The Word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this Word, and say, 'Hear the Word of the LORD, all you from Judah who enter through these gates to bow in worship to the LORD!'" Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will dwell with you in this place. Do not trust in lying when they say, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD is here!' "But amend your ways and your doings, that you do unjustly against another man, and do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt. I will always and forever dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers. "But now you trust in lies that are not profitable. In addition to this you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know. After these things you come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My Name, and say, 'We are free to commit all these abominations'. Is this house, which is called by My Name, a den for thieves? Behold, I see it well," says the LORD. [Jeremiah 7:1-11]

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. What is happening all around the prophet is a sort of tandem nightmare in which there are fewer and fewer examples of the kind of preaching that is necessary for the saving of souls and meanwhile more and more people are using that scarcity as an excuse or maybe even a good reason to turn their backs (or heads) on God's Word entirely, turning instead to stealing, murdering, adultery, lying about their neighbor for personal gain, worshipping other gods, and worshipping the one, true God falsely. Thus, the real horror lies in the fact that there is practically no place for the kind of bold preaching that some in Judah still believed was necessary – not only for the survival of God's people, but for the dying hope that one could walk into the LORD'S house on the Sabbath and hear something that was going to tell them what was really happening.

One could blame their unbelief on decades of inbreeding, hubris-crazed political infighting, or seriously diminished attention spans, but there were built in blind-spots in Judah's worship and from this, confusion about their relationship to their neighbor, a permanently exposed flank that would lead inevitably to disaster. The last thing they wanted to hear or be reminded of, the thing that made them laugh out loud, was what the prophet was preaching, that they were doomed, they were headed off a cliff.

All history is full of the destruction that comes from unbelief; the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Destruction of Solomon's Temple, the destruction of Herod's Temple, and on and on to the present day. If anything in the whole world is certain it is that unbelief ends absolutely in judgement. But unbelief, as Jeremiah tells it, not only refuses to hear that disaster is towering over it, it laughs at this!

The doom of judgment was fast falling upon the kingdom of Judah, its capital city Jerusalem, and the Temple of Solomon; and the people who were acting to bring on this doom, when the LORD Himself warned them, refused to believe it, until, too late, the disaster fell upon them.

Scripture paints a vivid picture then that unbelief is always deadly, but are we fully convinced that unbelief is always deadly?

Do we too laugh at the doom that is coming, and it is coming, thinking we are one of God's very own prototypes, an example for others of what a Christian ought to look and sound like. Are we, like Judah, bored by the preacher who stands in the LORD'S house warning that God does not speak His Word to teach you, as though you are teachable; to improve you, as though you are improvable; to reform you, as though you are reformable? No. God's Word comes to tear down and build up, uproot and replant, kill and raise to new life, not in theory but fact.

Or do we pray in God's Name, do we repent of our sin, do we confess that we are dead and absolutely need a word that raises the dead? Do we consider that even Jesus' disciples, after three years with the Good Teacher, never caught on to very much at all? Do we pay attention to the fact that God has been teaching the world for a millennia and the world hasn't done anything much about it?

Take for example the *"Ecumenical Movement"* that has enjoyed widespread approval and popularity for more than a century, whose intent it is to reform the church by uniting the scattered bits and pieces of Christianity into one worldwide church. In itself, that is a noble goal. But everything depends on understanding the source of Christian unity and division realistically. Otherwise, all we are going to do is apply Band-Aids to cancers, and actually make matters worse.

The LORD makes His Church ONE, not in just any way, but only in the TRUTH (John 8: 31-32; 17:14-17). Without real unity in the One LORD, the One Faith, and the One Baptism (Ephesians 4:5), outward togetherness, as it was in the days of Jeremiah, is a soul-destroying sham. This is why our Augsburg Confession demands for the *"true unity of the church"* nothing more and nothing less than *"that the Gospel be preached unanimously in its pure understanding, and the Sacraments be administered in accord with God's Word."* It is not necessary that human customs and traditions be everywhere alike. And, of course, there are believers, brothers and sisters, in all churches, who retain enough of the Gospel to make possible the creation of faith.

But let us go further ... Did Christ earn for us the free gift of eternal life, as the Bible teaches, or only the opportunity to earn eternal life by doing good works with His help, as Roman Catholicism teaches? An honest reading of Romans and Galatians will leave us in no doubt about the answer. Again, does Holy Baptism give life and salvation, as Christ and His Apostles teach (John 3:5; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21), or is it only a symbol of our obedience, as the Baptists say? And does the LORD really give us His holy body and blood to eat in His Sacrament for the forgiveness of sins, or is all this only a picture and symbol as the Non-denominationals say? There is no generic *"Gospel,"* which might overlook or bypass such questions. Any honest confession of faith must *"come clean"* on matters so clearly taught in God's Word (Galatians 1:6-8).

This is why the *"Ecumenical Movement"* - despite some promising beginnings - has largely given up on the issue of truth. It concentrates on getting everyone together outwardly, under compromise, with fear and contempt for the whole idea of truth, and it has had its impact in the churches. And since so many church bureaucrats and seminaries have given up the authority of the Bible as the Word of God, they, of course, and the pastors and church workers they have produced have no grounds for any firm convictions about anything.

Genuine unity, true Christian unity, must go another way. It must walk by faith, not by sight. That means being guided by the Truth of God and not by outward numbers or prestige or what our neighbor thinks of us. Whatever is not built on the one foundation of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20) is not the church of Christ, not the LORD'S house, but a counterfeit. There cannot be real peace between the Cross of Christ and the wisdom of this world (1 Corinthians 1-2). As Christians we are called to be friendly and peaceable among people of all kinds, to love even our enemies. But we cannot go along with a deceitful outward show of unity and communion when there is no agreement in the life-giving teaching of Christ and His Apostles, on which everything depends (John 6:63; Acts 2:42; 1 Timothy 4:16). The true unity of the faithful will be found under the banner of Christ's truth and teaching. Such faithfulness God blesses - and is blessing throughout the world today, everywhere the sheep of Christ hunger for the pure Bread of Life and rejoice in it. But the faithless are there too, shouldering them aside, making a public showing, putting in their *"God-time,"* truthless creatures, foul human monuments to corruption and depravity. The truth is not in them. But they never seem to understand this.

So the tragedies go on. The lies go on. The nonsense goes on. The twaddle goes on. All the things that are wrong with the world go on and slowly, serpentine, they creep into the LORD'S house, until Jesus comes and drives out the thieves who have set up shop in His Father's house! No more doomed living! Jesus Christ comes, suffers, dies, and is

raised from the dead to give the doomed and the dead new life in God's Name, His Name. Where before there were men's lies, now there is His truth, where there was love of sin, now there is heartfelt repentance, where we once provoked the LORD'S judgment, now there is His Spirit and promise that creates ONE faith, ONE LORD, and One baptism-hope that clings to Christ Jesus alone for its every need of body and soul, now and forever. That is God's final judgment: Jesus. When God's judgment pours out in furious anger Jesus takes our place, accepts God's wrath and displeasure, the destruction meant for you, you of little faith, and allows Himself to be destroyed by it for you, so that just as He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father even so, by your baptism in His Name, you also can walk in newness of life ... not so that you too may laugh at the doom that is coming, but to pray in God's Name, repent of your sin, and confess that you are dead and absolutely need a word that raises the dead, Jesus Christ, who is your ONE LORD and Savior, in the One faith, through the One baptism in His Name. Amen.