

"Only What Is Broken Can Be Fixed"

Text: Jeremiah 1:4-10

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

Dear Fellow Christians:

There's an expression you've all probably heard many times: *"If it ain't broke, don't fix it."* Maybe you've also experienced the frustration when someone, however well-meaning, ignores that time-honored maxim and nonetheless sets about trying to "fix you" when, in your mind, you *"ain't broke."* You see it often in couples when they are dating and between college-aged children and their parents. Subjective opinions play an outsized role. Because one side *feels* something strongly, the natural assumption is that those with contrary views or preferences are broken. So a vegan girl tries to "fix" her meat-eating boyfriend. College students try to "fix" their old-fashioned parents. An agnostic man tries to "fix" his Christian girlfriend.

Interesting, isn't it, that all would agree with the maxim *"If it ain't broke, don't fix it."* The problem is the differing opinions on just what constitutes "broken." The sad truth is that sometimes there is just no way to resolve emotion-based differences or personal preferences. If you *live* for steaks on the grill and the friend you are dating is convinced that "meat is murder," it's probably time to move on. When there is no objective right or wrong, only personal taste or opinion, and no one is willing or even able to change, there is only hard impasse.

Which is not to say that there are no differences that can be settled by an authoritative third-party arbitrator. That authoritative third-party arbitrator, for Christians, is God's Word. And that Word of God speaks to an astounding number of human differences. The only question is whether or not we will take the time to truly listen, learn, and then humble ourselves to that infallible authority.

That's essentially what Christians do, isn't it. Every day of our earthly existence we turn to that infallible source of divine truth and in humility bow to its perfect guidance. We do so also this morning as, on the basis of God's Word, we explore the theme: *"Only what is broken can be fixed."* The text that will guide and instruct us this morning is found in the First Chapter of the Book of Jeremiah, 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 – our ultimate and unparalleled source of authoritative and objective truth. May God the Holy Spirit give each of us wise, humble, and receptive hearts that accept and profit from these his words. To that end we pray, ***"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"*** Amen.

Before venturing 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 contentious topic 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 jobs. It isn't immigration. It isn't national defense, diversity, or the environment. It is the question of when human life begins and who has the right to end a life that God himself has given. 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 this right isn't limited to just human beings. God is the source of *all* life, including plants and animals. Man has the right to end the life of plants and animals only 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. They 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. 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.

Understand that there is nothing subjective or opinion-based here. We cannot "agree to disagree." *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. While human life certainly does begin at conception, we would be better served by thinking and speaking in terms of God's timeless regard for human life, both according to its creation and according to its purpose. 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. This understanding not only definitively answers the question of exactly when human life begins, it instructs us as to the even more profound sin of destroying both the life created by God and any and every blessing or service that God himself had planned for that human being. Consider the ramifications in connection with Jeremiah had his mother chosen to murder her unborn baby. She would not only have taken a human life, she would have robbed mankind of the invaluable work that God later performed through that great Prophet.

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, and of God's will, is excluded from the plans of man. We should not be surprised therefore when the same Godless society that condemns the killing of an animal nonetheless condones the murder of an unborn child. 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.

This is by no means unrelated to our theme for this morning: "*Only what is broken can be fixed.*" God had plans for Jeremiah even before he was born. Jeremiah was to serve as God's prophet, God's spokesman. God had a message for the people, and that message was to be delivered through a human spokesman – through Jeremiah. That's what a true prophet is, by the way - a spokesman for God. That's also what a faithful 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 Bible, we also know that God's message was intended 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's power over fallen mankind. In our text God said this 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 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. Our society condones only the criticism of those who themselves criticize others. Christians are therefore fair game, since the Word of God that we are commissioned to share includes both positive and negative, good news and bad news, condemnation and praise.

Nothing new here. Jesus encountered the same resistance from the godless of his day. 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 his 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 and how powerful that temptation truly 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 zombie society by actually sharing God's condemnation of that which absolutely needs to be condemned. Yet you also know that full divine truth is almost never communicated by speaking only the positive. It's the negative that most often clarifies and 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. Old buildings have to be torn down before the new can be built. We get the concept that old plants must be torn out to make room for the new. 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.*" Note especially that last point – the need for God to first break our own sinful flesh. Our own natural, human will is not just "off" a bit. It doesn't just need some minor tweaking or course correction. 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.

Just as it is God alone who creates all physical life, so it is God alone who can and does create spiritual life. God does not create spiritual life in us by altering what is already there. He saves us by first breaking, crushing, or uprooting what is there and only then by planting or creating in us something 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.

