

"Break It to Fix It"

Text: Jeremiah 1:4-10

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from the God who, in connection with Jesus Christ, fixed what we broke. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

On its face, the title of this morning's sermon makes no logical sense. It's hard to envision a scenario where anyone would purposely break something, just so they could turn around and repair what they just broke. People, as a rule, just don't purposely create such problems and expenses for themselves. Even those of us who find great satisfaction in repairing what is broken don't make work for ourselves. There's more than enough that breaks all on its own.

So the question is, "*Who in their right mind would break something, just so they could fix it?*" The answer might surprise you.

This morning we are going to talk about breaking things and fixing things – and of the need to actually do both. The text that will guide and instruct us this morning is found in the First Chapter of the Book of Jeremiah the Prophet, beginning there with the Fourth Verse:

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 1:4-10** *Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." ⁶ Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." ⁷ But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD." ⁹ Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰ See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."*

This is God's Word. May God the Holy Spirit give each of us a wise and receptive heart so that we accept these as the words of God alone, and so that we might utilize and treasure them accordingly. To this end we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!**" Amen.

Before we dive into this morning's theme, we need to recognize a simple statement in our text that supplies the clearest possible answer to what is arguably the single most important discussion in our country today. Did

you catch it when you read through this text the first time? Back up a step and ask yourself what you consider to be the most important issue in our society today. It isn't inflation. It isn't immigration. It isn't national defense, Covid, the national debt, or the rising crime rate. It is the question of when human life begins, and who has the right to end that life. Our text gives God's clear answer: *All life comes from God, and it is therefore God alone who owns the right to end any life that he creates.*

Understand that God is the source of *all* life, including plants and animals. Man has the right to end the life of plants and animals because God has clearly given us that right – in large part because there are no eternal consequences in connection with the ending of life forms that have no eternal soul. Those life forms were created to serve man, and therefore man was given absolute authority over them. That's not the case when it comes to *human* life. There God reserved the right to himself. He allows the ruling authorities to end the life of violent criminals, but never the innocent. Certainly no such authority has been given to individual mothers. The life they carry does not come *from* them or belong *to* them. The life a mother carries in her womb is created by God. It belongs to him alone.

God himself addressed this question in our text with these words: **Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."** Though we have adopted the phrase "*Life begins at conception*," the words of our God in this morning's text carry the question even farther by giving a more complete answer. Ending a life in the womb is not only murder, it robs all of us of the gifts God would have given us through that life. Before Jeremiah was even conceived in the womb of his mother, God not only knew him, he had also already determined the work or service that Jeremiah would be called upon to carry out during his time of grace.

Here then we see the depths of evil and depravity of which any society is capable when God is excluded, when the existence of God is not a factor in the plans of man. God grant to us, and to all citizens of our world, a universal respect not only for all human life, but for the God who alone creates that life. In the end, that's really the only way to correct this great evil. You can't fix it with laws. The stubborn, rebellious heart must first be broken by the power of God's Word before love and respect for our Creator can be built in its place.

Which brings us back to the theme of our text for this morning: *"Break It to Fix It."*

Again, all human beings break things – intentionally or unintentionally – but who in their right mind breaks something just so they can fix it? The answer is Christians – or at least the answer is *supposed to be* Christians.

Take another look at our text. God had plans for Jeremiah even before he was born. What were those plans? He was to serve as God's prophet, God's spokesman. God had a message for the people, and as was his custom God determined that he would convey that message through a human spokesman – through Jeremiah. That's what a true prophet is, by the way - a spokesman or messenger for God. That's also what a prophet does – he speaks the message God tells him to speak. But the message wasn't just for the people of Jeremiah's day, was it? The message had application for all the generations that would follow. From our text: ***But the LORD said to (Jeremiah), "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.*** Since Jeremiah's words were recorded in the Scriptures, we also know that God's message was intended to have wider application than to just those who originally heard it. God's intended audience for Jeremiah's message therefore included also you and me.

In our text God went into more detail as to just what he expected of Jeremiah. It is in those details that we find our specific guidance this morning. In those details we find not the devil, but God's plan to break the devil, together with his power over fallen mankind. In our text God said to Jeremiah: ***"Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰ See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."***

These are actually profoundly fascinating and instructive words if we will but take the time to examine them carefully. Though we live in a ridiculously critical society, it is nonetheless fashionable to advocate only positive thoughts and words. It's only stylish to condemn or criticize if you are condemning or criticizing condemnation and criticism. In other words, our society condones the criticism of those who themselves criticize others. Christians are therefore fair game, since the words of God that we are supposed to share include both positive and negative, good news and bad news, condemnation and praise.

