

"Living Sermons"

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Jeremiah 32:1-15

The book of Jeremiah has 52 chapters. 48 of them are filled with doom & gloom. Only 4 chapters, 30-33, are filled with hope. Fortunately for us this morning, we're in the hope chapters. Jeremiah is called the "Prophet of Doom" or the "Weeping Prophet." He wept because he could see that Jerusalem was about to be conquered by the Babylonians. This began a dark chapter in their history and Jeremiah could see it coming. Jerusalem fell in 587 BC. This incident we're going to read about probably occurred about a year before the fall, 588 BC.

Jeremiah 32:1-15

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar. At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Zedekiah had said, "Why do you prophesy and say: Thus says the Lord: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; King Zedekiah of Judah shall not escape out of the hands of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye; and he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I attend to him, says the Lord; though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed?"

Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me: Hanamel son of your uncle

Shallum is going to come to you and say, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours." Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the Lord, and said to me, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth

in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself."

Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord. And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

I almost titled this message, "Jeremiah was a prophet, not a bullfrog!"

*Jeremiah was a prophet.
Was a good friend of mine.
Never understood a single word he said
But he really did preach so fine.
Yes he really did preach so fine.*

"Three Dog Night" had a huge hit with "Joy to the World" in 1971. They were in the recording studio one day, finishing up an album and they needed one more song. Band member Hoyt Axton told the band that he had written a new song with pretty catchy melody, but he had no lyrics for the song. The band told him, "Let's just record it anyway. Make up some lyrics." So he came out with "Jeremiah was a bullfrog!" And the rest is rock & roll history. One of my earliest childhood memories is riding the school bus and the bus driver named Phyllis got the entire bus singing along on the chorus - "Joy to the World. All the boys & girls now. Joy to the fishies in the deep blue sea. Joy to you and me." It doesn't get any

better than that!

Well, in our text this morning, Jeremiah was a prophet! And he was trying to be a good friend of all, but with little success, because they never understood a single word he said. This was not uncommon among the Israelite prophets. They often had strong warnings to deliver to the people and their leaders. And so they often lived on the outskirts of society, on the outside looking in and usually not liking what they saw. They wanted there to be Joy to the World, but they believed that unless people turned their hearts toward God and changed their ways, there would not be joy but only hardship.

In Jeremiah's day the people had forgotten about God. Many had given up on the God of Israel and were making sacrifices to other gods. What was the first of the great Ten Commandments? *"You shall have no other gods before me."* (other translations say, "besides me"). Jeremiah, ch. 1 says the people were also "worshipping the works of their own hands." What's the 2nd commandment? *"Do not make for yourselves an idol."* Don't worship anything you make with your own hands. So, they were deliberately disobeying God. And in the Old Testament whenever the Israelites disobeyed God things did not go well for them. It seemed that forgetting God made them weak and vulnerable.

Charlton Heston once said, *"We don't break the Ten Commandments. We break ourselves upon them when we don't follow them."* The Israelites had broken themselves. It was Jeremiah's job to warn them, and warn them he did. He correctly saw that if they didn't change their ways their arch enemy the Babylonians would conquer them. He eventually came to see that the tipping point had been reached and the nation's defeat was inevitable. So to fulfill his duty to proclaim the truth, he told people that their enemy was going to win. He even told the king of the Israelites that he would be personally given into the hands of the King of Babylon. "You will be defeated!," Jeremiah told him.

Well, nobody likes a Party Pooper, so the king arrested Jeremiah, a classic case of "shooting the messenger." He confines him to the courtyard of his palace. He silences the Prophet of Doom. We still try to do that, don't we? Martin Luther King was a modern day prophet. And he was silenced. Even our own government was keeping an eye on him.

I think the early environmentalists were like prophets, telling us that the "climate change" we're in the midst of is way beyond the usual shifts in temperature that have been seen in the past. They were called all sorts of names, "Tree huggers," "Environmental Wacko's," until we all started seeing the pictures of glaciers melting away, the devastation of the rain forests and the holes in the ozone layer. We tried to silence what was strange, negative and unpopular, but fortunately they persevered.

Prophets have it tough, don't they? Misunderstood, dismissed, mocked, persecuted. Well, Jeremiah is in the midst of these hardships that come with being a prophet, when God gives him some rather unusual instructions. God says, "Listen, Jeremiah, your cousin, Hanamel, is going to come to you and extend to you an offer to buy his land. I want you to buy it." It's all a bit strange, don't you think? - for a land purchase to occur while he's under arrest? Old Jeremiah had to be thinking - "I'm a prisoner here. I have no freedom, and we're about to be invaded. "What's more, I'm in the King's courtyard and I know that the Babylonian Army is going to come marching right in here very soon and trash this whole place. So, I'm really not interested in the real estate market right now!" Now prophets were used to strange scenarios, but still this had to make about as much sense as, "Jeremiah was a bullfrog."

