

**Sermon – Sunday, September 3, 2023**

**Rev. Randi**

Jeremiah wasn't really a bullfrog but rather a prophet. However, the people truly never understood a single word he said – or if they did – they ignored him and kept doing their own thing.

Jeremiah lived in the 500s and 600s BCE. Biblical scholars sometimes dub him "The Weeping Prophet." He had the misfortune to be a prophet during times when Judah followed their human urges rather than doing what God had commanded them. Jeremiah prophesied that the defeat of Judah by foreign enemies and the subsequent exile of the people to Babylon came about because of their unfaithfulness. When other prophets were preaching that the exile would end soon so that the people would be happy, Jeremiah told them instead to settle in and be ready to stay away from their homes for a long time. He also prophesied that the Temple would be destroyed. The problem was that the people depended on the Temple for their sense of security. They had started worshiping the Temple building instead of worshiping God by being kind and just. So, God would punish them by destroying the Temple. Only when the Israelites returned to God would God redeem them. Needless to say, the Israelites didn't like this message. Of course, everything Jeremiah foretold came true because his words were a message from God.

So, saying Jeremiah went against the world's culture while doing what God wanted him to do would be an understatement. But Jeremiah did it anyway. Imagine Jeremiah's life. He didn't have any friends. He was thrown into a muddy cistern without food and left there. He was arrested and tried on a capital charge, although acquitted. Later, he was taken to Egypt. An extrabiblical source says his exasperated fellow citizens stoned him to death there.

Indeed, Jeremiah took up the cross when He followed God. He suffered for doing what was right. His suffering wasn't fair any more than Jesus's death was fair. Yet God ultimately delivered Jeremiah in the end.

Compared to what Jeremiah endured, living a godly life today is relatively easy. However, it is still difficult. Sometimes, we tend to seek security in things other than God. It could be money or our retirement accounts. Or our jobs. Or the church as an institution or the church building. While hoping that our retirement will last as long as we do is fine, trusting in it more than we trust in God is a sin. Likewise, while loving the church or its buildings is good, putting even these holy things before God is a sin. The institutional church, unfortunately, has not always been on the side of justice and right, for example. When we see that the church has departed from its mission, we are called to urge the church to change even if our urgings make us unpopular. If the buildings or grounds cease serving God's purpose, we must change how we view and use them.

Jesus calls us to be countercultural, just like the weeping and unappreciated Jeremiah. The world would have us make decisions based on what's best for us as individuals. For most in the world, life is all about WIIFM – What's in it, for me? Those of us who take up

our cross and follow Jesus make decisions based on what will best bring about the change God wants to see in the world. It may mean giving up much of what we value – our possessions, reputation, and security. The world would also encourage us to be quiet when we see wrongs occurring in society. After all, getting involved in events that happen to others can be physically or emotionally dangerous. God, however, asks us to speak up even if, in speaking up, we jeopardize a friendship, job, or personal safety or security.

The world also would have us seek revenge against those who've done wrong to us. After all, "they had it coming," the world would say. However, God calls us to be kind to everyone and to do everything we can to be at peace with our neighbors. We sometimes like to wallow in our self-pity and hatred when someone treats us poorly. Sometimes, we hold onto the hate so long that it becomes an old friend to us. We don't want to let it go. In this case, taking up our cross means being willing to give up that old friend, "resentment and self-pity," so that we can love that person who hurt us and move forward as a healed and whole person.

No, being a Christian isn't easy. And the secular world may never understand a single word we say about our faith. But if we consistently live our faith, the world might at least notice that we're different. And those in the world might inquire about that difference. They might realize that Christianity is a kinder, gentler, and more loving way than the world's way. And when the world realizes that love is a better way to live, we begin to see Resurrection all around us.