

Providence Presbyterian Church  
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Jeremiah 32: 1-15, 42-44

Have you ever been passionate or distressed over a cause or an issue that everyone else seems indifferent towards? They plod on, unmoved, and looking at you like you are a little odd, or at worse, crazy? Advent is a season where we learn the habit of waiting, a posture of anticipation, and a discipline of hope. For in Advent, we say that Christ has come into the world. And yet the world is still full of sin, chaos, enmity, and indifference. And yet... the world is not without hope, for Christ is not done. God's work is not done.

Often in the season of Advent, we read from the prophets. Not usually the prophet Jeremiah, however. But as I thought about what it means to believe and embody hope in a world that often feels like it's going to spin out of control at some point, I thought of Jeremiah. I thought of Jeremiah and I remembered a younger self.

I came out of college as an idealist. A type of missionary. I was not worried about a career, money, or impressing others. I was consumed with knowing God and Christ's love, and I saw the immense importance of teens knowing this. It was of eternal significance. It was of immediate importance in navigating the gauntlet of adolescence full of pitfalls. This is what drove me like a calling that weighed on my heart. The needs I saw directed my time and choices. So, when Grace Roossien pulled me aside, I age 22, and gave me a lecture about beginning to save for retirement and opening an IRA, I wasn't sure what to make of her. She seemed vain, painfully practical, and strangely invested in this world when I was looking to another world.

Everybody around me was consumed with the daily routines, driving their kids to sports, advancing in their careers, and consumed with their own lives. This all felt like temporal preoccupations, and it was hard to get people's attention for what seemed to me as more important matters. As I spent all my time reaching out to teenagers, I had a number of people look at me like I was odd or ill-intentioned. I was out of sync with what they expected from someone in their twenties.

I related to Jeremiah a good deal back then. For due to his zeal, Jeremiah is often out of sync with his peers, out of sync with popular priorities and sentiments. He tries to call people to a different posture or focus, and they scoff. And Jeremiah invests in a way that others can't see value in. Jeremiah speaks of a different reality, and he invests in hope. In our reading, he buys a field in a bottomed-out

market, going about the legal paperwork to purchase property in a land about to be desolated; he invests in things that others have given up on. He not only chooses to be hopeful, but he acts out that hope. He looks like a fool. Have you ever felt like a fool?

Jeremiah is often dubbed the weeping prophet. He felt a certain heaviness in his mission and calling. He is a prophet par excellence in that prophets are often called to speak a word or warning of impending disaster when no one wants to hear it, and when no one is prepared to believe it. And when people finally start to listen and respond and panic, the prophet pivots to a word of hope before anyone is ready to hope. Therefore, the prophet is always out of sync with his or her peers, always out of sync with popular culture.

In this way, Jeremiah did not seem to enjoy the message that he was called to carry. While everybody was consumed with the daily goings-on, being told not to worry, that the stock market was strong, that God would defend and protect, Jeremiah is a lonely voice calling out the truth. God's people had abandoned the covenant, had stopped listening to God's voice, and that God's protective hand would not shield them from the consequences. Jeremiah is called to deliver a message that he himself grieves. And to add insult to injury, no one listens to him.

Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem in the days leading up to Jerusalem being conquered. No one thought that Jerusalem, that holy city, that bulwark where the Lord had chosen his name to dwell, that symbol of God's presence and protection; no one thought that Jerusalem could fall. But God calls Jeremiah to speak of this as the inevitable, that the people had so strayed from God's order, that the king had so abandoned God's voice, that their society no longer represented God's justice, that God was not going to protect them from their enemies. Babylon would conquer and rule, and carry them off into exile. It was an unpopular and inconceivable message. No one believed him—not until Babylon's armies were on the horizon, not until they started to smell smoke.

But as the people of Jerusalem and Judah begin to smell smoke, as the people begin to realize what is happening, begin to realize the inevitable and that Jeremiah was right – God calls Jeremiah to once again speak a word. This time, it was a word of hope. And not only speak a word of hope, but to do a word of hope. Jeremiah is an interesting prophet in this way. God often calls him to act out a message or to take some symbolic action. In this instance, God calls him to buy a field. God calls him to buy a property that will lose all value in a very short time. His cousin must be thrilled, getting his money out before the market tanks. So, Jeremiah buys the field, once again out of sync with his peers.

In the frenzy and trauma of the time, I wonder if anyone started to listen to him, or to at least appreciate the hope he signified. That perhaps God's work is not done in this place, that perhaps God's good purposes would someday prevail in the end.

