

Preposterous Hope  
Jeremiah 32:1-15

Preposterous Hope. That's what our Scripture is about this morning. Daring to believe that God gives us a future when the present seems so very bleak.

Now, let's face it, our Scripture doesn't exactly sizzle with excitement this morning. In fact, the highlight is laborious detail about some long-ago real estate transaction: We are told, in excruciating detail that Jeremiah bought a field. That's all we need to know, but then, we hear how he weighed out the money, signed the deed, sealed the deed, got witnesses, weighed the money on the scales (I thought we had just heard that.) We want plot, action. Move the story forward. But no such luck.

We have to read on, Jeremiah takes the sealed deed, complete with terms and conditions of the sale, real estate is, well real estate, no matter what millennium you live in, I guess. And then we have to hear how he gives the deed of purchase to Baruch, his assistant, in the presence of a cousin, whose name I guess is pronounced Hanamel, in the presence of a bunch of Judeans.

And then the deed is placed in the BC equivalent of a safe-deposit box, an earthenware vase.

Folks, this is laborious, boring stuff.

Until you realize it packs an incredible spiritual wallop. The sale is made in public, and every last

detail is recorded, so that no faithful person would ever forget. Ever forget what? The real estate transaction?

No. Never to forget the power of God to forge a new future when the present seems so desperate. Or to put it another way: to believe in God is to live in hope, even when to hope seems preposterous.

Here's what's going on. Jeremiah the prophet is being held prisoner by the king because Jeremiah has preached gloom and doom, which went against the official party line. The evil Babylonians, otherwise known as the Chaldeans, led by Nebuchadnezzar were threatening all of Judah, which was what was left of the Holy Land, and even the sacred city of Jerusalem was under siege.

Other prophets had said, "Don't worry about it, God will come to our rescue once again." But not Jeremiah. And so he's arrested. King Zedekiah, wishes Jeremiah would get with the program, and so he has complained to Jeremiah: *"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; 4King 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; 5and 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?"*

But Jeremiah is not about to debate the king. Instead, Jeremiah brings a new message, of preposterous hope, that seems foolish given the present circumstance. God tells Jeremiah to buy a field, and place the deed in a safe and secure place. Because the day will come when the Babylonians are gone from the land, and God's people will once again live in God's land. God will restore their fortunes.

This is preposterous hope: Jeremiah buys land, publically, officially, and the transaction is told in deep detail, lest anyone miss the point. Jeremiah is the one prophet who correctly interprets the present: Judah is toast. But he is also the prophet who dares to believe in a God who is faithful beyond understanding. After defeat, after exile, there will be return.

Sure, in the next few months, the deed will be worthless, because the Babylonians will own all the land, but then in God's time, God's people will be restored to God's land.

What Jeremiah does is called a prophetic sign: by the purchase of the land he is showing his faith in the future, in God's future.

Face the grim reality of today, says Jeremiah, but never lose grasp of the new future God will bring about.

That was faith in Jeremiah's day and that is faith in our day as well. Because we have faith even more profound. It's not just the buying of land in the face of an invasion. Our faith is in Jesus

Christ, crucified, yet living again.

It is a faith that proclaims hope rises amidst the ruin, it is a faith that proclaims God is greater than any problem, any tragedy, any reality we presently face.

It is the faith in which I invite you to live, both as individuals and together as a church.

Folks, Christians are realists. We don't pretend that things are better than they are. We acknowledge the reality of war, of sickness, of death. But we also proclaim the reality of hope, hope that runs through all of Scripture and all of history. Hope bound up in Jeremiah's preposterous purchase of property rights when the Babylonians were poised to take it all, hope bound up in a savior risen from the dead.

And that's why I simply don't believe that our world is spiraling out of control. I don't believe that the future is only darkened with despair. I believe in the power of God to bring forth new life, new beginnings.

Have you ever heard of Woody Taxa and Jack Pine? They're not athletes or preachers. In fact, there' not even people, but rather plants. Plants whose seeds germinate after a fire. Think about that image. The forest is charred and ruined after a fire. But in the midst of the fire, new life springs forth, because new life and hope and new beginnings are every bit as real as the fire.

That's the power of God in the natural realm, and it's the same power God brings to the spiritual realm and to your life and my life.

Christians dare to live with a sense of preposterous hope because we believe in the power of God to make new.

In WWII, Coventry, England was bombed and the cathedral was destroyed. But someone took two nails from the rubble, and from them made a cross. A reminder, there still today, that even amidst the rubble, Jesus Christ is still Lord, and the Crucified One now lives. . . .

Speaking of preposterous hope, it was when my mother fainted and wrecked her car, that she found out she had leukemia. Her days were numbered. And the first thing she did when she left the hospital was to buy a new car. Because she had more living to do, and leukemia wasn't going to stop her.

Buying a car, as preposterous as Jeremiah buying that property when everyone knew the Babylonians were going to take over. She drove that car five years, until finally eternity called.

I think about Ann Street Church. I was told, before I became your pastor, that there were not so many young adults, not so many children. But even before I arrived, I learned of plans to begin Logos, an intensive ministry for children and youth. Preposterous hope. Not many children, but you believed in a future that includes children and young adults. And now that hope, with Logos

filled with children, does not seem so preposterous.

Well, I'm a realist. I know that not every prayer is answered as we would like it to be answered. I know that not every disease is cured. I know that there are grim realities in life, realities like debt and families estranged, and marriages hanging by a thread. I know that life sometimes disappoints and sometimes crushes. I know that there is war and terror. These are all realities.

But Jeremiah's people eventually returned to that promised Land. And Jesus is risen from the dead. God was working even when it was not obvious, except through the eyes of faith.

And that's why I'm preposterous enough to invite you to live not in despair but hope, not because I have any special wisdom, but because new seeds sprout even after the harshest fire and because Jesus is risen from the dead. Amen.