

Jeremiah 31:27-34
Psalm 119:97-104

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5
Luke 18:1-8

This fall season we have been considering what we are to do as disciples. How are we to act as disciples of Jesus Christ? Discipleship is more than believing the right things, which we call orthodoxy, which means “correct belief.” Discipleship is orthopraxis, which means “correct action,” or “correct conduct.” So far what we have considered is that: 1) discipleship requires a deep commitment to Jesus Christ. It is not to be taken lightly. Disciples take faith seriously. 2) Disciples seek people for Christ and the church. We are to be evangelists. 3) Disciples resist greed, contrary to our society of consumerism and consumption. 4) Disciples practice generosity. 5) Disciples take their faith home. They nurture the faith of the children. 6) Disciples make the best of Babylon, make the best of the location and the events where God has placed us. Today, I want to think of discipleship as a life filled with hope. A hope full of meaning and brimming with promise.

When Jeremiah wrote these words, the Jews were in exile, living in the foreign land of their enemies, conquerors. Bruce Boak, a Presbyterian pastor, reminds us that today’s world so much parallels the Jews captivity in Babylon, a culture that was hostile to the Jewish faith. We live in a cultural environment that is hostile to Christian faith. Our society believes the answer to violence is violence, where Jesus espouses peace. Parents sign up their children in various sports and other activities, so many of them occurring on Sunday mornings, instead of sending children to Sunday School and worshiping together as a family, to nurture the faith of our children, a responsibility of parents and the church. Our society is caught up in consumerism and consumption, whereas Jesus declares we are to live simply so that others may simply live. Our

society is more concerned about their own personal welfare than they are about the common good. As the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann wrote: “Our worship, spiritual discipline, and education seek to help us: practice memory in world of amnesia; practice grief in a world of denial; practice sacrament in a world of technique; practice generosity in a world of scarcity; practice obedience in a world of indulgence; practice hope in a world of despair.” As Christians we, like the Israelites in Babylon, are aliens living in a strange land.

Just as the Jews did in Babylon, we too live in a world of despair. The Jews despaired their being conquered, their land destroyed, and living as exiles in a foreign land. There is enough despair to go around. Despair of the war on terrorism, despair about radical Muslims, despair of climate change, despair of the rich getting richer, the poor getting poorer, and the middle class disappearing. The despair about how our society is changing, and changing fast. And with this year’s unprecedented presidential election, despair about the future of our nation no matter who wins. How often don’t we hear these words of despair. “It’s too late.” “Nothing can be done about it.” “You can’t change the world.” “There’s no hope.” “GET REAL!” “GIVE UP!” “What’s the use!” Those are phrases we hear all the time. And, when congregants sit in their churches and hear their pastors proclaim God’s words of hope, God’s desire for the future, they may silently say “Get real!”

And so Jeremiah, on behalf of God, declares that “the days are surely coming.” Of course they are. The future is coming. That is what the future does. Dah! But this is different. This phrase “the days are surely coming,” implies that this is something different. This is no ordinary future. It is a future of hope and meaning, brimming with

promise. Both human life and animal life will be renewed. It will be a sunny and fertile time of building anew and planting anew.

The phrase “the days” is packed with meaning in scripture. For example, “the day of the Lord” referred to a dramatic intervention of God in history, a judgment that will condemn God’s enemies and save God’s people. And so the “day of the Lord” was a day the Jews looked forward to. It was to be a day when their enemies would be destroyed and the Jews would be restored. However, later, “the day of the Lord” had the opposite meaning, the “day of the Lord” was to be a day of woe for the Jews because they had disobeyed God. However, Jeremiah now relocates “the days” in a positive way for the Jews. The days coming are filled with hope.

There is hope because God is going to do something new! Newness brings with it a sense of hope. Whenever we inaugurate a new president, the nation seems to fill with hope, hope that a new president will change things, make things better. I remember the excitement at President Obama’s first inauguration; the excitement of the first African-American president. Many were hoping this would be a new chapter for America. For some reason I feel the inauguration on this coming January 20 is going to be a bit different, no matter who wins! Anyway.

We must remember that hope does not mean life is going to be a bed of roses. There are thorns in those roses. As Peter J. Gomes said, “Hope does not deny the circumstances of the present, and hope doesn't help us get out of our difficulties. Hope doesn't get us out, but it does get us through.”

The hope that Jeremiah declares is based on a new thing that God is doing. The new thing God is doing is that despite the unfaithfulness of the Israelites, God will

remain faithful: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you." This is unmerited grace, amazing grace! God is the initiator of this new relationship. It is a sheer, unconditional promise, unilaterally made without the people's repentance or agreement. It will be an everlasting covenant. It is God who initiates the new relationship. God loves you, and there is nothing you can do about it.

This God that we worship this morning is a God of forgiveness. This forgiveness, as Walter Brueggemann wrote "permits Israel to begin at a new place with new possibility." The new that God is doing is a new based on God's forgiveness. God forgives you, and there is nothing you can do about it.

Notice how often we find the first-person-singular pronoun in verses 31-34, "*I* will make a new covenant," "this is the new covenant *I* will make," "*I* will put my law within them, and *I* will write it on their hearts, and *I* will be their God," "*I* will forgive their iniquity, and remember your sin no more." This emphasis is to assure us that hope is built on what God is doing, not on what we can do. It is because of God's love, because of God's forgiveness. It is all God's work. God loves you, God forgives you, and there is nothing you can do about it!

The days are coming, like all days. But the days Jeremiah refers to are to be different days. This is no ordinary future. Rather it is a future of hope and meaning, brimming with promise. These "days" will be something positive. Our hope is based on a God who is doing something new.

Blessed be the Lord our God. Amen.