

+In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit+

[Amen?]

By Jeremiah, God says, "*Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes . . . who prophesy lies and the deceit of their own heart.*"

So Jesus also said, "*Beware false prophets.*" Not everyone who presents himself as a teacher of God's Word is actually sent by Him. This is the reason that, in the Lutheran Church, we teach and confess that *no one is to publicly preach or teach or administer the Sacraments without being rightly called.* This means also that the wait you are now experiencing in your vacancy is good for you, and for the rest of the Church too. It would be easy to find someone—anyone—to do the job; but how important it is that that someone be God's man, called in the Church's usual way, ordained according to apostolic practice, and publicly received as one approved to be an overseer of God's flock in this place. Plenty of prophets are running. The question is, have they stood in God's council? Has God sent them? Do they speak His Word faithfully? And if so, will you stand for it?

Our Lord says that He *did not come to bring peace and unity, but division.* Didn't the angels say, "*peace on earth, goodwill toward men*"? Now Christ says He divides even within households, for He *"casts fire to the earth."* The fire, as Jeremiah says, is there in the Lord's Word. The Word of God isn't an offer or a proposal—"perhaps you'd like to consider giving Christianity a try?" It is the Word of the One who is Himself *a consuming fire.* This is why it splits like a hammer against a rock, dividing families and even individual hearts. His Word is a double-edged sword that pierces to the heart. It claims allegiance or it dashes to pieces.

That is the sense in which Christ and His Word do not bring peace. They do not bring

the false and easy peace of this world. His peace is hard-won and unique. The world cannot give it. Christ alone earned it by His blood, through the fires of God's wrath poured out on Him in our place. The fiery *Baptism* to which Christ refers is His Passion. *No other creature could make satisfaction for sin, only Christ true God and man could do that.* But such a statement forces the issue: which peace will you trust and seek?

We must also remember what Jesus said earlier in Luke 12, which in Matthew's Gospel is spoken in the same breath as today's saying about bringing division: *"If you confess me before men,"* Jesus says, *"I will also confess you before My Father in heaven; and if you deny me before men, I will also deny You before My Father in heaven."* To whom will you listen and repeat, those who speak their own words or Christ's? And if Christ, then will you accept that believing and confessing His truth will likely divide you from others?

First, then, Jesus calls us not to listen to the words of those who run without being sent. This means do not be deceived to listen to anyone whom God has not given the Office of the Ministry, but who takes it up anyway. Do not immerse yourself in their writings. Don't receive or support a missionary who is not rightly called. And if the pastor you have called returns the call, don't let anyone talk you into hiring some half-pastor or licensing a layman to fill-in instead. Even if a Synod official should insist that it is a good deal, do not listen. Your Lord loves you enough to send not a discount minister, but a true preacher, a real servant of His council and Word.

Second, Jesus also calls us to confess Him and bear with the divisions that result in the world, so that His genuine teaching may be recognized. To do this means Christians cannot leave matters of doctrine up to their pastors. We all must listen with a discerning

ear, and confess accordingly. *Let the prophets with dreams tell their dreams*; we must cling to those who *have the Lord's Word and speak it faithfully*. For this reason, the greatest and simplest word in the Church is not assigned to the pastor, but to the congregation: "Amen." "Amen" is the word of faith which agrees and confesses, *"Yes! This is most certainly true!"* It is your word, dear Christians, your stand in Christ and for His truth, which is why you should sing and say you "Amens" boldly. Only do not give your "Amen" cheaply or carelessly! Do not be mere "yes-men," but utter your "Amen" in Christ and Him alone!

If you do, this will divide you from those who confess differently. It cannot be avoided. Either you put your "Amen" to Jesus and His words, or to dreams and falsely peaceful preaching. Such division is better than its alternative: apathy. Division is preferable to the false peace of not caring about the Lord's Word and teaching.

Now, if this goes for a little word like "Amen," it most certainly goes for joining a church or being united to a congregation by communing with them when the Lord's Supper is offered. To commune is to join together with that congregation and what it believes, teaches, and confesses. If that church teaches falsely—if that pastor is a false prophet—the Lord does not say "overlook it"; He says, *beware! Flee! Do not listen!* We confess not only with our words, but also with our presence and with our eating and drinking. Is it true? Then say "Amen, this is God's Divine Doctrine and it is true." Is it false? Then withhold your "Amen." "This is not God's truth; I and every other person ought to renounce and run from it."

*Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to [false prophets] who fill you with vain hopes; who say continually to those who despise the Word of the Lord, 'it shall be well*

*with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'no disaster shall come upon you.'*" You cannot judge by your heart. Judge instead by whether it is the voice and truth of the Good Shepherd you hear. Has this preacher *"paid attention to His Word and listened?"* For *"if they had stood in My council,"* God says, *"then they would have proclaimed My Words to My people."* The Holy Scriptures are the words from the Lord's mouth written by His true prophets and apostles. All true preaching in our day will come from and accord with the Scriptures. It certainly must not come from visions of a preacher's own imagination. When you judge a preacher and a pastor, do it also according to these Scriptures and not simply whether it sits *"well with you."* The Scriptures aren't chaff, but *wheat*—wholesome. They aren't empty or dim, but clear and bright *like fire*—revealing the truth and cleansing away falsehood.

*The anger of the Lord will not turn back until He has executed and accomplished the intents of His heart*—not the intentions of a preacher's or a self-proclaimed prophet's or yours. *His heart* is what matters. And what we see amid all this wrath is that the Lord's anger is directed against your enemies—enemies who would put the dividing line not between truth and falsehood, but between you and Christ. *In the latter days you will understand it clearly.* And those latter days have come. Christ has faced the "Baptism of fire" in His sacrificial death and laid down His life for His sheep.

Perhaps you find yourself divided from those close to you. I do not know many families for whom the dividing lines of God's Word do not cut right through the middle, and it is a painful division. Nevertheless, take heart dear Christians, for Christ Jesus *will acknowledge you before Our Father in heaven.* Stand firm in His Word and do not compromise your confession of faith to make the easy peace. The Lord has been baptized

with the fires of God's wrath to redeem you, to claim you as His own, and to give you a Word and a Name and a promise that do not fail, which are worthy of your "Amen" and your trust. He would not have you settle for straw and fading dreams and false peace.

So Christ's body and blood are held before you at this altar each week, and the pastor says, "The peace of the Lord be with you always." In this you hear Christ's promise: that you may be divided in this world, but never from Him. You may be restless and unsettled and a Church militant in this world, but He has made lasting peace by the blood of His cross. And you know what we Christians say to that...

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Proper 15C (Jeremiah 23:16–29; Luke 12) 1543

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