

Title: For Us as Well as God

Date: September 26, 2021

Texts: Jeremiah 1.17-19 Luke 24.28-31

Series: Questions Of Displacement.....Responses Of Hope!

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Jeremiah 1:17-19 (NRSV)

¹⁷ But you, gird up your loins; stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not break down before them, or I will break you before them. ¹⁸ And I for my part have made you today a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. ¹⁹ They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you.

Luke 24:28-31 (NRSV)

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

On the surface,
the first chapter of Jeremiah
is all about how God
calls Jeremiah to be
a spokesperson on God's behalf.

God is very clear with Jeremiah –
being a spokesperson,
being a prophet,
being on God's team

can be an
impossibly difficult job.

People won't like
that you are
a mouthpiece for God.

And people won't like
what you say
on behalf of God.

And the people,
God's people,
will try to harm you
for uttering the words
which God says
you must speak.

Then, immediately following
this rather depressing
position description and interview.....

Just as soon
as Jeremiah is properly
called into God's service,
God places words of judgment
and impending doom for Israel
in the prophet's mouth.....

And the hate for Jeremiah
begins to grow.

(LINGER.....)

It comes as
a surprise, therefore,
when the final words
which God places

in Jeremiah's mouth
in this difficult opening chapter
of the book
that bears his name.....

It comes as a surprise,
when God's announcement
of judgment and abandonment
suddenly shifts to
a proclamation of God's
presence and deliverance
in verse nineteen –
".....but they shall not
prevail against you,
for I am with you,
says the LORD,
to deliver you."

What has happened here?!
Did we miss something?
Has God lost
any sense of consistency?

For while these words
can easily be seen
as applying to Jeremiah –
God saying to him,
"I'll have your back
when your fellow Israelites
turn against you in anger.

I think these words also
indicate something important
about the very nature of God.....

Pointing to the deep

and abiding hope
that defines God's essence.

When relationships are broken,
God believes there is always hope
for healing, for restoration,
for a new way forward.....

And God is always
looking for this newness;
searching for the
different way forward,
because it is
who God is.....

Searching for a
different way forward,
because the relationship
between Creator and people
is that important,
that vital and necessary
to God!

(LINGER.....)

From historical records,
we know that Exile
for the people of Israel
lasted some 40-60 years.

God's people were gone
for a long, long time
before the idea of homecoming,
of returning to Jerusalem,
became anything more
than a dream.

And yet,

even as God
fills Jeremiah's mind
and heart and mouth
with harsh and bitter
scorn and judgment.....

God speaks ever so gently,
ever so intentionally,
words of reassurance and love;
words that announce
that all who seek
to conquer God's people
will not ultimately prevail.

We must not miss
this ever-so-brief
glimpse of hope.....

For what it
says about God,
and what it
indicates to us!

(SLOWLY.....)

Our Gospel lesson
is one of the
post-resurrection stories
which the differing Gospel accounts
offer to us.

In most of these stories
one or more
of Jesus' followers
are in his presence,
but do not recognize him
until Jesus calls them by name,
or has a meal with them.

I see these
post-resurrection accounts
as being directly connected
to the ever-so-brief
glimpses of hope
God continually offers
through Jeremiah.

What seems hopeless,
a total loss,
truly is not,
because of God's
nature of hope,
and God's endless creativity.

God finds a
new way forward
with God's people
despite all they have done –
all we have done –
to damage and destroy
our relationship with God.....

God finds a
new way forward,
because the relationship
we are privileged
to share with God,
is that important to God.

(LINGER.....)

I believe that the restoration
God makes possible
for God's exiled people in Babylon,
can also be understood as Resurrection
for disciples of Jesus,

for you and me.

Out of the
hopelessness of Jesus' death,
God first sees
and then creates
a new way forward.....

A way forward
that is impossible
for anyone but God;
a way forward
that changes everything!

(SLOWLY.....)

Now, we must
be careful here.

We cannot fall
into the trap
of thinking that God
had planned on Resurrection
as a way
to impress God's people,
as a way
to lure us back
despite what the collective "we"
had done, and continues
to do to Jesus.

For God's victory over death
is not a smooth,
pre-planned transition.....
is not simply ensured survival
designed to impress.

No.....Resurrection is

a new existence
after non-survival.

Jesus was dead.
There was no way forward;
no plan "B".

Resurrection was and is
a great imaginative leap
from the depth
of God's despair and pain
on Saturday

Resurrection is an audacious
act of hope;
a gift for
the likes of us
who don't deserve it.

Resurrection offers a
quite different reality,
an everything-has-
changed-forever reality,
for us as well as God!

(LINGER.....)

Resurrection demands an on-going
response of faith from us.

God has creatively found
a way forward
out of brokenness
with and for us.....

And we are invited
and we are expected
to respond to this mighty

act of hope
with gratitude,
and with our lives,
and by creating similar hope
for all those stuck
in brokenness and despair today.

(SLOWLY.....)

We only have to
look around this room,
look around our
circle of friends,
read or watch
a news story or two
to see the great
brokenness and despair
that covid has brought
to creation in these days.

The despair is real.
The finality of this disease
has torn and
continues to tear
through so many lives,
so many families,
so many communities,
so many countries.

It is easy
to fall into
and be trapped by
a deep sense
of pessimism and hopelessness
in these days.

Even with all the tools
science and human creativity

have provided
to combat this enemy,
hope is difficult to find.

But here, my friends,
here is where we,
as children of God,
as disciples of Jesus,
have resources,
have Good News,
have hope to share!

Thanks to God's
creative and hope-filled
working through Jeremiah.....

Thanks to God's imagining
and putting into motion
undreamed of new possibilities through Jesus.....

We know something about
Restoration and Resurrection,
and the hope
these gifts make possible.

Our calling in
these challenging days,
is to live
in this hope,
is to freely
share this hope.....

Is to remind ourselves,
and all others,
that God is never done
being creative on our behalf,

because God loves us that much.

(PAUSE)

For our spiritual homework this week,
I want us
to look around
and see where hope
is at work.....

For where we find hope,
God is surely there,
showing us what is possible,
showing us what
needs to be done.

And when we find hope,
let us join in it!

Let us join
with our amazing
and loving God,
and, in the name of Jesus,
make hope possible for others.

No pandemic can stand
in the face
of unrelenting hope!

Amen!!!

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Resource: *Preaching Jeremiah: Announcing God's Restorative
Passion* by Walter Brueggemann