

There’s a phrase from the 14th chapter of Jeremiah that I have been chewing on all week long. The title of today’s sermon—*Do Something Lord*—comes from the first verse of our reading that I assigned to it months ago when I was sermon planning. But as I read and studied Jeremiah 14 this week another phrase that immediately follows the sermon title has struck me. Listen again to verse 7: *“Although our sins testify against us, do something, LORD, for the sake of your name.”* Did you hear that? *“For the sake of your name.”*

Now, why should we even emphasize that God loves and forgives us *“for the sake of his name”*—for his own glory? Here are two reasons (among many). First, we should emphasize that God loves and forgives us for the glory of his name because the Bible does. Isaiah 43:25 says, *“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”* Psalm 25:11 says, *“For your name’s sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great.”* Psalm 79:9 says, *“Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and forgive our sins, for your name’s sake.”*

And once again, here in Jeremiah 14:7 we hear, *“Although our sins testify against us, do something, LORD, for the sake of your name.”* And in verse 22 of our reading we hear another plea: *“For the sake of your name do not despise us; do not dishonor your glorious throne. Remember your covenant with us and do not break it.”* God put Christ forward as an atonement for our sin, to be received by faith. It was to show God’s righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of anyone who has faith in Jesus. As it says in 1 John 2:12, *“Your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.”*

Secondly, we should emphasize that God loves and forgives for his own name’s sake because it makes clear that God loves us with the greatest love. Jesus prayed in John 17:24, *“Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”* God loves us in a way that makes God himself supreme, not us. Heaven will not be a hall of mirrors, but an increasing vision of God’s infinite greatness. Getting to heaven and finding that we are supreme would be a big letdown for me.

The greatest love makes sure that God does everything in such a way as to uphold and magnify his own supremacy so that, when we get to heaven, we have something that will increase our joy forever. That is what God’s glory does. The greatest love is an act of God giving himself to us for our eternal enjoyment, at the price of his Son’s life. That is what he means when he says that he loves us and forgives us for his own name’s sake. And that

is why Jeremiah cries out to God with this desperate plea: “*Although our sins testify against us, do something, LORD, for the sake of your name.*”

The New Covenant that we looked at last week was God’s way of answering his people’s desperate plea—*Do something, Lord*. Why would we need to ask God such a thing as this? It is almost an embarrassingly personal thing for Jeremiah to say, a private message between the prophet and his God, but we are listening in. Maybe we should just draw the curtain closed around the hospital bed and let them have their chat while we tend to other things.

Except that here, as in all things, there is a lesson to be learned. A life to consider, perhaps to model. If Jeremiah can say it, why can’t we? My hunch is that we already have—at one time or another. When our backs are against the wall, we turn to God and plead in desperation, “*Do something Lord.*”

In 2 Timothy 4 we likewise listen in and hear a challenge to the kind of life that the gospel requires, or maybe demands. That doesn’t seem quite right. Let’s say the kind of life that the gospel affords or invites. A door is opened into this kind of life, this all-or-nothing life. And the one who opens the door stands with us to the very end. But perhaps we’re getting ahead of ourselves.

Let’s take a look at this life, Paul’s life, which he describes as a poured-out life. The description of his life that he gives to Timothy is a life poured out like a drink offering. Other translations use the word “libation.” Libation is not a word we encounter all that often. The Greek is σπένδομαι (*stendomai*). And sometimes it means to be put to death, to have one’s life’s blood poured out. It means to give one’s all, withholding nothing. A libation is a liquid sacrifice as opposed to a grain sacrifice or meat sacrifice. It would not be a misuse to speak of blood, sweat, and tears as part of this type of offering. We talk about a total commitment like that calling forth our vital essence, our full selves.

It is not, however, implied that the only way to be poured as a libation is to die, that only a martyr can be said to have been poured out. We can, instead, read this as a call to live, not to die. Not to diminish those who die for the faith. Even in our so-called civilized world today, there are those who do make the ultimate sacrifice with frightening regularity in a world that is becoming less and less tolerant of Christians. But I am not issuing a call to die from this pulpit. Instead, I am issuing a call to live. But to live fully.

