

WELCOME 15th September 2024 – 17th Sunday after Pentecost '24 B

Jeremiah 45:1-5

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.

As we move into this week...A friend sent me **THIS**...said it showed up in his social media feed & knows I don't social media. It's one of those not-so-funny reminders of what we suffered during the gov't response to the pandemic. It's especially a reminder that as 2-weeks-to-flatten-the-curve turned into months most of us were stuck at home thinking **This** is awful. It just can't get any worse." But...Sadly...it did in many many ways...

We've been listening to Jeremiah for almost 3 months now. God's call to Jeremiah & to us, is to be fully engaged in the world in which we live speaking God's word of truth into the communities & circumstances where he has placed us.

Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe/secretary, was expecting Jeremiah's preaching to have a transforming impact in embattled endangered Jerusalem & he was hoping he'd be praised for his faithful diligent work. But in thinking things can't get worse, they did & instead of a pat on the back...he too was persecuted along with Jeremiah.

So today we explore how we stay fully engaged in daily faithfulness, when we can't see any results, are attacked for our efforts & things continue to worsen around us.

Just as Moses declared:

Know therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God.

*He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.
(Deuteronomy 7:9)*

Daily faithfulness does not save us,
but it reveals our Saviour to a watching world.

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

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father you are slow to anger & abounding in steadfast love & faithfulness to those who put their trust in you. You lavish your grace & love to 1000 generations and forgive sin & rebellion so that we may live forever in your presence.

Shape our hearts to also abound in steadfast love & faithfulness toward you, toward each other, & to those who are yet distant from your saving embrace. Cause your word to grow in our hearts so that our lives are obedient to your commands in the same way Jesus Christ obeyed trusting you in all things...we pray as we gather now, in Jesus' name...Amen.

Let's hear God's Word

FAITH CHAT:

1. What's the longest time you've ever had to "work" on one thing?
What was that like?
Did you ever get frustrated with how long... delayed success...delayed rewards...maybe no result...?
2. Where in your life are you finding daily faithfulness the biggest challenge?

17 Pentecost '24 B – FULLY ENGAGED: IN DAILY FAITHFULNESS

"This is not what I signed up for!" Ever said that? Either aloud or from deep inside? You launched yourself into a new position/role, put your hand up for a project w/ high hopes & great expectations, maybe visions of big things coming your way? Then you discovered "reality" was not what you hoped/thought? The dream was shattered in disappointment, the anticipation replaced by anxiety & when things go from bad to worse...you're forced to shift from success to survival mode.

As we reach the end of our engagement with Jeremiah...God's spokesman as Jerusalem falls to Nebuchadnezzar's armies & its people slaughtered, starved & stolen as slaves for Babylon...we meet Baruch, Jeremiah's faithful diligent scribe. He wrote every word God spoke through Jeremiah & dutifully transcribed the anguish of the prophet who for 40 yrs was in turns ignored, attacked, assaulted & imprisoned...while Baruch suffered alongside him.

As much as Jeremiah longed for God's people to repent, return to Yahweh, & be restored, Baruch seemingly suffered in silence at his side. As companion, secretary, friend & likewise faithful...Baruch just knew Jeremiah's preaching would someday have a transforming impact in embattled endangered Jerusalem & perhaps hoped he'd be praised for his faithful diligent work. But as the years dragged on he was not seen as a hero...he was hated. He anticipated triumph but experienced trauma. He longed for recognition but was subject to ridicule. Instead of exaltation he was driven to exhaustion! Maybe that's your story too...where you are is not like you thought hoped or expected. The hard work isn't paying off. The fatigue is high & you're ready to disengage...call it quits, close up shop...throw in the towel. Effort but no effect.

