

WELCOME 28th July 2024 – 10th Sunday after Pentecost '24 B

Jeremiah 8:4-9:2

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs/GPs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & farther out into his world to you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m. That link will be on the web page by about Wednesday.

As we move into this week...A father in Sydney dies trying to save the lives of his children who've fallen onto a train track. Another in Pennsylvania while shielding his family from the errant gunfire of an assassin. Maybe it's images of the victims of a terrorist attack or famine. You perhaps know from personal experience flood, fire, or family tragedy. Sometimes...our hearts just break...the weight of the world's brokenness rocks us deep w/in & sits heavy on our souls.

"We hoped for peace, but no peace came.

We hoped for a time of healing, but found only terror."

When you know you are powerless to prevent the tragedy...helpless against the unstoppable...defenceless against the inevitable...you are where Jeremiah was. Jeremiah knows w/ absolute certainty Jerusalem will fall. Its people will be taken into captivity. He knows by God's assurance the people of his city are in for pain, fear, hurt & heartache...destruction & exile...

Only God's broken heart for his broken people will be the key to their restoration & new life...

You can't fix the emptiness of what sin has broken,
but in weeping over it, experience the fullness of the God who can.

Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory God will reveal to us later...

*Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all,
won't he also give us everything else? – Rom 8:18 & 32*

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of all life, beyond our imagining, and yet coming so close; you refuse to leave those in need on the rubbish dump. You give the poor a place of dignity among the powerful. You make a home for the homeless, and bring joy abounding to families and communities. As we gather to celebrate and give thanks for your harvest of blessing, may we live within your reality, share your vision, and do your will, that the whole earth may echo your glory. Amen.

Let's hear God's Word

FAITH CHAT:

1. What's the last thing that really broke your heart?
2. How do you experience God's fullness in the middle of "broken" circumstances?

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON:

Let's pray together...

Search me, O God, & know my heart; test me & know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, & lead me along the path of everlasting life. Father prepare me for whatever you require today & lead me in faith wherever you call me to go. In Jesus' Name... Amen.

10 Pentecost '24 B – FULLY ENGAGED: IN GRIEF

Obviously, we don't know what Jeremiah looked like...but Michelangelo's rendering of the prophet on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel comes pretty close in my books. Jeremiah is often called "weeping prophet" but as I read & re-read his word from God, I see more a man who has run out of tears b/c he ran out of sadness...stopped weeping long b/c he stopped grieving. Years ago I was called to preside at a funeral for a troubled young man who had taken his own life. He'd threatened & tried b/c. After the service ended, I noticed his partner sitting under a tree at the cemetery. Off w/ her best friend were just sitting...not saying a word. As I walked up & sat w/ them she looked at me & said, "I'll be ok. I just can't be where his family stares at me like I should have done something or be as cut up as they are. I quit crying for him ages ago." She knew this was inevitable. As much as she loved him...she could not fix him. She'd tried...begged...pleaded...his brokenness was more than she could mend...She'd reached that place where her tears dried up long b/c her sadness went away...she stopped weeping long b/c she stopped grieving.

I remember standing in our sanctuary in Nth Tx the evening of 9/11. Place was packed. There were tears beyond imagining for the 3K & more killed that day...for families who had no idea where loved ones were...for the inevitable retaliation we knew would come & the hell that would unleash globally...we had no idea. 3 years later that same sanctuary was twice-that-filled for a soldier a confirmation kid from among us grown to manhood on his 3rd tour in Afghanistan...He was no more. What is it that breaks your heart...causes you to look like Jeremiah? Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel says: "The opposite of love is not hate; it is indifference..." to not care about someone else's pain – be unmoved by injustice – unaffected by tragedy... "In being indifferent, one dies before one actually dies...to be at the window watching people being sent to concentration camps or being attacked in the street & do nothing, care none, that's being dead." To not care about someone else's pain – be unmoved by injustice – be unaffected by tragedy is to be dead b/c dying. Jeremiah is many things...God's word to/through him stirs many reactions. "Indifference" is not one of them.

