the chief of sinners? Does Peter hide from his betrayal? Or is it featured in the Gospels? The Church Fathers do this as well, Augustine points to his former life as an example of sin and God’s grace to bring him out of it.

Are they saying, “stop bringing it up?” Or are they saying, “look at the wretchedness, and look to this One who loves me nevertheless and has washed it all away”?

May this be us! When we say that confession, listen to the words, do we mean them? “Practice what you preacher, pastor!” Indeed. I am a sinner. Who needs his sins to be called out. Sins of pride, greed, mouth, and eye. I’ve got them. Shine the spotlight.

Is there one who can cover them? One who can take the shame so I can be honest about them?

Yes. And now our eyes move from the spotlight of our sin and shame and to a cross and a Savior.

And this then is where we can go back around to the function of God's good law and why we preach it: 1. The curb: It so that we might stop the evil or at least fight against it, "Mend your ways and deeds." 2: The Mirror - And it is so we might see our need for a Savior and draw nearer to God for mercy, "The Lord will relent." 3: The guide: It's so we might be his people of goodness in a broken world like Jeremiah was.

Like the greater Jeremiah was. Yes, Jeremiah was not the last Prophet to be threatened with death for preaching the Word of God. No, Jesus, the greater Jeremiah, as he said in our Gospel lesson, will die in Jerusalem. He too is well acquainted with sorrow and suffering. He was taken, put on a false trial, and killed for proclaiming the truth.

While we try to dodge the law, and say stop picking on me, and stop shining the spotlight on my shame - Christ hears all our pet sins, none of which convict him, none of which make him feel defensive or shameful, and he says, "I will take those. Let me have them, let that word of judgment come to me and let it hurt." He says, "Let me take the shameful spotlight off of you, let it come to me instead, along with the wrath and hell it deserves."

And the marvelous beauty of our God then is that, in Jesus, he says, "No, no, I won't shine a light on your sin that you may be downtrodden forever, no, I will cover it. With a robe of righteousness won when I was lifted up, shamefully, for all to see."

He takes the shameful judgment, that your shame might be forever covered. This is his love.

And where does this leave you then, you with your pet sins? It leaves you, child of God, in a place where you don't have to be afraid of them - you can be honest about them and your struggles, but not afraid of them.

It leaves you like the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 – there are some big sinners in there. And the Bible shines a light on their sin for billions of people to know about. But in Hebrews 11, in that list of faithful redeemed, the sins aren't listed anymore, no, only the victories given by faith. This is the same for you. You need not fear your sin, you need not fear the judgment when all is revealed.

You have a covering, the robe of Jesus' righteousness. You are washed clean. Hear his word of Law, let it hurt, hear his word of Gospel, let it cover you.

I close with a quote from Luther from his letters of Spiritual Counsel, "So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: "I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall be also!"

God be praised. Amen.