

JEREMIAH 32:1-3a, 6-15

If you have been following our sermon series on Jeremiah, it may appear to be disjointed. We started with chapter one, followed by eighteen, then thirty-six, back to twenty-nine and today it's chapter thirty-two. No, the people who put this series together were not confused. In Jeremiah, as in the Gospels, telling stories is a major way of doing theology. A difference is that the Gospels turned the individual stories about Jesus into one coherent story, whereas the stories in Jeremiah come in ones or in series but not in one sequence. Many of the stories were recorded on individual scrolls, not in any particular order.

This reflects the fact that Jesus is the real subject in the Gospels, whereas Jeremiah is not the real subject in the Jeremiah scroll. It was a real challenge to try and put together the stories about Jeremiah in logical sequence. The Gospels tell the Jesus story in the logical way - birth to ministry to death to resurrection. Yet the Gospel writers know from the beginning where the story is going, and Jesus' entire story is told in light of his being on the way to death and resurrection. The story of Jeremiah in that sense begins from the end and works backwards as it searches for the theology in the story.

This week's passage continues the lectionary's sampling of texts that deal with the multi-faceted theme of judgment in the book of Jeremiah. Chapter 32 contains an audacious prophetic sign of future restoration. Though Jeremiah has been speaking words of judgment against Jerusalem and Judah throughout most of his prophetic career, chapters 30–33, also known as the Book of Comfort or the Book of Consolation, contain messages of hope. Thus, even as Babylon is threatening to complete its destruction of

Judah, the prophet makes a bold pronouncement about Judah's future – one in which “houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.”

We begin with a historical prologue, situating this prophetic action in “the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar,” or in 588 BCE. The historical context of this passage corresponds to the second siege of Jerusalem just before the eventual fall of the city in 587. Jeremiah is being held captive in the “court of the guard” because of his negative oracles, which predicted the fall of the city and the capture of the king by the Babylonians.

This passage has a basic structure, beginning with the word of the LORD coming to Jeremiah. The LORD tells Jeremiah that Hanamel, his uncle Shallum's son, would come to the prophet saying, “Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.” This word is confirmed when Hanamel comes and makes the request. In the remaining verses of today's reading, Jeremiah recounts in detail how he fulfilled the LORD's command to purchase the field, which includes an interpretation of this prophetic action:

‘Someday people will again own property here in this land and will buy and sell houses and vineyards and fields.’”

In the prophetic literature, symbolic action was a common way of conveying the “word” of the LORD. These embodied performances, which were common in the ancient Near East, usually contained three basic elements: 1) the deity's instruction to the prophet; 2) a report that describes the fulfillment of the prophetic action; and 3) an interpretation of the act. Just like

the prophetic word, these actions were not merely the prophet's best guess at upcoming events. These acts initiated the future in the present. They proclaimed in embodied form the "here not yet" of the LORD's acts in history.

The LORD instructs Jeremiah to purchase the field, because the prophet has the right to redeem it. If you recall the Book of Ruth, this well-known practice in ancient Israel involved the purchase of land by the next of kin, usually when a relative had died, in order to keep property within the clan. The significance of this action is profound given the historical context of the second Babylonian siege of Jerusalem.

In the middle of the city's impending destruction, Jeremiah makes an investment in the future stock of Judah's eventual restoration, when "houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land." This symbolic action of hope does not cancel out the word of judgment that Jeremiah had already proclaimed. The judgment of the LORD was certain. The fate of the people was sealed. In fact, it was being fulfilled even as Jeremiah was signing the deed of purchase. However, in the middle of this catastrophic set of events, God initiates a word of hope through the prophet's actions. Jeremiah, quite literally, puts his money where his mouth is. These actions put in motion a reality that is nearly impossible to envision given the current state of events.

Despite the improbable outcome of this prophetic action, something that Jeremiah acknowledges in the verses following today's passage, the prophet proceeds to fulfill this command in painstaking detail. He mentions two deeds, one sealed and one open: 'Take both this sealed deed and the

unsealed copy, and put them into a pottery jar to preserve them for a long time.'

The practice of signing two documents was common in ancient Near Eastern legal custom. The opened version functioned as a working document, which parties could reference to settle disputes. The closed document preserved a copy of the original to insure that nothing was changed.

The detail in the verses which follow has a meaningful function in this text. It not only shows the complete extent to which Jeremiah has fulfilled the instruction of the LORD – a perfect obedience - Jeremiah's meticulous fulfillment of this command also points to the prophet's and God's careful attention to a future that is still very distant and hard to see given the current circumstances. This hope is as certain as the Babylonian armies that are at the gate. Thus, the observers of this transaction are not there simply to verify the purchase of land. They are witnesses to the future that the LORD has announced through Jeremiah's prophetic action.

As Jeremiah narrates the actions he took to redeem the field, notice the prominent role of witnesses, who also sign the deed, and of Baruch, whom Jeremiah charges to bury the deed and its copy in an earthen jar. Hanamel, Baruch, the signatories, and "all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard" witness and participate in the future's unfolding.

