

“(Jeremiah’s) Field of Dreams”

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Covid 12

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“This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says: ‘Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.’”

...‘though the city will be handed over to the Babylonians, you, O Sovereign Lord, say to me, “Buy the field with silver and have the transaction witnessed.” Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: “I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?”’
Jeremiah 32:15, 25-26

Let me start with a question: How would you rate your money smarts, your financial acumen? I know of a woman who was given a \$100 bonus at work, and went out and spent \$400 to celebrate. Not a prudent business decision!

Thinking along those lines, the prophet Jeremiah seems to be making a big mistake with his land purchase. On the surface it looks dumb! But then Jeremiah didn’t do it for his retirement portfolio. He was making a statement – maybe to himself, definitely to his neighbours and nation around him.

The year is 587 B.C.E. The Babylonian army has surrounded and laid siege to Jerusalem. The Babylonians are irresistibly powerful. The Jerusalemites are weak, hungry, and utterly defenseless. There is no hope. And at just that moment, something defiantly hopeful happened.

Jeremiah, the prophet buys a field. WHA-AT? With the enemy at the gate, the city about to fall, the people starving and dying, Jeremiah invests in real estate. It’s slightly bizarre.

And then in a public display that is ceremonial and symbolic, Jeremiah summons Baruch (a local judge) signs the deal, transfers the deed into an earthen jar and orders Baruch to bury it, store it for the long haul.

Things are terrible and they are going to get worse and everybody knows it. And Jeremiah declares: *“Thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.”*

What do we take from a story like this? Bizarre. Why would he do this? The situation is a disaster.

You know what that's like. Some of us are feeling confronted by life's challenges these days - it's looking pretty dark; the enemy is at the gate – bad things are happening to good people; and maybe to you – be it financial squeeze, health scare, relational stress, work tension. Right now, there's not a lot of hope. Things are looking grim.

(I do want to examine Jeremiah's buying of a field in the face of disaster, but let me make a general preliminary personal observation). The Bad news is always reported, but it's usually not the whole story!

I remember the visit I had with my Dad & Mom – I took them emails and some photos that our daughter Leslie has sent from Moscow, Russia. She was living there for part of a semester, doing historical research at a former Soviet institute.

So I showed them a picture of Leslie standing in Red Square, and I read her descriptions of her 'flat', and the market where she buys fresh vegetables, and the vast efficiency of the Moscow Metro (subway), and the welcome and friendship she receives from Russian neighbours, as they help her learn words and phrases of the language.

My Dad was 6 weeks into chemo treatments. He received all this from Leslie, smiling, and then said: *"The Bad news is always reported, but it's usually not the whole story..."*

Because you'd never know about all this good in Moscow if you only listened to the broadcast news – a month ago they were reporting major fires threatening the countryside around the city; we hear about crime, poverty, and unrest in Russia. That's what is fed to us. But people are living happy lives. They are being kind to foreigners and strangers."

So I ask that we all remember this when we're feeling afraid or depressed or discouraged about things in our world. The bad news is NOT the whole story.

Now I need to immediately say – sometimes it truly is the end of the world as we know it. There are events when history is changed forever. When Hitler marched into Poland on Sept 1st, 1939 that was the end of Europe's troubled peace and all nations on that continent were set on a path of change that is still going on. And when the planes hit the twin towers on 9\11 the world of relaxed travel and international freedoms ended.

AND NOW? Life is different now. Education – Travel – Retail – Health Care – Economic activity...

So examining this story of Jeremiah's purchase of land can be valuable and helpful. What might be our take-away?

1. The LONG VIEW is where your hope is! There are ups and downs in life, AND in history. There are smooth seasons, interspersed with tough times in every life. And periods of history, and the cycle of life, mean that whatever IS happening WILL NOT last forever.

Jeremiah bought land knowing that the city was about to be defeated and destroyed. What was he thinking? He looked to the long term. He was willing to be patient, and see past the immediate situation, to the hope in the future. *'Yet once more houses and lands and vineyards will be bought and sold, says the Lord.'* Jeremiah believed, trusted and acted in that hope.

Robert Schuller says: *"Tough times never last, but tough people do"*. A bit Cheesy, but I like it!

Winston Churchill said, *'When you're going through hell, keep going.'* The long view is where your hope is. Keep going, wait it out and usually, eventually, things will get better. But for people of faith there's something else:

2. The long view WITH GOD is a certain hope!

That is hope, a defiant hope based on trust in God – from whom nothing will separate us. *"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and NOT to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future."* Jeremiah 29:11

From that comes a resilient, defiant hopefulness in the midst of disaster, a characteristic which has characterized God's people down through the centuries.

Like through this Babylonian exile in 500 B.C.E

In the times of Roman persecution in the early centuries of Christianity.

As the Vikings sacked the monasteries in 1000.

And the middle ages –

A pastor in 1636, his town decimated by a thirty year war, now flooded with refugees, 50 to 100 people dying every day, and he's the only minister left. And in the middle of that Martin Rinkart sits down and writes: (familiar hymn)

*"Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices;
Who wondrous things hath done, in whom this world rejoices.*

Even in Auschwitz, the Nazi death camp, Jews condemned to the gas chambers continued to observe the Sabbath, and worship God.

A defiant hope.

In the darkest days, with the enemy at the gate, Jeremiah purchased property, invested in the future – an act of defiant hope.

What we dare to believe is that even in the darkness, when we can't see our way out, or forward, God is with us. What we dare to believe is that the most powerful reality in the world is the love of God.

What we dare to believe is that the last word spoken about each of us will not be a word of death, but a word of love, from which nothing can separate us.

What we dare to believe is that God is Lord of the future – that God calls us into the future in courage and hope.

So what is our situation and what should be our response today?

It's much better than Jeremiah faced, isn't it? YES, we do have challenges – Covid-19 pinches all of us in some ways – Work – Financial – Health – Relationships.

Jeremiah bought a field that he couldn't take possession of for 70 years. It would pass down to those who followed him. But he bought it as a spiritual investment – he put his money where his Faith was.

So what do you think the world will be like in 3 generations; in 70 years? What's God dreaming of?

Let's cast our vision out ahead – Not 3 generations – but maybe 3 months!? Not 70 years – but maybe 70 weeks – a little more than a year.

I don't expect anyone to have instant detailed answers; and yet, we can live with a confidence, an assured certainty that all will be well; - that in the end God wins!

So let's downshift our anxiety levels, and become calmly receptive to what God dreams of doing, and then let's trust and lean into that future and that hope.

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, give us the eyes of Faith to see as Jeremiah did, the bifocals of faith that recognize reality today, and yet see beyond the present hardship and challenge to a certain confidence in the work you are doing. Inspire us to join you in that work. AMEN.