When have you gone against the grain? When have you, beyond the preoccupations of everyone around you, been caught by a need, by a value, and invested in it? I think of my professor in college. He would occasionally take his son into the city of Buffalo and distribute condoms to the prostitutes. I would shake my head at him back then, because I did not get it, and yet I was intrigued, and I have always remembered. Because he was shy about it, he didn't brag. But he saw with compassion a segment of society that we typically view with only condemnation. And he didn't just offer empty words; he did something. He did not think those women were hopeless. He showed compassion; made contact. He wanted to teach his son to see and be compassionate

When have you embodied hope, even when people scoff? When have you been guided by a conviction, by a love, by a calling, by a seed of compassion, that no one else in your peer group sees? Notice I said, peer group. We are not talking about your political opponents or people you already see yourself as different from. I'm talking about your peers – when they look at you funny; when they don't understand the love or compassion or conviction you act out of. When they don't comprehend where your hope comes from.

I think of Jesus. Jesus sees hope and possibility where others do not, and he embodies that hope. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, they will inherit the world; blessed are the merciful. Blessed are those that grieve, those that hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are the peacemakers and the pure in heart. Jesus sees something in them. He sees the blessing in these things society does not see as blessed. Jesus invests in the things that can grow into love and compassion and community and faithfulness.

In this season of Advent, we not only remember Christ's first coming, but we anticipate the fullness of Christ's work, the fullness of God's kingdom – God's kingdom, meaning when the world operates according to God's purposes and creative intent. As we light candles in Advent, we light today's candle in hope. But I wonder, what other symbolic action might we live out to represent our hope, in the fashion of Jeremiah? Rather than just offer words to ourselves or to the world, how might we embody our hope?

I think of good friends from our year in Princeton, They have given birth to three children, adopted another. And then they got involved in foster care. When we camped with them a few years ago in Rocky Mountain national park, they had four children plus a foster baby. They have now adopted two foster children are a family of eight. They saw the complexities and difficulties of the foster care system, and could easily have pulled away from the massive and overwhelming problems. In some way, you could say they are doing their part. But I think they also live out a sense of hope, of what a remade society might look like. And so, in a culture where we are typically consumed with our interests and aims, they took in a couple more children.

It is hard to balance the day-to-day needs while investing in such things. I looked at Grace Roossien with a puzzled face back when I was 22. I didn't know anything about IRAs and 401ks and all that jazz, and I didn't see the value in it. I'm glad she did. I have taken seriously such practical concerns over the years. As a parent, I look at my friend Justin like he is a little crazy, juggling six kids now. And in some ways, I am now guilty of being consumed with family and needs and the daily.

It is reasonable, I suppose. Life has its own frantic pace, keeping us busy and consumed. But perhaps that is the risk, as well. I don't feel much like a Jeremiah as I once did. We tend to follow the currents of the time. We lose the ability to see through the haze to what matters, to what Christ's kingdom might look like, and how to act it out in the present.

What might it look like to embody hope this Advent. What values of the kingdom of God are we willing to live out in some way? Our New Testament reading this morning reminds us how Mary and Joseph were called to embody God's hope in the world, to take on a lived reality that put them out of sync with their peers. In Advent, we wait and we anticipate the fullness of God's kingdom. And perhaps, like Jeremiah, he calls us to embody it, to act it out as a prophetic witness, long before others realize what God is up to.

And all God's people said...

*Jeremiah Buys a Field During the Siege*

**Jeremiah 32** The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar. <sup>2</sup> At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, <sup>3</sup> where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Zedekiah had said, “Why do you prophesy and say: Thus says the LORD: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; <sup>4</sup> King Zedekiah of Judah shall not escape out of the hands of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye; <sup>5</sup> and he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I attend to him, says the LORD; though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed?”

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>7</sup> Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, “Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.” <sup>8</sup> Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the LORD, and said to me, “Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.” Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.

<sup>9</sup> And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. <sup>10</sup> I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. <sup>11</sup> Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; <sup>12</sup> and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. <sup>13</sup> In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, <sup>14</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. <sup>15</sup> For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

<sup>42</sup> For thus says the LORD: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good fortune that I now promise them.

<sup>43</sup> Fields shall be bought in this land of which you are saying, It is a desolation, without human beings or animals; it has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans. <sup>44</sup> Fields shall be bought for money, and deeds shall be signed and sealed and witnessed, in the land of Benjamin, in the places around Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, of the hill country, of the Shephelah, and of the Negeb; for I will restore their fortunes, says the LORD.