

# How Is It with Your Soul?

## Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

### Introduction

We continue our *Wesleyan Vile-tality* series, and have followed the history of the people called Methodist. As the movement they built grew into an institution, more than once, the people lost their nerve. This week we turn to the ones who worked prophetically from within, refusing to leave and refusing to behave. They formed communities of accountability and care, and kept asking one plain and profound question: How is it with your soul?

In the face of ridicule, the prophet Jeremiah discovers he cannot stop responding to God's inspiring call, because God's presence has become like "a burning fire shut up in [his] bones" (v9). Jesus tells his followers that the life he calls them to will be more challenging than they can imagine, and that the God who counts the sparrows knows even how many hairs are on their heads. Many of us know what it's like to be ridiculed among people who we respect. This week we explore the courage it takes to work within confining circumstances and systems, and how genuine community can offer strength in the most difficult times.

### Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYOLUIIwo8k>

*In this clip from Rudy (1993), his teammates walk into the head coach's office one by one and lay their own jerseys on the desk, each offering to give up his place so that Rudy can dress.*

### Why This Video?

Rudy has spent years trying to earn a place on the Notre Dame football team. The coaches have been consistent: he is too small and not talented enough to play. He earns a spot on the scout team, the players whose job is to take hits in practice so the starters are ready on Saturdays, and works there season after season without making the game-day roster. In his final year, when Rudy learns he will be left off the roster for the last home game of his career, his teammates respond.

### Video Discussion Questions

1. Rudy works for years on the scout team while the coaches keep him off the game-day roster. What do you think that felt like for Rudy? What do you think kept him going?
2. The players who act for Rudy have no official authority over the roster. Why do you think the players took this stand? What was at risk for them? Was it worth it?
3. Each teammate gives up his own roster spot so that Rudy can dress for the game. Have you ever seen someone give up their own advantage so that others could be included? What did you think about that? How did you react?
4. Rudy holds onto his dream for years even when others tell him to give it up. What do you think made him hold on? When have you held onto a dream when you were told to give it up? What happened?
5. Imagine yourself as one of those teammates giving up your own roster spot. What do you think it would take to do that for someone else? Would it be worth it?

## Jeremiah 20:7-13 (NRSVue)

<sup>7</sup>O Lord, you have enticed me,  
and I was enticed;  
you have overpowered me,  
and you have prevailed.  
I have become a laughingstock all day long;  
everyone mocks me.

<sup>8</sup>For whenever I speak, I must cry out;  
I must shout, "Violence and destruction!"  
For the word of the Lord has become for me  
a reproach and derision all day long.

<sup>9</sup>If I say, "I will not mention him  
or speak any more in his name,"  
then within me there is something like a burning fire  
shut up in my bones;  
I am weary with holding it in,  
and I cannot.

<sup>10</sup>For I hear many whispering:  
"Terror is all around!  
Denounce him! Let us denounce him!"  
All my close friends  
are watching for me to stumble.  
"Perhaps he can be enticed,  
and we can prevail against him  
and take our revenge on him."

<sup>11</sup>But the Lord is with me like a terrifying warrior;  
therefore my persecutors will stumble,  
and they will not prevail.  
They will be greatly shamed,  
for they will not succeed.  
Their eternal dishonor  
will never be forgotten.

<sup>12</sup>O Lord of hosts, you test the righteous;  
you see the heart and the mind;  
let me see your retribution upon them,  
for to you I have committed my cause.

<sup>13</sup>Sing to the Lord;  
praise the Lord!  
For he has delivered the life of the needy  
from the hands of evildoers.

## Matthew 10:24-39 (NRSVue)

<sup>24</sup>“A disciple is not above the teacher nor a slave above the master; <sup>25</sup>it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

<sup>26</sup>“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered and nothing secret that will not become known. <sup>27</sup>What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. <sup>28</sup>Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup>Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup>And even the hairs of your head are all counted. <sup>31</sup>So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

<sup>32</sup>“Everyone, therefore, who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven, <sup>33</sup>but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

<sup>34</sup>“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword.

<sup>35</sup>For I have come to set a man against his father,  
and a daughter against her mother,  
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law,  
<sup>36</sup>and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

<sup>37</sup>“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, <sup>38</sup>and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup>Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

## Scripture Study Questions

1. Jeremiah says that when he tries to stay quiet, the word becomes “something like a burning fire shut up in [his] bones,” until he cannot hold it in. What does that image tell you about what Jeremiah is experiencing? Why can’t he simply stay silent?
2. The prophet is honest with God to the point of complaint: God has “enticed” and “overpowered” him and left him a “laughingstock all day long.” What does it take to express this much raw honesty with God? What might that free us to say in our own prayers?
3. Jeremiah acknowledges that even his “close friends are watching for [him] to stumble.” What does that tell you about what it took for Jeremiah to keep speaking? What does it say about him that he kept speaking anyway?
4. In nearly the same breath as his complaint, Jeremiah says, “the Lord is with me like a terrifying warrior.” What do you make of those two statements side by side? What does that tension tell you about Jeremiah’s faith?
5. Among the most challenging words here, Jesus says, “I have not come to bring peace but a sword,” and that “one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.” Which of Jesus’ statements in this passage is most difficult for you to hear, and why?

6. Jesus says that those who “find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for [his] sake will find it.” What do you think Jesus means by that? What does losing your life for his sake look like in ordinary daily terms?
7. Jesus tells his followers that what they hear whispered they are to “proclaim from the housetops,” and that they are worth more than “many sparrows.” Why do you think Jesus connects those two things? What does that say about the relationship between courage and belovedness?

### **Additional (Optional) Questions**

1. Wesley’s bands and classes were built around one practice: honest mutual accountability. Think of one person who has been that kind of friend to you — someone who asks how you are really doing and waits for a real answer. What has their presence meant to your faith?
2. Have you ever felt unheard, as though your voice did not count in the room? What did that feel like, and who finally listened?
3. Jeremiah’s close friends are watching for him to stumble. What does that tell you about the difference between people who are watching you and people who are genuinely with you?
4. What makes someone a good listener? Think of one person who does it well. What do they actually do?
5. Both Jeremiah and Jesus are speaking to people who would rather not hear what they have to say. Whose voices are easy to overlook in our own community — the young, the hurting, the ones pushed to the edges? What would it take for us to hear them on their own terms?

### **Weekly Action**

Find one person this week and ask them, face to face: “How is it with your soul?” Think of this as asking someone how they are, but asking how they are *really*. Then stay long enough to hear the whole answer. Be ready to answer honestly when they ask you the same question.

### **Prayer**

O, God, you are the one who hears the cries not heard by human ears. Our earthly existence reveals much injustice and harm in our world, even this very day. Forgive us, we pray, when we are participants. Make us aware of our complicity and sensitize our ears to hear the cries of the needy. And God, we also are the needy ones; give us confidence to pray again, to cry out again to you with the hope that you will again hear *our* voices and reveal your Presence. In the name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.