This particular series of prophetic words from God begins in unmitigated shock... utter amazement...absolute bewilderment... "When people fall down, don't they get up again? When they discover they're on the wrong road, don't they turn back? Then why do these people stay on their self-destructive path? Why do the people of Jerusalem refuse to turn back? They cling tightly to their lies & will not turn around...Is anyone sorry for doing wrong? Does anyone say, 'What a terrible thing I have done?' No!" Over & over again through Jeremiah we see God's broken-hearted dismay over human rebellion & the obstinacy of his people. Jeremiah gives us unmatched insight into God's heartbreak

over that broken/betrayed relationship. The most significant & rewarding of all relationships is the one we can have w/ the Father & yet instead of diving deeper & deeper into our relationship w/ God we get waylaid & put our time & energy into "things" ...work or hobbies or nothing specific...just not investing in *THE THING THE ONE* who lasts, satisfies, & yields deep wholeness. When that happens... God is hurt...God is baffled. God's heart breaks over every life that turns away from him to pursue its own autonomy - its own independence – its own course or path in this world...God & Jeremiah grieve in unison. Hear all of vs 6:

I listen to their conversations & don't hear a word of truth.

Is anyone sorry for doing wrong? Does anyone say, "What a terrible thing I have done?"

No! All are running down the path of sin as swiftly as a horse galloping into battle!

Jeremiah's joy was gone because the people he loved, loved lies & blinded themselves to the truth. Jeremiah loved his people. He loved his nation. He wanted better for them than they wanted for themselves. He wanted them to love God & follow Him w/ all their hearts; they didn't & it grieved him. Jeremiah's unfailing loyalty to God & to God's desires for his people, coupled w/ his own deep love for his own people & his own land, tore his heart apart so that he cried out, "My grief is beyond healing; my heart is broken." – vs 18

It's unavoidable here; as Jeremiah cries out God's voice, **we're** confronted by **OUR** accountability b/c God. *What have I done?* It invites God & perhaps someone close to you to examine your heart, your motives, your attitudes, values, choices, hopes, ambitions, & aspirations & w/ the help of God's Spirit to turn you toward what God desires for you. **Confess** your sins to each other & pray for each other so that you may be healed. Jas. 5:16. Or as the Psalmist prays: **Search** me, O God, & know my heart; test me & know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, & lead me along the path of everlasting life. Ps. 139:23-24 Remember last week we said repentance isn't just saying "sorry," it's asking God to redirect reorient realign your life according to his design/desires. It's saying day after day, "God you know better than I do...show me...lead me...tell me what you want today." Now & I again I suggest praying: **Father** prepare me for whatever you require today & lead me in faith wherever you call me to go. In Jesus' Name... Amen. You know better than I do...show me/lead me...

Or you can just blindly charge through life...like a horse galloping off into battle. You can fully build your life around your wants, your desires, your comfort & safe-spaces routines & rights, your self-chosen identity & ignore all accountability except to your own interest...**BUT** to do that invites disaster. Even birds are smarter than that...they know how to find their way back to their nests & to their migration patterns...But we do not & certainly the people in Judah did not, instinctively turn to God...which only

multiplies the pain. Jeremiah was there as the disaster unfolded ^{b/4} his eye. You can't watch people you love destroy themselves & everything around them ^{w/o} feeling your heart sink. You can't watch your daughter, husband, best friend workmate destroy their life & be indifferent. Ah well...

It's the lies we believe that are the problem...Those in Judah falsely took comfort & security in Jerusalem & the temple – thinking that God's city & God's house would never fall. Their prophets/priests/leaders perpetuated that lie ^{w/} "assurances of peace when there is no peace." We tell ourselves "things aren't that bad – I'm not that bad – that person over there is worse than I am – I go to church - I can handle this – I don't really need church – I'm in control of me." ALL LIES. God's word for us right now is to turn to Him for his truth about us.