The prophet Jeremiah gave a message to Baruch son of Neriah in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, after Baruch had written down everything Jeremiah had dictated to him. If you've been reading Jeremiah alongside our Sunday worship experiences...& I HOPE you have...this is one of those places in the book where a little bell should have gone off in your head...I'll spare you the details & tell you straight up, Jer 45 is out of place in the text. Jehoiakim hasn't been king for a while. In the chronology of the book of Jeremiah, Jerusalem fell to Babylon in Jer 39 while Zedekiah was king. Somewhere b/t Jer 36 & 37 Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon & was killed. His son Jehoichin made the same mistake & was carted off as a prisoner to Babylon & Zedekiah was installed as a puppet-king but he too got too big for his britches & Nebuchadnezzar came back w/ a vengeance...finished the job he'd started a few decades earlier. No reprieve this time...just destruction, death & captivity for the survivors.

But as Baruch's record of Jeremiah's prophecies were compiled, it looks like Baruch took a page perhaps from his own diary & put it here as a reminder of God's hand over all that transpired among his people...it serves as a word from God to enable labourers in God's vineyard...servants in God's household...children of his love to persevere & fully engage in daily faithfulness, even when the task seems thankless or maybe hopeless. Jeremiah said, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to you, Baruch: You have said, 'I am overwhelmed with trouble! Haven't I had enough pain already? Now the Lord has added more! I am worn out from sighing & can find no rest.'

Gotta tell you...this is one of my favourite passages in the Bible. Why? God says something to Baruch. This isn't a prophecy about Jerusalem, or her useless kings, or Babylon or one of the other nations...we've seen all those. This is God speaking to one of the servants...the off-sider...not the star of the show, but his butler/secretary/assistant...AND when God speaks to Baruch, God quotes Baruch's prayers back to him. God listens so closely to our prayers, he can quote us. Let that settle in your heart for a minute...*"This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to you, Baruch: You have said...then he tells Baruch what he'd been praying or mumbling to himself while the Babylonians besieged the city. If God were to quote your prayers from this week back to you...what would you hear? Complaints? Fatigue? Gratitude? Weariness? Disappointment? Pleas for unsaved/lost family & friends? Heartbreak? Prayers for LWF our leaders, finances, capacity to reach the city? Your open door to share your faith w/ someone you're meeting for coffee? Our relationships w/ other churches? PM & Parliament, local elections? God listens so closely to our prayers, he can quote us. If God quoted your prayers back to you...*

You see why this is one of my favourite passages of Scripture...today's struggle, yesterday's disappointment, last week's failure, tomorrow's trial...God knows. What you've never told anyone but has rotted in your soul for years...God knows. The deepest longing, rawest wound, oldest scar, greatest joy, most fervent hope...God knows. At one point...I suspect it's what gave birth to that prayer...King Jehoiakim used one of Baruch's scrolls of Jeremiah's prophecy as fuel for his private fireplace. As it was read the King sliced off that section & tossed it into the flames. So Baruch wrote it again as Jeremiah added a special judgment for the faithless king. Baruch needed to be reminded...that in the mess, pain, hurt, chaos...especially that which resided in his own heart...God had his hands there too. God listens so closely to our prayers, he can quote us...because his work for our good never ceases...today's struggle, yesterday's disappointment, last week's failure, tomorrow's trial...God's hands are there working...*"God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God & are called according to his purpose..." – Rom 8:28*

And having said that...what I suspect Baruch wanted to hear next was something along the lines of, "She'll be right mate. It'll be fine." Something reassuring, comforting, hopeful. What he got, he neither wanted nor expected: "This is what the Lord says: 'I will destroy this nation that I built. I will uproot what I planted. Baruch I got bad news...it's about to get worse. I don't know how you feel about the state of the world, the state of your family, your health, the church...I will destroy...I will uproot...does not sound hopeful, promising, encouraging, comforting at all...It sounds like Baruch is about to go from the frying pan into the fire. Whatever you've been praying about...it could get worse. What sits heaviest in your heart...it could get worse. I hate to say it...but in a rebellious sinful broken-at-its-core world it could get worse not better. I will destroy...I will uproot...may be God's next course of action. But notice God is still in control of those moments...Yahweh is still King of the universe...Sovereign Lord...Remember this is decades ^{b/4} the destruction of Jerusalem...the demolishing of the Temple...the slaughter & exile...