Jeremiah's act of redemption affirms his ties to a place and people that had rejected him. His charge to Baruch contains an oracle that widens the scope from the field of Hanamel to the future social and economic flourishing of

“this land.” Jeremiah’s redemption of the field thus anticipates and inaugurates God’s will for the land as a whole and the people who will live in it.

There is much in today’s world that creates anxiety over the future – climate change, a wavering economy, and increased hostility among nations and religious groups, to name a few. Biblical hope, however, does not resort to despair in such times, nor does it try to cover up anxiety with mere words and false hope.

Today’s passage reminds us that God is invested in the future destiny of humankind. Even when catastrophe was imminent, Jeremiah made an audacious and specific financial act, symbolizing God’s declaration: that judgment and destruction would not have the final word. Judah would certainly suffer the judgment that God had announced. Babylon would destroy Jerusalem and Judah and carry off its inhabitants into exile.

The prophet, however, activates the future in the present through a symbolic act of purchasing a field. God’s people would be restored and would again thrive in the land: ‘Someday people will again own property here in this land.’ Perilous times require the faithful to put into embodied action the hope that God has announced, which is already here, but not yet.

It is said that hope springs eternal. There are times, however, when hope is hard to find. Where is the hope when the dread of war is reality? Where is the hope when the lone voice of the one God commissioned to bring hope is locked away in prison? Where is the hope when leaders mistake painful

words for words of hopelessness?

This is the situation in today's text. Babylon has overtaken Jerusalem leaving a trail of death and destruction in its path. Jeremiah, the prophet whose job it is "to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" is imprisoned, silenced within the walls of the king's palace. The king, King Zedekiah, is too shortsighted to understand that Jeremiah's word of warning is a blessing in and of itself.

Sometimes, especially in the worst of times, hope comes from unexpected places, and is visible only to those who have the "eyes to see." Many would see the offer to buy land in a time such as this simply as a way to rid oneself of an unwanted financial responsibility. After all, owning land or buying property seemed pointless when the entire population is about to be killed or deported." Jeremiah, on the other hand, understood his cousin's offer to be a sign of hope and expectation for future blessing. Since God had told him to expect his cousin to make the offer, Jeremiah saw it as a sign that God would reverse Israel's fortunes. He saw it as a sign that God had neither forgotten Israel nor left it to its own devices.

Commanding that the deeds be put in clay pots, Jeremiah took steps necessary to assure that the deeds of purchase would outlast war and destruction. Even today, it is a joyous occasion and a newsworthy event when a cache of ancient documents is found. For example, Israel's national library announced its purchase of thousand-year-old "writings in Hebrew, Aramaic, Judea-Arabic and ... Judeo-Persian" found in caves in northeast Afghanistan, and was international news.

Years earlier when Israel settled in the Promised Land, priests and Levites were forbidden to own land. Instead, they were given “fields around the towns that had been allocated to them.” These properties were to remain in the hands of close relatives. “Crops “could be planted and] harvested” but never sold outside the family. This restriction was designed to “prevent a family losing its land and ... being reduced to poverty.”

Jeremiah made sure that he followed all of the prescribed legal procedures, including having it witnessed publicly. With the transaction in public view, Jeremiah was also conducting a “sermon” for all to see. It was a way of expressing his hope, his desire, his trust in God, that things would indeed get better, even if he did not live to experience better.

Where is the hope when the addict has lost their way, when the family has lost its connection, when the gambler has lost it all? Where is the hope when changes in the economy result in an unwanted layoff? Where is the hope when failing health signals that life will go on, but it will never be the same? What do you do when you know there’s light at the end of the tunnel, but for the life of you, you can’t see it? What do you do when it seems that what is broken can never be healed, can never be fixed?

Sooner or later, the one whose heart is broken must step out in faith if there is to be any healing, any movement forward into the new “future story.” The addict must seek treatment. The family can choose love, even in divorce. The gambler can choose to make different financial decisions. The employee with a pink slip can find a new career. Failing health can lead to a new way of life.

The one looking for light at the end of the tunnel can choose to move forward, confident that the light is there, even in the darkness. The one whose heart is broken can trust that God will heal.

For Jeremiah, that act of faith meant buying a plot of land. It must have taken much faith. It must have taken much courage to purchase land that had been upended by war, especially since he expected a long road to peace. Seventy years is a long time and Jeremiah likely would not live to reclaim the land. His purchase was not just for himself, but for future generations. His purchase signalled to the nation that the one who brought warning of destruction was also one who believed in restoration, who believed in hope.

Scripture does not tell us what happened to Jeremiah or to the land, except to say that despite warning against it, Jeremiah was compelled by some in his community to go to Egypt. Many years later, under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the exiles would return to reclaim and rebuild the nation and its temple.