Well, Jeremiah thinking all this over when lo and behold his cousin Hanamel walks into the courtyard and offers to sell him his land. Jeremiah says to himself, *"Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord."* I love that verse! "Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord." God had called him to do something strange. Somehow, through the thoughts of his own mind or out loud, we don't know; Jeremiah heard a specific call from God to buy this land. But he's not certain it's from God until cousin Hanamel comes walking in. *"Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief."* *"Lord, I'm*

willing to believe but

I'd love a little proof, some sort of sign that I'm on the right track." Sounds like us, doesn't it? Even the great Jeremiah needed that.

This is why we have church - so we see that we're not alone in our faith, in believing all the strange stuff that we do. That's why we pray out loud together! That's why we sing . . . together! That's why we have silent prayer . . . together! This is why we have youth group - so the kids can see that they're not alone in their quest to be Christ-followers today. That's what I love about the mission trip. We served with 348 workcampers. Sharing the faith with others makes it stronger.

So, Jeremiah the Prophet, sees his cousin and he's trying to get him to buy some land, and he says to himself, "Hey, this God stuff is for real!" Well, Jeremiah buys the land and makes a big deal of the purchase. He gets a scale to weigh the silver he had to pay for it. He signs the deed in front of many witnesses. He even calls together all the others in the courtyard, presumably all the other Jews under house arrest. He then gives an assignment to a guy named Baruch. He asks him to get a jar and put the deed in it, so that it will be preserved for a long time. And he says, "For one day houses will be built upon this land, one day crops will grow on this land, and one day a vineyard will grow on this land. This land I just bought will know prosperity again. Have faith."

What's the message here? What's Jeremiah saying and doing? It's quite surprising actually, and out of character for him. The Prophet of Doom is giving the people hope. "We're going to be defeated shortly by the Babylonians. I don't know what will happen to us. But I do know that God is faithful. And one day we'll be back. One day we'll flourish once again on this land!"

Martin Luther once said, *"If I knew that the world was going to end tomorrow, I'd still plant my apple tree today."* "This land," said Jeremiah, "will one day know peace and prosperity once again."

Nelson Mandela was in prison in South Africa for 27 years. While in prison he got word that a new granddaughter had been born, and the parents wanted him to name the child. He named her, Tariro, which means hope. Jeremiah was giving a message of hope to his people.

There's a few things I'd like you to remember about Jeremiah.

He was a prophet, not a bullfrog.

He lived during the darkest hours of Israelite history, the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians.

He was the Prophet of Doom, the Wailing Prophet (after Jerusalem fell he grieved profoundly and wrote the book of Lamentations).

One more thing. There's a great lesson from the life of Jeremiah that we see in this passage. It's a lesson and a truth that's for all of us.

It's this: Jeremiah was called to live out God's Word, not just preach it. He wasn't called to speak words of hope. He was called to illustrate it through buying the land. His actions were to be a living sermon. The Word of the Lord came to him. It was a word of hope. But he wasn't called to preach it. He was called to demonstrate it! And we're called to do the same thing - to demonstrate the Good News of God, to embody the love of God. To not just preach, "For God so loved the world;" we're called to actually love the world!

St. Francis said it so well: *"Preach every day. Use words if you must."*

There's a story told about a Salvation Army worker named Joe. Joe was a recovering addict himself and he knew what "rock bottom" was all about. And this made him incredibly compassionate and persistent in helping those whose lives were taken over with addiction and other issues. There was one man that Joe ministered to for months, getting him off the street, into the shelter for the night, a hot meal, medical attention, everything the man needed - only to see him go right back out onto the street again, ensnared by his old ways. But Joe never gave up. Finally recovering began to take hold and the man had a lengthy stay at the shelter. They were getting ready to have a worship service at the shelter when another worker said to the man, "Please come to the service. I want

you to meet Jesus." "Is he like, Joe?" the man said. "Is he as nice as Joe?"

Joe's life and the life of Christ had become one in his ministry of compassion. May we have moments just like that as well.

Jeremiah was a prophet. People seldom understood a single word he said, But he sure did preach so fine. Sometimes with his words. Other times with his life. May it be so with us as well. Amen.