Baruch...Things are about to get a whole lot worse...trust God is at work in it. That is hard to say & harder to hear if at this moment you've got a loved one who's just driven their life into a ditch...made a series of irrevocable damaging or damning choices for their life...maybe some w/ irreversible consequences. Pr 21:16 – "The person who strays from the way of wisdom (God's guidance/presence) will end up in the company of the dead." Who wants to hear that about their brother, grandchild, spouse? But as true as that is...so is this: Jesus said, "Those who are well don't need a doctor, but the sick do. Go learn what this means: I desire mercy; not sacrifice. For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners." – Mt 9:12-13 God has not lost sight of those in the ditch. We can't either. We may not be able to retrieve them...but our responsibility & call to pray, to offer Christ as hope, to extend forgiveness not advice or pretend nothing has happened...to model daily faithfulness is on-going – never ceases...I love what Glenna Marshall says in her book *Everyday Faithfulness*...

"People do not drift toward holiness...People do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, & delight in the Lord. We, rather, drift toward compromise & call it tolerance. We drift toward disobedience & call it freedom. We drift toward superstition & call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control & call it relaxation. We slouch toward prayerlessness & delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism. We slide toward godlessness & convince ourselves we've been liberated." *The person who strays from the way of wisdom (God's guidance/presence) will end up in the company of the dead.* And the only path out of that grave...is for those who are there to see in you/me/Christ's disciple-making people lives of daily faithfulness that point to life hope love joy & restoration in Christ alone. Things could get a whole lot worse...trust God is at work in it & at work in you for those who bear the weight of worse...

Are you seeking great things for yourself? Don't do it! I will bring great disaster upon all these people; but I will give you your life as a reward wherever you go. I, the Lord, have spoken!" We don't really know what's in Baruch's heart at this moment except the pain & frustrated longing for his nation to heed Jeremiah's warnings & return to trust & obedience in Yahweh. Perhaps he hoped he'd be praised for his faithful work at Jeremiah's side for > 40 yrs. But as the years dragged on he was not seen as a hero...he was hated. There was no triumph just trauma. No recognition just ridicule. No exaltation just exhaustion! Maybe Baruch, like many followers of Jesus think they deserve "more" from God because they've at least showed up...

But all God has ever promised us is life w/ him forever: & THAT is already ours through faith in Jesus crucified, risen & ruling over all things. Baruch is told what we also know...You are part of the picture of God's restoring all creation to himself. You have a place in the Father's house forever. You have a role to play as that eternal future unfolds so don't set your hopes on the things of this world...God intends to bless you in such abundance that you can live now revealing his overflowing grace, mercy, love, peace, & joy every day...inviting others to share that abundance in Christ.

You may never know & don't have to know the details of God's plans to walk in peace. It is enough to know him. Rest in the fact that God has given you everything you need to persevere, even if you never have an answer to the why of your suffering or heartache....if things get worse not better ...

Daily faithfulness does not save us,
but it reveals our Saviour to a watching world.

Know therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God.

He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unending love on those who love him and obey his commands. (Deut 7:9)

TAKE IT HOME: (take a bit & share with your neighbour)

The greatest thing any person can have, is the living relationship with God that He has already given to us through Jesus Christ.

How will you express your faithfulness & devoted loyalty to him this week, for all he has done for you?

LET'S PRAY...Heavenly Father, like Jeremiah & Baruch you have placed us in a city you claim in love as your own. Jesus, who makes all things new makes his home among us. We are called, chosen, embraced by his death/resurrection & sent to reveal his saving restoring grace in all we are & do. You promise a day when tears, mourning, pain & even death will be no more. We plea for that day to hold until we've drawn still more to know you: constant in love...great in faithfulness & abundant in forgiveness...in Jesus we pray... "Come, Lord Jesus!" Amen.