Paul too knew the importance of living by faith. He would write in 2 Corinthians “for we walk by faith, not by sight.” Paul and Jeremiah, their words speak volumes, even today. Jeremiah’s purchase of land still stands as a testimony of what faith and hope in God can do.

Even in the worst of times faith and hope can be found if only we have “eyes to see.” Like Paul, like Jeremiah, it is incumbent for all to know that hope does indeed spring eternal.

Amen.

PRAYERS FOR JULY 20, 2025

Gracious God, we come to you broken – from that which confines us: the prejudice buried, weighted down with fear distorted self-protection breaking me, breaking you. And, so we come to you seeking to be made whole. For you, God, put your love within us; you wrote it on our hearts, that we may be your people.

On this day we pray for those who weep, who are struggling from lack of clean water, healthy food, quality, affordable health care. Women who want to make decisions about their families, their lives, their bodies, how and when, and with whom. And, so we come to you seeking to be made whole. For you, God, put your love within us; you wrote it on our hearts, that we may be your people.

Compassionate God, God of covenant, God of love, we come to you tired, yearning for peace and harmony for places in our world affected by political strife including: South Korea, Russia, Ukraine, Sudan, for Syria, Lebanon, and Afghanistan. We pray for the end of bitterness and violence in its many forms. We pray for the people suffering war conditions and the threat of war. We see the desolate eyes of refugees, plodding along war-devastated roads, or looking from transit camps, and from behind barbed wire, for glimmers of hope.

We pray that leaders at every level learn to speak in favour of humanity and justice and work for peace. We pray that all people can walk the path of peace, the path of forgiveness, the path of equality. We pray for Palestine, where over 58,000 have been killed, with the latest Israeli strike hitting the Catholic church in Gaza, killing 2 and injuring at least 30.

Holy Friend, healer of the sick, comfort of the sad, rebuke of the oppressor, judge of the greedy, hope of the repentant, friend of the downtrodden; in prayer we lift up to you this world with its outrageous injustices yet also its outpouring of human kindness from ordinary people.

Gracious God, protect those who have no place to live and no one to love them. Help them to know you, and to know love. We pray for the feeding of the hungry, the clothing of the destitute, the housing of the homeless, the reformation of prisoners, and the rehabilitation of those who have been addicted to drugs. Bless every agency, church or government, which is dedicated to the care of our disadvantaged siblings.

Guide us, we pray, as your church, struggling to spread the good news. Keep us focussed on the mission and ministry to which you have called us and lead

us forward. We know that there will often be bumps and holes in the road along the way. Save us from dwelling on them and make us secure in the goals you have placed before us.

Hear our prayers for all who need your tender touch of healing — those we name before you each day, and those who are known only to you in the depths of our hearts. We pray for our families, friends, and neighbours, and for those who are alone. We pray for those who are separated from loved ones, those who grieve this day, and those who are sick in hospital or ill at home, and those undergoing treatments. We lift up before you Pr. Kristen Steele, Dawn Hill, and Mark Wickson. Bless all who work in clinics and hospitals.

We pray for the church, that we may love one another in practice as well as in prayer. May the Church be true, engaging, glad, and active, doing your will, faithful and ready to promote the cause of compassionate love and peace. We pray for Pope Leo XIV; Newly elected Bishop Larry Kochendorfer, Bishop Kathy, Bishop Anna, newly elected Anglican Primate the Rt Rev. Shane Parker, congregations and Bishops of the Moravian Worldwide church, Bishop Azar and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, Faith Lutheran in Kelowna - Rev. Brian Krushel Gloria Dei Lutheran in North Vancouver - Rev. Vida Jaugelis, our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanze and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, and Holy Trinity Lutheran in Port Angeles.

We pray for the thousands who are in terror or despair because of natural disasters: flood or house fire, cyclone or earthquake, avalanche or wildfire, drought or lightning strike, storm waves or volcanic eruption, monsoons and flooding, breathing problems due to intense smoke. We uplift areas in the USA which are currently experiencing flash flooding – Texas, New Mexico, New York, and New Jersey.

Let us pray for an end to the divisions and inequalities that scar God's creation. Let us pray for an end to the waste and desecration of God's creation, for access to the fruits of creation to be shared equally among all people, and for communities and nations to find sustenance in the fruits of the earth and the water God has given us. We pray for our mother earth as she faces the continued impacts of climate change. We also take this moment to give thanks for the wonders of creation especially during this summer season when many of us are able to spend more time outdoors connecting with wildlife.

We pray for the over 14 million children globally who did not receive a single vaccine in 2024 according to a recent UN report. We pray for areas where children suffer from poverty, starvation, wars, and natural disasters. And for

places close to home where children are forced to navigate parental addictions and mental wellness struggles, family conflict, and bullying.

Mother, Father, Creator, and Redeemer of the whole world: You have all of us – all our countries and nations in the palm of Your hand. Help us also to gently hold one another with Your love. Fill us with strength and courage, with discernment and compassion, that we may be your instruments of justice and love in this world, that it may be on earth as it is in heaven. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray ...

Our Father ...