

Jeremiah 33:14-18
December 3, 2023

Baruch's Hope

The time is coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill my gracious promise with the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time, I will raise up a righteous branch from David's line, who will do what is just and right in the land. In those days, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is what he will be called: The LORD Is Our Righteousness. The LORD proclaims: David will always have one of his descendants sit on the throne of the house of Israel. And the levitical priests will always have someone in my presence to make entirely burned offerings and grain offerings, and to present sacrifices.

Jer. 33:14-18 (C.E.B.)

For the children:¹

Rather than sitting down this morning, I wonder if we could very carefully walk over here and look at this stable.

Do you know what it is?

It kind of looks like a barn. There is straw and maybe room for some animals.

Why would we have a stable in the church?

Yes! This is where the baby Jesus was born. But he's not here yet. In fact, his mother and father are making a journey. We'll talk a little bit about that journey next week, but I wonder if we can see them yet. Can you see if Mary and Joseph are on their way?

Good job! We found them!

Let's watch each week and see how long it takes them to get here!

Let's pray:

God, thank you. Thank you for Mary and Joseph. Thank you for places to live. Thank you for beds to sleep in. Be with all those who travel this month, and keep them safe. Amen.

¹ Hope Mennonite Church keeps a Crèche (made by Carol Matulka, Leslie James, and P.J.) on display throughout Advent. As part of the tradition, Mary and Joseph "make the journey" from the far reaches of the church toward the stable, getting closer each week, "arriving" on Christmas Eve. Each week the Children's Time will feature a time to look for the travelers on their journey.

For the adults:

Good morning! My name is Baruch. Your pastor asked me to come and talk to you today. He thought I could offer some insight on the scripture you heard this morning.

You may not recognize my name. I was the scribe for the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 36:4). In some ways, I was more than a scribe though. Sometimes I felt like I was a bodyguard, or at least someone who provided a buffer between Jeremiah and the angry mobs. Sometimes, he would ask me to read his prophecies to the congregation rather than speaking to the crowds directly (Jer. 36:10).

Your pastor asked me to come today because I was probably closer to Jeremiah than any other person. That was in part because so few people wanted to hear what he had to say. More than once he was silenced. Once they threw him into a cistern, hoping he would die. For a while he was imprisoned. In those times the only way his message was heard was when I read what he told me to write.

Jeremiah often heard messages in places no one else did. He said it was as if he heard visions, as if his eyes were his ears. Jeremiah saw an almond tree, for example (Jer. 1:11). But when he said it out loud he heard God saying he was looking over Israel. It's hard to explain in English, but the words sound similar.

I remember Jeremiah telling me the first thing he remembers God telling him. It was a tongue twister we all learned to say as children:²

נתש נתץ אבד הר הר בנה נתע

(pronounced: *nathash nathats 'abad harac harac banah nata'*)

That may sound like gibberish to you; it did to us, too, when we first learned to say it. As I said, it was intended as a tongue twister, maybe like the ones you learned as children. "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers." In our tongue twister, the words sound similar. But it was so like Jeremiah to hear a message in them.

nathash nathats 'abad harac harac banah nata'

Literally, it means to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. Mostly gibberish. But Jeremiah knew he was sent to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. Those words caused Jeremiah to be thrown in jail cells, to be cast to the bottom of muddy cisterns, and to be locked in publicly humiliating stocks.

² This is an actual quote from Jeremiah (Jer. 1:10). The idea of it being a tongue twister learned by children is my own invention.

He never told me when he first heard those words as a message from the Lord, but I can assure you he found himself wondering at times why he is the one God chose to be a prophet!

Often, as we sat together, he would tell me about his life story and his powerful call to speak. It wasn't what he chose, he would say, but clearly God chose him. One time he told me it was like a fire in his belly (Jer. 20:9). He couldn't *not* speak.

He was born the son of a priest, and raised in Anathoth, a town not far from Jerusalem (Jer. 1:1). Because his father was a priest, Jeremiah knew he was destined to become one himself and became fluent in the language of rituals.

Unlike many prophets before and since, his role in the temple gave him a stage from which to speak directly to the people – and to the King – because everyone who wanted to make a sacrifice came to the temple. He wasn't always on duty, but when he was, no one could avoid hearing his message (Jer. 7:2; 19:14, etc.).

In many ways, though, his personality was more suited to that of a priest than that of a prophet. He was an introvert who preferred to watch and listen while repeating the rituals of the temple. The truth is Jeremiah loved to sit silently and watch, watching with his ears as much as his eyes.

