
“Thus Saith the Lord: Even so... Hope in Me”

A SERMON on Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15 for the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C
Preached 28 September 2025 by the Rev. Matthew Emery, Lead Minister
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“At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined.”

With these rather understated words, the scripture lets us know that things weren't so hot for Jeremiah's nation and people. The capital city surrounded, troops on every side, nowhere to go, nowhere to escape, nowhere else left that had not already been conquered.

Things weren't so hot for Jeremiah himself, either. He was not fully “in jail” exactly, but he was for all intents and purposes locked up, confined and constricted under the power of Jerusalem's king. That king, King Zedekiah, you see, did not much appreciate that Jeremiah was going around telling everyone that Jerusalem was going to fall, and that Zedekiah himself would be hauled off to Babylon. Locking up the prophet, then...? Well, it may not change the truth of the message, but at least it's not being broadcast everywhere. So there Jeremiah sat, confined in the palace.

And so, indeed. Things didn't look so hot, for either the prophet or the people.

Many—if not most—of us today live with the increasingly constant sense that things aren't looking so hot for us and our world today. The news headlines of the past few weeks have been more than enough to trouble our minds and hearts. From the genocide that continues in Gaza unabated and unchecked, to the world leaders at the United Nations this week who showed us they have given up on even the illusion of cooperation or mutual concern, to all the other mind-boggling things among our neighbours south of the border that make us wonder if we'll ever return to a world that seems “normal”, the world around us does not exactly inspire hope. Throw on top of all that the impending catastrophes that will result from climate change and the ongoing burdens of the current cost-of-living and affordability crises and longer-term wealth inequalities, and, well... things aren't going so hot for us these days, are they?

When things had gotten bad for Jeremiah and his people, what did Jeremiah do? Well, as we heard in today's scripture, he bought a piece of land, a field that belonged to his cousin.

Perhaps that seems like a strange thing to do. In fact, I'm pretty sure that the people around Jeremiah thought so—thought it was strange, irrelevant, wasteful even. You see, the threat that was standing outside the gate, quite literally, was that the nation and the people were about to lose all of the land. The forces of the Babylonian empire had surrounded the city, holding it in a siege, ready to conquer and destroy. What good does a land deed do, when the whole of the land is gone...? When the people have been hauled away in exile...? When anything you could do with that land was but a dream from a time long since passed...?

And take note that Jeremiah doesn't just buy this field of his cousin's, quietly. He goes through all of the usual public transactions and recordings—the money exchange, the creation of deeds, the recording and witnessing of those deeds, the preservation of them so they'd be protected. This was not an under-the-table deal, but a public and fully actualized exchange.

But why?

In many ways, the answer to that is quite simple. Why? Because of the promises of God. “For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards *shall again* be bought in this land.” God declares that there is still a future for these people, for this land, for

these people in this land. Where it seems like all is saying “no way,” God is saying there is a way. In the midst of a time when things weren’t going so well, when all the signs pointed to death and destruction, God’s voice sounds forth, saying life and construction and abundance are still yet in store.

In buying the field, and making sure to do all the necessary things to safeguard his “right of redemption”—that is, his ability to come back and reclaim and repossess the land—Jeremiah was making a bold statement of trust. Yes, devastation and destruction were still upon them. But with the sure promises of God at hand, that would not—and *could* not—be the end of the story. Why bother wasting money and effort to buy a field that was only months or even weeks from getting overrun by invading enemies? Because, as the psalmist sang, “In the time of trouble, God shall hide me—whom shall I fear?” There will still be yet more beyond the dawn.

So, my friends, what are our fields to buy? What are the acts of faith we might take on, that such acts might stand as signs and seals and sacraments, even, of the promises of God in our time, in our world, in our life. In the midst of what seems, so often, to be hopeless, how do we make real a vision of hope?

I’m struck, in Jeremiah’s example, by the reality that even he could do something. Remember, after all, that he was locked up—not quite imprisoned totally, but close to it. And yet still, even he could do something to make visible and real the reality of the gracious promise of God that sounded forth in their midst.

I am convinced that there is not a single one of us here who cannot do something. None of us, of course, can do everything. But everyone can do something. Everyone can do something that testifies to our hope that, no matter what troubling future tomorrow has in store for us, God has for us still yet a different future, in another tomorrow beyond it.

A number of years ago, when I was still back in Connecticut, I found myself at a large rally and demonstration in Hartford, the state capital, following a week where the United States witnessed yet another unarmed black man get shot and killed by police. As some of you probably know, these incidents—in many ways just a modern incarnation of Jim Crow era lynchings—became sickeningly frequent during the years I was serving in Connecticut. Or, well, probably more accurate to say that *broader public awareness of them* finally became frequent enough in those years to sicken those of us who did not live with the day-to-day realities that come with being clothed in black skin.

At that rally, Bishop John Selders, a friend, United Church of Christ pastor colleague, and activist within the local black community spoke. He started off “well, friends, here we are again,” which was tragically so true. Later he spoke about the fact that he has a son, 21-years-old at that time. He spoke of the very real worry, even fear, every day when that son walks out the door, that he might not return again. And, of course, there are countless reasons that could happen, but time and time again, American society was demonstrating that it could be the police themselves that could have a hand in that. A traffic stop. Carrying a book or a toy gun. Selling some cigarettes on the street. You name it. Is that anyway to live? And sure, the storyline is a bit different here in Canada, but not as different as many of us might like to believe. A ninth-generation Canadian Baptist preacher in Halifax who I heard from last fall still gets asked where he came from, simply because he’s black. A South African mother of Indian ethnic background in my husband Adam’s congregation has two sons, one with distinctly darker skin tone than the other, and that family day in and day out witnesses first-hand how the two sons get treated differently, right here in Vancouver. And, of course, we know that being Indigenous in this country still puts a target for society’s prejudices and injustices on one’s back, even at times with those pledged to uphold

justice among us.

As I said a moment ago, I am convinced that there is not a single one of us here who cannot do something. None of us, of course, can do everything. But everyone can do something. There is something for each one of us to do that might begin to embody our hope and trust in God that a new future, beyond the immediate future, is indeed coming. In the face of ongoing societal dynamics and immediate news headlines that cause dismay, each of us can stake a claim on hope beyond hope.

Later on at that rally back in Hartford, Connecticut, one of the songs that came out says that “we who believe in freedom cannot rest until it’s won.” My friends, as people who believe in the one who is freedom itself, the one who makes all true freedom possible, the one who wins freedom over the chains of death themselves, we cannot rest until all is won. Even when it seems like things aren’t so hot for us these days, for our world these days. We cannot rest. We cannot give up hope. Because the truth is, sisters and brothers, God has not given up on us.

Blessing and honour, glory and power, be unto God, now and forever. Amen.