

“Walk Humbly With God”
Jeremiah 2:4-13 & Luke 14:1, 7-14

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The words of Jeremiah in this text we read today are delivered in the language and style of a lawsuit – a form of delivery that would have been understood by his audience to be serious and sober.

First, as in a courtroom, the people, and in this case all the people of God, are called to order: Hear the word of the Lord, Jeremiah calls, hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob. Every clan of the House of Israel.

And then through the words of Jeremiah, God issues an indictment – a formal accusation. The people are accused of breaking their agreement with God. An agreement to which God has remained faithful. They are accused of turning their back on God; the God who led them through a dangerous wilderness and brought them to a country of farmland where they have the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of its bounty.

But instead of remembering the gratitude they owe to this God, instead of staying faithful to the ways in which God had instructed, the ways that offer well-being and flourishing, they have gone their own way. They have defiled the land they were to steward for the good of the people and the vulnerable and the stranger amongst them. And they have replaced their rightful reliance on God with empty gods - empty gods made of their own hands.

In this lawsuit speech of Jeremiah's, God calls the heavens to bear witness against the accused, before God reiterates again the crime that deserves punishment. A two-fold wrong of, firstly forsaking God, and then imagining that they themselves, with their own technologies, their own drives for greatness and self-reliance are the things that would save them, the things that would provide meaning and a flourishing future.

Jeremiah was a priest and prophet who held his role in Judah, the southern kingdom of the people of Israel, for 40 years from 627 BCE until 586 BCE. Judah was home to Solomon's temple at Jerusalem, and Jeremiah served in the Kingdom of Judah through the reign of three kings: King Josiah, and then Josiah's son's King Jehoiakim and King Zedekiah.

King Josiah was a reformer who led independently of the empires that surrounded him. He was faithful to Yahweh's Covenant God: Abraham's God, Sarah's God, Jacob's God, Our God. Josiah established the temple in Jerusalem as the center of religious life. He ended worship in local temples and drove out the worship of idols.

After Josiah's death in 608 BCE, however, Josiah's sons turned away from their father's ways and they looked to those empires around them instead of God to secure and try to retain power. They turned first to Egypt for help and as a result they became embroiled in Egypt's conflict with Babylon.

When the increasingly powerful Babylonian empire overpowered and conquered Egypt, the descendants of Josiah tried to court Babylon, but friendship counts for nothing in the grasping world view of empire and before long Judah suffered through Babylonian invasion, the destruction of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem and then the exile of a great number of Jewish people into Babylon.

Jeremiah was a fierce opponent of Josiah's sons as he saw them turn from the ways of Yahweh and rely on their own wheeling and dealing, and the violence of empire to secure their positions. He understood and proclaimed the Babylonian invasion as inevitable and prophesied the coming destruction as something the people must submit to as God's punishment for their abandonment of their covenant with Yahweh and their return to idol worship.

Unlike his predecessor Moses who for 40 years led the people from the wilderness to the promise of God, Jeremiah also a priest and prophet who led for 40 years, warned and then accompanied his people as they lost their way and found themselves back in wilderness.

Scholars now understand that much of what we now read in this book of Jeremiah was collected and written down by those exiles in Babylon as they found themselves separated from the ways that gave their existence meaning and looked back to ask the question that Jeremiah says they should have asked at the time. Namely, where was God? And how do we remember God's ways in this new place? How do we help our children remember and hold onto God's ways into the future in order that they do not face such destruction?

We, beloved, are those children. Our ancestors are warning us, they are begging us, to remember our story and to learn from our story. They are warning us,

begging us to look at our world now, and for our sakes, and for our children's sakes, ask the questions - where is the Lord?

Is the Lord in our courting power and status? Or is the Lord in remembering and relying on our Covenant God?

Is the Lord in competition and accumulation and even violence as we strive for security for our own circles? Or is the Lord in generosity and inclusion?

Is the Lord in maintaining relationships that keep us comfortable or are grounded solely in the hope of the reciprocation or privilege they might bring? Or is the Lord in relationships that challenge us to grow and flourish together?

Is the Lord in keeping it all closed, building bigger fences? Or is the Lord in building bigger tables, stewarding our resources for our collective benefit?

Those are all very leading questions, of course; I might not make it in a court of law. But the story we are called to remember, the story we are invited into through these scriptures and through our relationship with Jesus, is unequivocal. You are close to the kingdom of God, you are walking in God's way's, living in God's story when you give up the need for status and recognition; when you show up with gentleness not violence; when you sit with those who are different from you, those who understand the world differently; when you eat and drink and learn and build community together. You are close to the kingdom of God when you live into God's instruction that creation be stewarded for flourishing of all and when you feed those who are hungry and invite them to eat in dignity.

Jeremiah and the people who suffered in exile and who brought these words of Jeremiah are asking us to look to God, to turn back away from the idols we make of our own hands, and to trust instead in God's ways warning to us lest we suffered the isolation and the disconnection they suffered.

But beloved in all this I want to remember God's good news. This text from Jeremiah is written as a lawsuit, but even as the people are found guilty of abandoning God, God does not abandon them. The people suffer the consequences of their abandonment of God in the destruction and isolation that it

inevitably brings, and should they continue, their children will suffer also, but still God does not abandon them.

At the beginning of this book attributed to Jeremiah, God says to him, “See, I appoint you this day over nations and kingdoms to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. To build and to plant. God is always about new life and never leaves us alone. God remained with the exiles in their isolation and alienation. And as they found their way back to the story, to the ways of God, God brought them back to life.

Beloved we have been granted the assurance of this never-ending promise of life in the actions of Jesus. The full and final assurance that God will give everything for us and has brought his kingdom, his peace, his promise of new life to us never to be undone.

You are secure in the love of God, beloved. You have nothing to fear, nothing to prove. Remember and live securely in this Good news. Live securely and tell the story of a God who is faithful, a God who is the source of all good things and who gifts us with everything we need. Tell the story in what you say but more so by living as Jesus lived – with humility, with great mercy and standing always for just relations in our world. Tell the story and be a living answer to the question – where is the Lord? Amen