

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15
Part 5: The Politically Incorrect Prophet Jeremiah
A Purchase of Hope
WRCoB 7.11.21

Judith is from an area in Nigeria
That has had minor skirmishes
Between her people, the Irigwe

Which is mostly Christian farming people
Whose small hamlets are nestled in the hills
Of Western Plateau State

And the Fulani, the nomadic cattle herders
Who travel the region in search of grass and water.

In previous years when the only weapons they had
Were bows and arrows and spears
Conflicts were few and much less volatile

But things have really changed for the worse.

Nowadays, with the support from Islamist terrorist groups
The Fulani now carry illegally obtained modern weaponry.

What was once slight clashes between tribes
It has now evolved into acts of terrorism.

Now, the Fulanis invade a village with their AK47s
They shoot everyone in sight
Killing men, women, and children.

They burn their stores of grain, their vehicles, and homes.

They have caused severe suffering
In what is called the middle belt of Nigeria;

The demarcation between
The Muslim North and the Christian South.

They are intent on extending
Their power and territory farther south
Due to desertification in the North
Caused in part by climate change

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Even today, around Judith's hometown
The crisis is ongoing.

So, it is all the more surprising
That when relatives call on Judith
Seeking to sell their land
Due to economic hardships

She, for the most part, does not hesitate but buys it.

She does so to keep the land in the family.

But she also does so with the eventual hope that one day
We will build a home there
And spend some of our golden years
Basking in the African sun, eating mangoes.

This is the same hope God gave to Jeremiah
When God instructed Jeremiah to buy his cousin's farm
In the middle of Babylon's siege of Jerusalem.

Today, we backtrack just a little.

In our last Scripture Lesson, we witnessed
Jeremiah writing a letter to the exiles in Babylon

The siege was over
And many people were sent into exile in Babylon.

Today's text takes us back to Jerusalem.
Jeremiah is in prison
And Babylon's has just about squeezed
The life out of the city.

The situation is dire.

The time period is somewhere between 589 and 587 BCE

King Nebuchadnezzar laid siege against the city
When Judah's King Zedekiah revolted.

The king installed by Nebuchadnezzar himself.

The siege lasted close to 2 years
And produced horrific suffering.

1

2 Kings 25:3 NRSV

³On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine became so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land.

2

Lamentations 4:4 NRSV

**⁴The tongue of the infant sticks
to the roof of its mouth for thirst;
the children beg for food,
but no one gives them anything.**

3 Lamentations 4:10 NLT

¹⁰ Tenderhearted women

have cooked their own children.

**They have eaten them
to survive the siege.**

I cannot imagine a more difficult situation.

During this unbearable situation
God comes to Jeremiah.

God informs him, his cousin is coming,
And wants Jeremiah to buy his farm.

And so, in the middle of all that suffering
With Jeremiah in prison
The city in siege by the Babylonian army

His cousin slips into the city
And asks Jeremiah to buy his farm.

And Jeremiah buys it!

A bit weird, wouldn't you say
Buying land in the middle of a siege?

Real estate values have plummeted
There is no market for farms now.

You can buy a dozen farms for a song and a dance.

Besides that, what good would buying a farm do
They're all going to die!

But God's message to was this.

4

Jeremiah 32:15 CEV

15 I am the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, and I promise you that people will once again buy and sell houses, farms, and vineyards in this country.

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There's more to Jeremiah's purchase
Than getting Jeremiah's cousin out of a bind.

And Jeremiah knows it.

And rather than doing the transaction
In secret so he wouldn't look foolish.

He brings in witnesses
Makes a big deal weighing out the money
Has Baruch make copies of the deed

And in the presence of all those suffering Judeans
Who were standing around with nothing to do
But slowly starve to death

Jeremiah orders the deeds
To be placed in a safe earthenware jar
For preservation.

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Just as he did at the potter's house
And the potter molding his clay.

And just as he did buying the expensive earthen jar
And smashing it to the ground

Jeremiah gets theatrical and over the top dramatic!

But whereas before the symbolism prophesied
God's disappointment and punishment

This clay pot symbolizes something else.

For in it is stored the future of Israel.

It symbolizes a coming time
When Israel will return to their homes
Farm the land their ancestors farmed

And raise families as they had done so for generations.

To those witnessing Jeremiah actions
The deeds stored in an earthen jar
Becomes a purchase of hope.

The hope that the current situation will not last forever.

That God indeed has plans for the people
Plans for their welfare and not for their harm
To give them a future with hope.

With his seventeen shekels
Jeremiah purchases something more
Than just his cousin's land.
He purchases hope for the people of Israel.

If Jeremiah, the prophet, the voice of God
Has hope enough to buy the farm
In the middle of a war.

Then, by golly,

There just might be hope enough for the rest of them.

God offers everlasting hope to sustain them.

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According to Psychology Today

5

Hope structures your life in anticipation of the future and influences how you feel in the present.

6

Hope creates a positive mood about an expectation, a goal, or a future situation. Such mental time travel influences your state of mind and alters your behavior in the present.

7

The positive feelings you experience as you look ahead, imagining hopefully what might happen, what you will attain, or who you are going to be, can alter how you currently view yourself.

~~

Hope changes things.

Hope may not change your external circumstances

But it certainly changes how you view them.

In perhaps the darkest period of time

Ever to have befallen Jerusalem and Judah

God tells Jeremiah to go and buy some real estate!

And Jeremiah does so in as conspicuous a way as possible.

At the time, it must have looked ridiculous.

But it was a tangible expression life continues

The oppression they were facing
 Though it would last 70 years
 Would eventually be over

And they would be set free
 To return to their homeland.

Jeremiah had given them hope
 That their present suffering will not last
 That the future held something better.

We hope it was enough for them to hold onto.

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Last week, the Brethren ended Annual Conference.

It was done virtually.

Other than agency reports and elections
 The only business that was conducted
 Was to approve the adoption
 Of the church's Compelling Vision.

For those of you who don't know it, here it is.

8

*Together, as the Church of the Brethren,
we will passionately live and share the radical transformation
and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based
neighborhood engagement. To move us forward, we will
develop a culture of calling and equipping disciples who are
innovative, adaptable, and fearless.*

It was voted on and approved.

In some way, as I see it
The Compelling Vision is also a gesture of hope

It is similar to Jeremiah's purchase
In its attempt to bring people hope
During a difficult period in Brethren life.

I believe it is meant to unify and bring courage
To a much divided and despairing denomination.

The membership decline has been exponential here of late

However, I admit, I look at any vision statements
With a bit of skepticism.

I wish I didn't . . . but I do.

I have seen a lot of hard work go into them
Without having any lasting impact.

But I too, need hope for the future of our denomination.

I was born a cradle Brethren
And I have chosen to be a Brethren minister
Because I believe in who we are.

I believe the Brethren have something to offer the world
That is unique and needed

In essence, I see the Church of the Brethren
Exhibiting characteristics Jesus would want in a church.

And so, I, for one, will jump into this new vision
With both feet and with all my energy.

To do everything I can to support
This congregation, the district, and the greater brotherhood.

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Beginning the second week in September
We will begin a Bible Study series
On the Compelling Vision

It will be in person at church
On Sundays at 9:30 in the Gathering Room.

It is my hope we work together
At understanding and then living out its commission.

With the hope of unifying and strengthening us
To be the church God wants us to be. Amen?

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And so, Judith, we will build that house in Irigweland
Trusting God that God has a plan for us
To build up and not to tear down

And too, church, let's recommit ourselves to the Gospel
Knowing God has plans for our welfare
And plans to give us hope for our future.