Nothing new here. Jesus encountered the same resistance. The people absolutely adored him as long as he voiced only positive messages – or when he limited his criticism to a sort of unwritten list approved by his

audience. The moment Jesus' condemnation hit home, the people were ready to toss him off the nearest cliff.

You get that, don't you? You've experienced this temptation for yourself, haven't you, the temptation to go along to get along? You know exactly how real it is and how powerful it is. You've felt that tug toward the path of least resistance, together with the realization that you would be breaking the unwritten rules of our soul-dead society by actually condemning what needs to be condemned.

Truth however is seldom communicated, and clarity is almost never achieved, by speaking only the positive. It's the negative that most often illuminates or defines the positive. It is the negative that identifies what has to be torn down or destroyed before the new can be built, the negative that shows what must be uprooted so that the new can be planted, the negative that must remove the bad so that the good can follow. So also God's preview to Jeremiah of the message he would be called to share wasn't just to ***"build and plant"***; it began with ***"pluck up, break down, destroy, and overthrow."***

We tend to get the concept of tearing down to build new, of uprooting the dead and dying to plant fresh. Old buildings are often torn down to build new. Old growth is cleared away so that new gardens and fields can be sown. The concept with which we have a bit more trouble is the need to break something before we can fix it.

Our Catechism can help us here. In the explanation to the Third Petition (*"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"*) we read: *"God's will is done when He breaks and stops every evil will and plan of those who do not want us to hallow His name or let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, of the world, and of our own flesh."* The point here is that our own natural, human will is not just "off" a bit. It doesn't just need some minor tweaking. It needs to be broken, crushed, destroyed. Our natural human will cannot coexist with God's will. Only when that natural will is broken can God the Holy Spirit make it new and right within us.

God therefore not only creates all *physical* life; he is also the only one who can and does create *spiritual* life. So also just as God created physical life not by gathering raw materials but by creating from nothing that which had no previous existence, so also he does not create spiritual life in us by altering what is already there, but by creating in us something altogether new and different.

This fact also helps us to understand the gospel itself, which is not the story of how man must clean up his act if he hopes to earn his way into heaven. It is rather the account of how God's own Son had to be broken if mankind was to be fixed. God placed the sins of mankind on Jesus, and then credited mankind with the perfection of his Son. Our relationship with God the Father was fixed only because his relationship with his Son was first broken.

In our text Jeremiah was told that his immediate target audience would be the Jews – a profoundly stubborn and rebellious people who would reject his message and make his life miserable – if he actually spoke the words that God sent him to speak. He did, and they did.

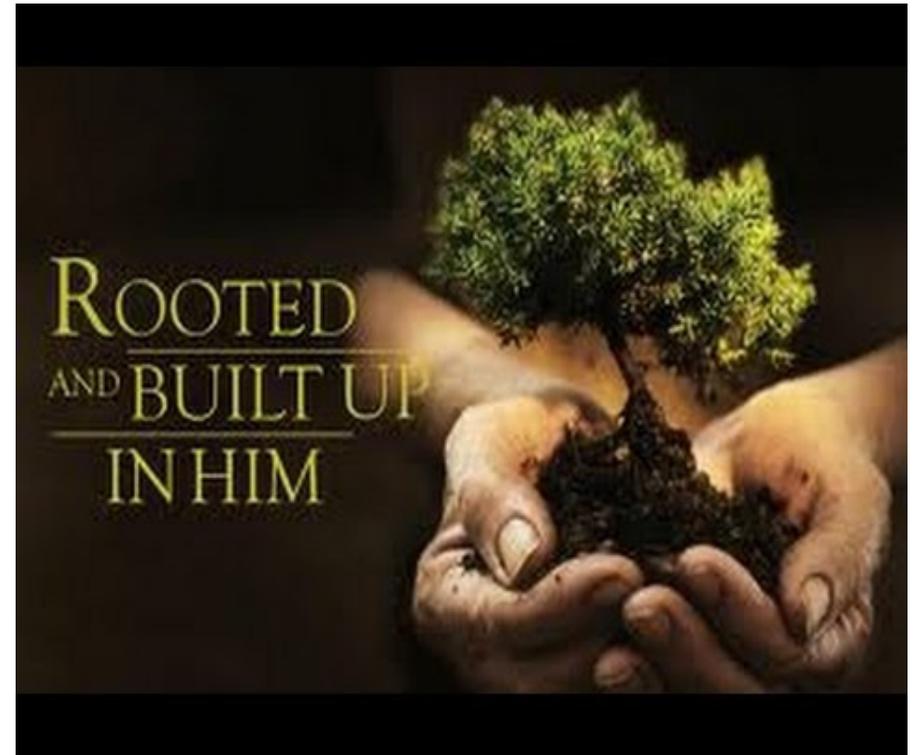
You and I have been sent to a very similar target audience – one that absolutely needs to be broken by the message of God's law, but only so that they can be "fixed" by our Savior's gospel. We can also therefore expect that their reaction will be every bit as negative and hostile as were the Jews of Jeremiah's day... if, like Jeremiah, we actually share with them the whole message of God's Word. God grant us then, first of all, an acceptance of the fact that the grip that sin and Satan have on our society must first be broken, and that that breaking can only be accomplished through our sharing of his divine, immutable law. Having then accepted that fact, God grant us also the courage to share – lovingly and humbly – that most difficult part of the words that we are to speak. Then - when the sinner lies broken, terrified, helpless and hopeless - may God the Holy Spirit use us to share, simply and accurately, the message of love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