- He watched the seasons change, for example, and sensed God's judgement coming when he felt the dry summer wind against his face (Jer. 4:11).
- Another time, he sat and watched potters at work (Jer. 18:2). As they slowly worked the clay, he recognized how God's hand had been shaping him. But he went further, he realized God was shaping Israel, and that like a potter, there were times when pieces were cast aside or refashioned.
- Other times he watched armies march toward war and loved ones wailing in grief.

He noticed things. And he saw meanings in what he noticed.

He also noticed how bleak and hopeless life seemed.

You may have thought of Jeremiah as the weeping prophet because of the deep sadness with which he spoke. Maybe you thought of him as a weeping prophet because of the Book of Lamentations that he is given credit for writing – even though he didn't.

I only saw him weep once, though. He was weeping because the people would not listen to the words he had been saying when they refused to surrender to King Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 27:12).

Other prophets of the day were proclaiming joy and celebration as they saw the last of the Assyrian army moving out of the region.

You probably remember that the northern kingdom of Israel had succumbed to the rule of the Assyrians 100 years earlier. It was a constant fear in Judah that we would be next. But God spared us that tragedy. And as the Assyrians left, people began to believe good times were ahead.

But not Jeremiah. To him, it was the calm before the storm.

He knew a storm was brewing because the people – including the other priests and the king – had been courting false gods. If God could destroy Israel at the hands of the Assyrians, he said, we are not immune from God’s punishment just because we live in Judah.

That’s part of why no one wanted to listen to Jeremiah. He said – and rightfully so, as it turned out – that the Babylonians were on their way. He warned us that they would be far worse than the Assyrians had been.

But what really made people angry was when he encouraged the king to surrender to the Babylonians. Jeremiah was certain that the Babylonians would treat us better if we surrendered peacefully.

We’ll never know if that was the case because no one willingly surrendered.

The truth is Jeremiah was more hopeful than most people believe. He spoke of God’s abiding presence. He spoke of God’s ultimate plans. He spoke of the day when we would return from Babylon. But no one would listen to his words of hope because it was coming from such a bleak starting point, from surrendering to a foreign ruler.

Jeremiah didn’t make it any easier on himself, either. As evidence of his belief in this potential future, he bought land (Jer. 32:10). It was his ancestral land. He told me he remembered going there as a young child. He remembered rolling down the grassy hills in the summer and picking grapes in the early fall. And even though it was inside the enemy lines, he knew it would once again be the land of Judah.

He was in shackles at the time, being publicly humiliated for his preaching. While he was in shackles, he bought it! He couldn’t have been more public about it. Everyone saw him, and those who didn’t heard about it.

Of course, people accused him of being a traitor who was going to join the enemy rather than stay and fight. Others thought he was taking advantage of the falling price of land. They thought he was a prophet who was after a financial profit. They were convinced he knew the Babylonians would be defeated. He was taking advantage of his position and preying on the current landowners.

It would be like buying land in Gaza right now. Only a fool would do that. Or perhaps a shrewd investor who knows the price of land will never be lower. It's bleak in that land, too. It's bleak in all lands wherever war is present. It's bleak whenever war is on the horizon.

Did you know Jeremiah said, "mourning will come upon Gaza" (Jer. 47:5)? He really wasn't predicting what is taking place in your era, but he does speak about the devastation coming upon the earth, about the immense sorrow that happens when people forget to do what God requires.

And what does the Lord require? More than once, Jeremiah said all God asked was for us to obey him so he can be our God (Jer. 7:23; 11:4).

Jeremiah kept seeing evidence of people refusing to obey God, of people exploiting and mistreating refugees and spilling innocent blood (Jer. 22:3). Too many people preferred to chase after other gods. Too many people thought violence was the answer. And yet Jeremiah maintained an incurable sense of hope and optimism.

He would sit in the darkness and watch the stars at night. He would whisper to me things he noticed. He noticed, for instance, that God made a covenant with the day and with the night (Jer. 33:20). That covenant, like all of God's covenant, was eternal. In the deepest darkness, as he awaited the sunrise, he reminded me that just as surely as the sun would rise, God would keep the promise to be with us, to bring us salvation.

Other prophets spoke about that salvation as coming from the Messiah, from some future king who would rule with justice (see Is. 9:7, for example). Not so, Jeremiah. He knew salvation came from the God who restores, who builds and who plants (Jer. 33:16).³

nathash nathats 'abad harac harac banah nata'

Remember that phrase? To pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. Destruction was on the horizon, but that meant so was the building and the planting of something new. God may use a king, a Messiah, to achieve that goal. But the Messiah was not the answer. The only hope for restoration is to trust in God.

I guess that's the word I would like to bring to you today. No matter how bleak life seems, God will be present. The Lord will give you life (Jer. 45:5).

Maybe you can learn to look and see what Jeremiah might see. Notice the darkness of the evening skies, for example, and remember that brighter days of spring are coming.

