

Let us pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, so often in this life we turn our attention from You. We seek comfort and fulfillment in our jobs, spouses, family, and toys; but we do not always seek You. Please, Lord, forgive us our trespasses for the sake of Jesus Christ. Lord, we also ask that You would turn our attentions and desires to You and Your holy word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Old Testament book of the Prophet Jeremiah the thirty-first chapter beginning at the twenty-third verse:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "They shall again use this speech in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I bring back their captivity: 'The LORD bless

you, O home of justice, and mountain of holiness!' " 24 "And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all its cities together, farmers and those going out with flocks. 25 "For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul."

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, O Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

In our Gospel lesson, we hear about one of the times that Jesus was able to perform a miracle: He fed 4,000 people. These were people who had come out to Jesus to see Him and see His works, they were seeking Him out and trying to figure out just who this Jesus was. Of course they knew about His previous miracles and healings, still they wanted to see Him for themselves.

However, as the day wears on, Jesus begins to worry about the people. Not wanting to send them away and allow them to faint and stumble on the way home, so Jesus provides for them. He provides food to not only fill their bellies but He also provides a miracle to provide food for their souls.

And so it is with us. Jesus sees us, He knows that though we are sinners, we are answering His plea to come to Him... and He cares for us. He provides us nourishment for our bodies every day that we are alive; but most importantly, through His word and sacraments, ***God satisfies our souls.***

While the fall of Jerusalem had not yet taken place, Jeremiah is already well aware of what is going to happen. God has had him prophesying for years about the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the remaining Jews. Jeremiah was to take this message to

the people in hopes that they would repent and change their ways... of course we know that they never did that. The people of Jerusalem continued in their sinful ways and were eventually carried off from Jerusalem. Yet, years before this happened God had a message for these people, a message of restoration. God promises that He will bring back the captives, all those who were taken away, and they will come back and worship Him. How often our own lives sound just like the lives of the Israelites.

We are sinful people and we sin greatly and often. We sin in big ways and in 'little' ways. We sin against our friends, neighbors, family, spouse, children, co-workers, everyone... but especially we sin against God.

Just like the people of Judah we sin against God in myriad ways, but none more so than when we replace God in our lives... just as

the Israelites had done. The Israelites knew God, they knew His commandments, they knew His Temple and His presence... and still they strayed from Him; and we do the exact same thing.

We know God's commandments; after all, how many of us were confirmed? Through confirmation, both as a child and as an adult, we had to learn and know the Ten Commandments. Not only did we have to know the bare meaning of the commandments but we also got to learn in depth what each commandment meant. Sure it says, "Do not kill," but it means that we should not even be angry at another person. Sure it says, "Do not lie," but it means that we should give people the benefit of the doubt and put the best construction on events and actions and words. We all know the commandments and still we break them constantly.

We know God's Temple, for Christ is the fulfillment of that Temple. We know our Savior Jesus Christ more intimately than any other person. We know Him as our friend, our God, our Savior, the One who gave His life for me. We know our Savior Jesus Christ; yet, we still turn away from Him. When it is expedient to not know Jesus, we are very good at playing dumb about our Savior. When it serves to keep me in an earthly relationship, it is easier to deny Christ than to give up that friendship. When it lets me gain friends, money, or fame it is easier to deny Christ than to admit that He is the most important thing in my life. When it comes to the importance of my family and friends, it is much easier to make them number one... and not Jesus.

We know God's presence; yet we continue to run from that presence. God is present in His house, this church, and how much easier is it for us to want to stay home or not be here

than come into God's house? We know God's presence when we come to receive His very body and blood in the Lord's Supper; yet, how easy is it to not receive it... or better yet, to blaspheme God's name and His sacrifice because "You just take communion," and you never really think about the sin that you carry with you and maybe even come forward without truly asking for forgiveness. We know God's presence as He has claimed us as His own in our baptism, but which of us can remember on which day we were baptized or the pastor who did it or what it truly means for us.

You see, just like the Israelites, just like Judah, we very often turn our backs on our God... and then we wonder, we complain, when we are led into our own personal exile. We abandon God and we wonder why we feel lost, unloved, and apart. We have strained our relationship with God... We do

it. And yet God constantly stands at the ready to call us back to Him.

As the Lord Himself tells us through Jeremiah the prophet, ***"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'They shall again use this speech in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I bring back their captivity.'"*** God is calling us back to Himself... we do not come to Him, we are in captivity to our sin, we are in bondage to satan; and still, God is calling us back to Himself. God is constantly calling out to us through His word and through His sacraments.

However, most importantly, God called us to Himself through the most important thing... His Son. "Through Jesus Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself," Paul tells us. Through Christ God is reconciling us and He is calling us to Him. Through Jesus' perfect life we are called to God when the

Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, calls out to us. Through Jesus' innocent death, we see Him nailed to the cross and we know that He is there for us, and yet, because of us. Through Jesus' rising again, we know that we now have heaven waiting for us... we have an eternity with God once this life is over, but we don't have to wait.

Right now, through faith in Jesus and in all that He has done, we have our salvation and we have heaven. While we cannot grasp onto these things, they are ours. We have them from the moment of our baptism. We have them every time we turn to Christ instead of giving in to sin. We have them every time we sin... but we come to Christ with a repentant heart seeking forgiveness in His blood.

Jeremiah concludes this portion of his prophecy with these words, ***“And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all its cities***

together, farmers and those going out with flocks. ²⁵ ***“For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.”*** And just like in Judah, so in this world, He has left us farmers and shepherds... two people that Jesus has much to say about. Jesus tells us about sowers, farmers, who go out with the seed and sow it wherever it will grow... and that seed is God's word. Those farmers who would take God's word and scatter to the ends of the earth and allow God to cause its growth. And Jesus also tells us about shepherds, Himself the chief and good shepherd, who would give up His life for the sheep. These are those whom God has left in the land so that His word and His people would be safe.

But do not think that only pastors or missionaries are these people, your friends, neighbors, family... so many people can take God's word and spread it. So many people can provide guidance and leadership

for you in your life. Those who are faithful to God and His message are those farmers and shepherds of God's flocks, chief of whom is Jesus Christ our Lord.

And still, God has assured us that it is He who satiates our weary soul and who replenishes our sorrowful soul. When we are weary in this life, when we are weary from our personally imposed exile from God... God satisfies us. He gives us all good things, even while we are in exile, knowing that those who are His will recognize His hand in action and come running back to Him. And God promises when our soul is sorrowful, when we are sorrowing over some sin, God will replenish us. He will replenish our strength and our faith in Him and in all that He has done.

Dear friends in Christ, just like God led the Israelites back when they had been taken captive from Jerusalem, so He also leads you

back from your exile. Though you turn away from Him much... He still calls out to you constantly, seeking you, and calling you back as only He does. And when you come back, He satisfies you and He replenishes you... this is what your God does.

Thanks be to God that He cares so much for me, an often self-imposed exile. Thanks be to God that He replenishes my sorrowful soul. And thanks be to God that He has mercy on me and He satisfies my soul... for He is the only one who can.

Thanks be to God. Amen.