This is God's plan – break man to fix man. Since the plan comes from God himself, we shouldn't be surprised that it works. Nor should we then be surprised when we get to witness the miracle of the creation of eternal life performed right before our very eyes. Amen.

ESV **1 Corinthians 13:1-13** If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. ⁴ ¶ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ ¶ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

ESV **Luke 4:31-44** And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, ³² and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority. ³³ And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, ³⁴ "Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are-- the Holy One of God." ³⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm. ³⁶ And they were all amazed and said to one another, "What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!" ³⁷ And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region. ³⁸ ¶ And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. ³⁹ And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them. ⁴⁰ ¶ Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. ⁴¹ And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ. ⁴² ¶ And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, ⁴³ but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose." ⁴⁴ And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

ESV **Jeremiah 1:4-10** Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." ⁶ Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." ⁷ But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD." ⁹ Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰ See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."



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The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – January 30, 2022

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 24 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord of My Life Whose Tender Care"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (1 Corinthians 13:1-13) 1 Corinthians 13 is universally known as "the love chapter" because it defines, in clearest detail, just what God means when he speaks of love. This kind of love is not based on emotion or personal gratification. It is selfless, seeking always the good not of self but of others. The greatest demonstration of this higher love was Jesus Christ and the sacrifice he made to save us. While faith and hope will not exist in heaven (being replaced by direct personal experience) the love described here by God endures forever.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 92 (On Screens Only)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 4:31-44) Jesus performed miracles not to entertain or impress but to offer tangible proof of the power and efficacy of his words. The danger, of course, was that the crowds sought him for temporal gifts when they should have been seeking the far greater spiritual gifts he offered. Still today we need to learn this lesson for ourselves. Jesus came to seek and to save lost sinners. This is the same work that Jesus identified as our life's purpose.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – (Supplement page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 351 (Red Hymnal)

"Love Divine, All Love Excelling"

The Sermon – Jeremiah 1:4-10 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Break It to Fix It"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 411 (Verses 1-3, 6-7) (Red Hymnal)

"From Eternity, O God"

The Prayers of the Day followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 179 (Red Hymnal)

"On My Heart Imprint Thine Image"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (30) Average (30)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Luke Bernthal has returned the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven. That congregation has now call Pastor Mark Tiefel. Teacher Andrew Roehl Grace Lutheran School of Valentine. Teacher Nathan Wales has accepted the call to Grace Lutheran School of Sleepy Eye. Pastor Luke Bernthal is considering the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven. Teacher Michaela Winters is considering the call to Berea Lutheran School of Inver Grove Heights.

Church Council Notes – The Council met on 1/23. Timothy and Hope Meyer were accepted by transfer from Holy Trinity of West Columbia. The December offering reduced our year-end deficit to (\$1,697). The Council voted to save \$2,600 in interest by using Roofing Reserve funds to pay off our Special Assessment. Mark Redlin and Mark Johnson were appointed to the Financial Inspection Committee. The Council is investigating the best online contribution platform for our needs. Pastor Nathanael Mayhew has been asked to serve as our Mission Festival speaker. Next meeting – February 20th.

February Communion Services – Due to scheduling issues, Holy Communion will be celebrated on the 1st and 3rd Sundays in February (February 6th and 20th). Private communion is always available from the Pastor on request.

Care Package – Don't forget to bring contributions for the care packages by next Sunday.