As the Lord coached Jeremiah, Timothy's coach, Paul, describes the life of faith as one of fighting the good fight, of running the race. Choose your metaphor. The image of fighting might be uncomfortable in such a contentious day and time. But we have been known to fight for air. We fight for rights. There are fights that carry all sorts of connotations, but we should choose what best conveys the apostle's message. Verse 7 says, "*I have fought the good fight,*" which brings to mind the late Congressman John Lewis's call for us to get into good trouble—trouble for the right purpose, trouble to bring about the right change. Fighting for the sake of fighting or to prove our strength or toughness is not a good fight. But a fight for justice, for redemption, for transformation, might be worth it.

Or maybe just keeping the faith would be the place to settle for this moment. What does it mean when Paul says, "*I have kept the faith?*" Keep it to oneself? Keep it hidden away and safe and secure from all alarms? Keep it unchallenged, unexamined, tucked into some rarely visited corner of our existence? Absolutely not. No, the call is to keep the faith before us—always. To let our faith in Jesus be the yardstick by which our lives are measured. We keep the faith when we live it every day. We keep the faith when we don't set it aside when the decisions are difficult. We keep the faith when challenged by divisiveness or hatred. We don't set it aside simply to go along. We risk security and privilege by keeping the faith.

We keep the faith by listening to and leaning into the words of Jesus, by looking at his life as the model for our own. We keep the faith even when others seem to be swayed by something less than the faith of Jesus, something that resembles a type of misplaced faith. Yet Paul, facing the end of his life, declares that he has kept the faith. We, as we face another day of living and choosing and working, are challenged to declare the same thing.

The last verse, verse 18, then, points toward the author of that faith—the doorkeeper who invites us into a new way of living in this world as we prepare for the next. Paul seems to say, "The Lord stood by me," even when no one else would or did. The Lord was the source of my strength, the source of my proclamation, the power to risk moving beyond safe boundaries into a wider world with promise and hope. There was a new sense of safety and a new understanding of security because of the one who stood beside Paul.

"*The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack,*" says Paul. But wait, was he rescued? What exactly does "rescue" mean to Paul? How does the apostle understand this concept? It obviously doesn't mean avoidance of suffering, a lack of hardship. Here's why we wrestle with this idea of rescuing. When we ask, "*Do something Lord,*" we want the

outcome to be one of safety, without pain or suffering. But that isn't the rescue. The real rescue is our inclusion in the kingdom of God. The real rescue is a relationship that never wavers, a presence that is real and felt and claimed. The real rescue is an identity that is found in living poured out as a "libation." We find out who we are as we give ourselves away. We hold on to our true essence when we spend our lives in the cause of Christ. Jeremiah said it simply: "*Therefore, our hope is in you...*" (v. 22). Yes, we are poured out, so that glory is given to the One for whom we are poured. And there we find great joy in living fully. Also, let's remember that we have asked, "*Do something Lord, for the sake of your name.*"

Years ago, I was at a summer conference at Whitworth College in Spokane WA. The main speaker for the week, John Claypool, had experienced a horrible personal loss. He had recently lost his seven-year-old daughter to leukemia. Perhaps for that reason alone, everything he said during the conference was spoken with complete honesty, unquestioned integrity, and the strongest personal conviction. He told us that when we face pain, suffering, or trauma, we turn to God and the first thing we ask from God is to fix it. That is, we want God to swoop down into our situation and rescue us; to fly in like Superman and remove all threats or dangers. But God's response to our plea is usually something quite different than what we have in mind. Instead, God chooses to come into our situation and stand *beside* us, to work *with* us, and to *collaborate* with us to manage the circumstances and challenges that we face.

Likewise, in Jeremiah chapter 14, the judgment of God (the Babylonian Exile of God's people) is about to come, but it will not be the last chapter in the story of the Lord and the Lord's people. The Lord will put these people through a fire, but it will be a refiner's fire rather than a destroyer's fire. Their redemption will be a long time coming, but it will eventually come.

It is the Lord's way of acknowledging that cheap grace is no bargain; nor is a quick fix or an easy rescue the solution. At this point, that's not going to really help Jeremiah's people. The time has come for God to exercise Tough Love. In total desperation, the people cry out, through the prophet Jeremiah, "*Do something, Lord, for the sake of your name.*"

When we find ourselves in desperate circumstances, we too want God to come and rescue us. Most often though, God offers us something a little different. God offers us his peace and his presence. God offers himself. As Jeremiah states, "*You are among us, Lord, and we bear your name.*" Amen.