³ Clements, p. 200

In the same way, the advent of Christ in your midst will arrive soon.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Randy L Quinn
Hope Mennonite Church

Selected Bibliography

- Clements, R.E. *Jeremiah (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching)*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1988.
- Martens, Elmer A. *Jeremiah (Believers Church Bible Commentary)*. Scottsdale: Herald, 1986.
- Quinn, Randy L. "Betting the Farm." Sermon preached September 26, 2010 at First UMC, Hiawatha; based on Jeremiah 32:1-15 (and published online at DesperatePreacher.com for the week of September 29, 2013).
- _____. "Covenant V – A New Covenant." Sermon preached March 20, 1988 at First UMC, Saint John; based on Jeremiah 31:31-34.
- _____. "Down in my Heart." Sermon preached March 22, 2015 at First UMC, Hiawatha; based on Jeremiah 31:31-34.
- _____. "A Firestorm." Sermon preached September 12, 2010 at First UMC, Hiawatha; based on Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28 (and published online at DesperatePreacher.com for the week of September 15, 2013).
- _____. "Forgiven and Forgotten, to be Remembered." Sermon preached April 9, 2000 at Fowler; based on Jeremiah 31:31-34 (and published online at DesperatePreacher.com for the week of April 2, 2004 and GoodPreacher.com for the week of October 17, 2010).
- _____. "Forgiven & Forgotten – to be Remembered." Sermon preached October 17, 2010 at First UMC, Hiawatha; based on Jeremiah 31:31-34 (and published online at DesperatePreacher.com for the week of October 20, 2013).
- _____. "Forgiven from the Heart." Sermon preached April 6, 2003 at Sunnyside; based on Jeremiah 31:31-34.
- _____. "A Future with Hope." Sermon preached May 17, 2006 at McLouth; based on Jeremiah 29:11-14a.
- _____. "God at the Wheel." Sermon preached September 5, 2010 at First UMC, Hiawatha; based on Jeremiah 18:1-6.

- _____. “God, the Master Potter.” Sermon preached August 9, 1992 at Allen Blanchard; based on Jeremiah 18:1-11 (and published online at DesperatePreacher.com for the week of September 5, 2004).
- _____. “The Good, the Bad, the Ugly.” Sermon preached February 16, 1992 at First UMC, Saint John; based on Jeremiah 17:5-10.
- _____. “Homecoming Celebration.” Sermon preached October 23, 1988 at First UMC, Saint John; based on Jeremiah 31:7-9.
- _____. “Investing in the Kingdom.” Sermon preached October 10, 2010 at First UMC, Hiawatha; based on Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7 (and published online at DesperatePreacher.com for the week of October 13, 2013).
- _____. “Is There a Doctor in the House?” Sermon preached September 19, 2010 at First UMC, Hiawatha; based on Jeremiah 8:18 – 9:1.
- _____. “A New Reason to Sing.” Sermon preached January 4, 1009 at First UMC, Hiawatha; based on Jeremiah 31:7-14 (and published online at DesperatePreacher.com for the week of January 3, 2010).
- _____. “No More Excuses.” Sermon preached August 22, 2010 at First UMC, Hiawatha; based on Jeremiah 1:4-10 (and published online at DesperatePreacher.com for the week of August 25, 2013).
- _____. “Promises, Promises, Promises.” Sermon preached December 3, 2000 at Deer Park & Wild Rose; based on Jeremiah 33:14-16.
- _____. “The Prophetic Task.” Sermon preached February 2, 1992 at First UMC, Saint John; based on Jeremiah 1:1-10.
- _____. “Ruling with Righteousness.” Sermon preached November 21, 2010 at First UMC, Hiawatha; based on Jeremiah 23:1-6 (and published online at DesperatePreacher.com for the week of November 24, 2013).
- _____. “A Service of Service.” Sermon preached June 30, 2019 at West Heights; based on Jeremiah 29:4-7.
- _____. “Showdown at High Noon.” Sermon preached August 27, 1989 at First UMC, Saint John; based on Jeremiah 28:1-9.
- _____. “So, Who do You Trust?” Sermon preached August 23, 1992 at Allen Blanchard; based on Jeremiah 28:1-11.
- _____. “Stepping Out in Faith.” Sermon preached October 8, 2023 at Hope Mennonite Church; based on Jeremiah 29:4-7, 11.
- _____. “The Time is Coming.” Sermon preached November 27, 1988 at Saint John; based on Jeremiah 33:14-16.

_____. “The Worst Kind of Heartburn.” Sermon preached August 20, 1989 at First UMC, Saint John; based on Jeremiah 20:7-13.

_____. “You Gotta Do what You Gotta Do.” Sermon preached August 16, 1992 at Allen Blanchard; based on Jeremiah 20:7-13.