That truth...**THE TRUTH:** God chose us from ^{b/4} creation's first dawn to be holy & loved in his presence. God chose us from forever into forever to share his image & reveal his glory. God chose us to live in his presence under his rule of grace freed from the grip of sin, death, evil & all that would destroy us by Christ's self-offering for us. God chose us to live responsive & obedient to his grace & love inviting others into the life we have received in Christ. If we cling to anything other than that truth we cut ourselves off from God & all he intends to pour out on us & through us for our good & the good of those around us.

Jeremiah paints the results of self-deception in stark harsh colours...**I will surely consume them. There will be no more harvests of figs & grapes. Their fruit trees will all die. Whatever I gave them will soon be gone.** Jeremiah points to the swift arrival of painful days. The exile ^{w/} all its grief is coming. There will be violence, death, the loss of home & family. The sounds of joy & gladness will be gone. There will be nothing but the agony of burying their dead & being dragged in chains to captivity. When disaster strikes it does not matter how many fortified cities they've built or how many foreign treaties they have signed for mutual military protection: **"the summer is over & we are not saved"** Jeremiah's prophecies came to pass. The Babylonian invasion was horrific. The contrast between living in peace & safety & being taken away as slaves into exile was drastic. Likewise, the contrast ^{b/t} knowing God & living ^{w/o} God could not be more glaring. The horror of the exile is a living picture of a greater horror, the horror of living alienated/cut off from God. It is **THAT** exile – the exile of living distant from God...as if we are God for ourselves...living by our own whims & wants...that brings on all the other kinds of exile.

We hoped for peace, but no peace came.
We hoped for a time of healing, but found only terror."

When you know you are powerless to prevent the tragedy... helpless against the unstoppable...defenceless against the inevitable...you are where Jeremiah **was**. *I hurt with the hurt of my people. I mourn & am overcome with grief. Is there no medicine in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why is there no healing for the wounds of my people?* He aches for his people. His heart reflects the heart of God. Through Jeremiah's anguish we see the grief God feels for all who have brought calamity upon themselves by their unfaithfulness & who steadfastly refuse to turn to him for healing...who live as if his love was a trivial thing...as if Christ's death was inconsequential for the needs of today. It was in fact Jesus who also wept over unfaith...**"As** Jesus closer to Jerusalem & saw the city ahead, he began to weep. 'How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, & peace is hidden from your eyes...' – Lk 19:41-44 **"O** Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets & stones God's messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me. Now, look, your house is abandoned & desolate." – Mt 23:37-38

But when Jesus stopped weeping...he went straight to his dying. He became the medicine for our broken souls...the healer of our rebellious hearts. He lived to touch the untouchable, embrace the outcast, lift up the beat down, & forgive the unforgivable. He died suffering for all who suffer so the unredeemable would find redemption. He was raised from death to demonstrate God's desire to save not destroy. God has healed our unfaithfulness through the wounds of Jesus Christ.

In Jesus we know once & forever God has not abandoned us even in our sin. In Jesus we experience God's greatest joy in rebuilding the broken & recovering the lost. Jesus lifts our eyes to see beyond the days when joy is gone & strengthens us to live for the day when joy shall be restored. The tear-stained face of Jeremiah & the blood-stained face of Jesus remind us that our suffering is God's suffering. Our pain is God's pain. God became flesh in Jesus because God promised not to leave us alone. In the cross, God's love intersects our sorrow so that we might have life – hope & joy that never ends.

You can't fix the emptiness of what sin has broken,
but in weeping over it, experience the fullness of the God who can.

*Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory God will reveal to us later...
Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all,
won't he also give us everything else? – Rom 8:18 & 32*

TAKE IT HOME:

Where is God calling you out of indifference into deep love for the lost?
What are you going to do about that?