

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 28: 5-9; Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18; Romans 6: 12-23 ; Saint Matthew 10: 40-42

In nomine Jesu!

The Vice President of the United States. Pope Leo. The Southern Baptist Convention's Annual Meeting. James Talarico. Franklin Graham. The prophet Hananiah. The prophet Jeremiah. The Apostle Paul.

What do they have in common? Each claim to speak for God. Each ask for our attention. Each expects agreement. Yet these voices sharply disagree with one another.

So, the question is unavoidable: **Who speaks for God?** That runs through each of today's readings, and it remains urgent for us today. To hear it clearly, we begin with the prophets Jeremiah and Hananiah.

Jeremiah 28 belongs to a larger story that begins in chapter 27 and unfolds during Judah's final chaotic years, before Jerusalem falls to Nebuchadnezzar's army in 586 BCE. The key events are these:

- Judah's kings shift alliances between Babylon and Egypt.
- Babylon attacks Jerusalem, plunders part of the temple, and deports the first Judean exiles (599–597 BCE).
- Babylon installs Zedekiah as Judah's vassal king.
- Zedekiah seeks Egypt's help against Babylon.
- Jeremiah wears a yoke to show that submission to Babylon is God's command.
- Zedekiah's prophets promise the return of the temple vessels and King Jechoniah.
- Hananiah says God will break Babylon's yoke within two years.

Hananiah's promise forces the question: **Who speaks for God?**

Jeremiah and Hananiah both say, "Thus says the LORD," but they cannot both be right. Babylon's yoke will either be broken—or it will not. Jeremiah says time will reveal the truth. But what do we do while we wait, surrounded by confident, conflicting claims made in God's name?

Today's Gospel gives us an evaluator tool. Jesus says, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me." Disciples speak for Christ—but not with status, force, or certainty for its own sake. They speak as the just, the *dikaioi*, people aligned with God's new order; what Matthew's Jesus calls "the kingdom of heaven." And they speak as "little ones," sent without power, dependent on the hospitality of others, bearing a justice that overturns the world's usual arrangements.

So here is the challenge: do not ask only whether a voice sounds religious, quotes scripture, or claims divine authority. Ask whether it bears the shape of Jesus—his preaching, his cross, his open tomb. Ask whether it lifts up the little ones, unmasking false power, and serves God's justice. That is the test for anyone who claims to speak for God—including us; and in these chaotic days, especially us.

With this in mind, today's second reading from Romans speaks with startling force. As we heard last week, it comes down to allegiance: "You're gonna have to serve somebody." Paul's language of slavery does not make slavery good, just, or divinely appointed. Over time, Jesus-followers have come to see that clearly. But Paul's deeper claim still presses on us: we are never simply free-floating individuals choosing our own way. We are always being claimed, trained, and disciplined by powers larger than ourselves. Social, political, cultural, and theological systems teach us what to desire, what to fear, what to call normal, and what to imagine as possible.

Hananiah and Jeremiah did not merely disagree about policy; they spoke from rival worlds. So do the lords that compete for us now. One of them is the modern dream of inevitable progress — the comforting belief that history naturally bends forward, that society will somehow keep improving on its own. The last ten years have buried that illusion. Progress is not automatic. Justice is not inevitable. Human decency does not sustain itself. But life within God's blueprint is not dead. It is still being drawn, still being built, still being entrusted to us. God is not finished with us, and God is not finished with the world. At Christ's table, God gives us more than comfort. God gives us a foretaste of "the design of God's great love," and sends us with the foresight, courage, and energy to follow that blueprint—creatively shaping life here and now to be "on earth as it is in heaven."

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