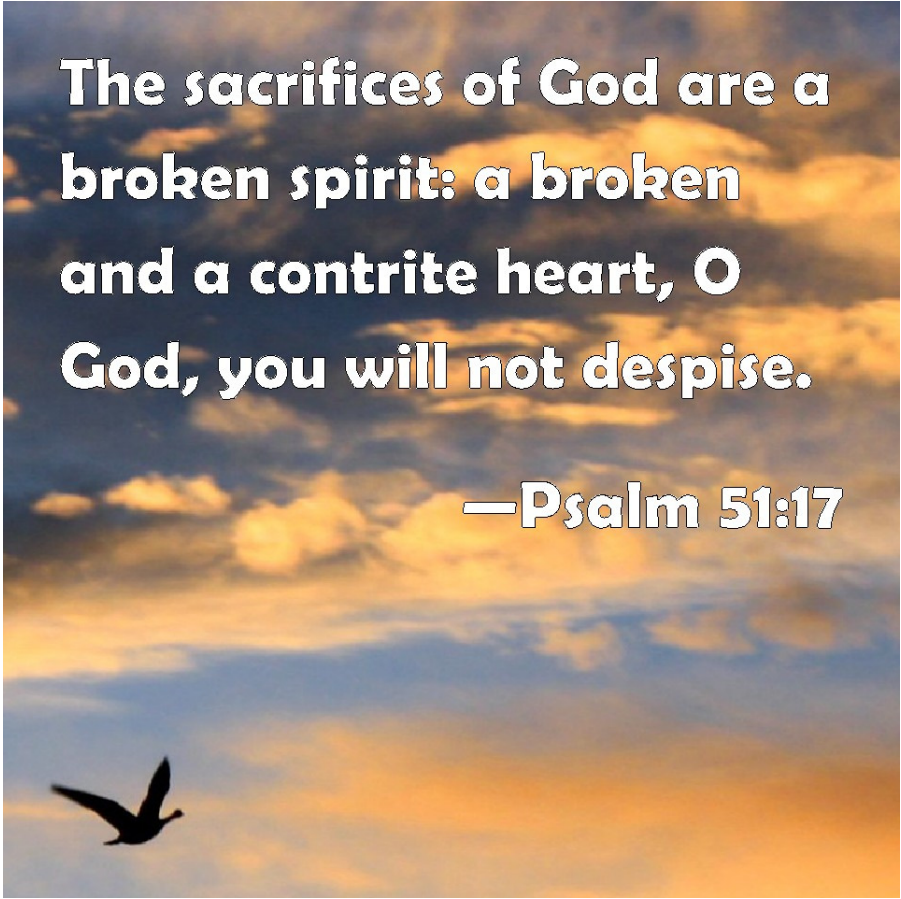
You and I were born with that same stubborn, rebellious human nature. That nature had to first be crushed, uprooted, shattered by God's law – which is what our loving God has done in every believer's heart. Man has no power to accomplish this in himself, as David noted in the 51st Psalm: "***For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.***" When the proud sinner's heart is crushed by the law, David went on to reveal what we should expect: "***The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.***" Only the broken field is ready for planting. So also only the heart broken by the law is ready to hear of the forgiveness that is found only through faith in Jesus Christ. This is God's

plan. The law must break man before the gospel can fix man. Despair then of your old Adam, which cannot be salvaged. ^{ESV}(1 Peter 5:6) ***Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,*** remembering that *only what is broken can be fixed.* 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."



The sacrifices of God are a
broken spirit: a broken
and a contrite heart, O
God, you will not despise.

—Psalm 51:17

ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – February 2, 2025

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 4 (Red Hymnal)

"God Himself Is Present"

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 146 (Supplement Page 41)

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 – the same work that is our life's purpose.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 139 (Red Hymnal)

"In His Temple Now Behold Him"

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

"Only What Is Broken Can be Fixed"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 144 (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 152 (From Sing of Christ) (New Hymnal)

"Thanks to You, O Christ Victorious"

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 (39) Average (40)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– 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.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Samuel Naumann has returned the call to Faith of Manchester, MO. Pastor Paul Krause has returned the call to St. Stephen of San Francisco. Trinity School of Watertown has called Teacher Mikella Schmidt.

Church Council Notes – The Council met on January 27th. A very strong December offering brought our General Fund to within \$635 of budgeted need. Expenses were also under budget, resulting in a positive balance of \$597. Trustee Coordinator Mark Johnson reported on current progress on the "Projects List." An updated list can be found on the mailbox table. Holy Communion will be celebrated only once in February (February 9th).

Care Package – The Women's Fellowship is preparing a care package for our lone out-of-town student. Anyone who would like to add to the package should do so by next Sunday, February 9th.

Valentines Care Packages – The Women's Fellowship is also preparing Valentines Care packages for inactive members. See Allison Loeb for more information.