

4 Pentecost A

Jeremiah 28:5-9

Psalms 89:1-4, 15-18

Matthew 10:40-42

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July 28, 2020

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Grace and peace to you from Christ Jesus.

It's been a crazy few months – with more happening in our lives and on a national scale than we could ever imagine. We used to worry about missing an episode of our favorite TV show or which was the softest toilet paper, but those superficial concerns have turned into us leaning into the news for important updates, in us reflecting on the most meaningful ingredients of our lives, into asking big questions like “where is God in all this?” and to rethinking all we thought we knew about how we got to our station in life whether we are white or a person of colour.

In my life I cannot remember a time where familiar routines had been so thoroughly disrupted. The way we gather, shop, worship, entertain and even understand ourselves is changing. And as a result we are feeling - well – how are you feeling? Really, how are you doing? Because whatever way this is all impacting you and your loved ones, is ok. With all that is going on, to be able to pause and say “this hurts,” “this stinks,” “I’m afraid,” “I’m tired,” or *whatever* emotion is present – just acknowledge it. You are not lesser or weaker or incapable, because any piece of this has tripped you up.

For me it's the time. Back in the middle of March I was ok with hunkering down for a few weeks. I remember how much I was looking forward to Easter, because surely, we will be back by then! And then we weren't. I, like you, ache to gather with family and for everything to be alright – but there is no timeframe to this experience. Even a biblical reference to 40 days of wilderness isn't applicable anymore and we sure hope it will not be 40 years.

On every front we are learning anew about who and whose we are. We are learning about the societal values and forces that shape us, the digital algorithms that follow us, the longings that keep us up at

night, the ways of privilege that have kept us at odds with our neighbours, the ways of whiteness that keep some in power. We're learning about the frailty of our bodies and how easily fissures can open, even between family members.

How are we to understand these days? What guideposts do we have to direct us into a new day when we don't know where we're going? How long will it take to slough off the old and selfish people we have been to make room for God to work with us? I guess in short, the question is, do we want to hear what will make us comfortable and ok, or do we want the truth?

In the time of the prophet Jeremiah, the people lived in exile. Living in exile isn't fun, you can't just see your family and friends when you like, you can no longer worship as you used to, you lost the ability to support your family and lost your personal freedom to choose what and when to do things. Facing this situation two prophets emerged: Hananiah and Jeremiah who were tasked with helping the people grasp where God was in it all.

¹Hananiah offered a message of hope, stating that they faced two years of exile, after which, God would rescue them and the yoke of slavery under Babylon would be broken. What wonderful news! Two years isn't such a long time, especially if one knows that God would bring an end to it all and put everything neatly back in its place. That was a message the people wanted to hear, they were happy to hear and they were willing to wait for it to come to be.

But, Jeremiah preached a different message. "Hunker down," he said. "We're in this for the long haul," he said. He even instructs the people to embrace the foreign land and *to build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat the produce* (29:5.) It wasn't a popular message, but a truthful one. There was no easy way out.

¹ Thanks to Charles L. Aaron Jr. for commentary on Jeremiah 28:5-9 at: https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4501

In a way he was saying, if your life is a mess and you just tell yourself everything is going to be great, but it isn't, then there is a great gap between expectation and reality.

Instead, if our life is a mess, we can simply admit that it is and we make room to see that God is with us in the mess.

The people of Judah were asked to build lives in the last place they wanted to live. We too are being asked to reconfigure our lives in ways we never imagined we'd have to. When we lose a loved one our lives are reshaped without our wanting them to be. When a parent finds themselves raising a child alone, their life takes a new and undesired turn. When we cannot gather to worship, when we are faced with the sin of racism or homophobia or sexism, when financial castles crumble... such changes call us to examine and amend our lives into the new shape God is molding.

Today, that call is to reshape the way we live in a way that inspires us to truly be communities of welcome, justice, equality, listening, and compassion. The world thirsts for renewal. Neighbourhoods hunger for change. We are asked to rethink economic patterns and the ways power is used to hold some down, while others benefit. Today we are becoming aware that while everything in our lives may be turned upside down, God is the sure foundation upon which we can try again.

Jesus said it much more simply describing, *it's like giving water to a thirsty person*. In that simple description we realize, first you have to take note of who is thirsty and who has the water. Then and only then can compassion change the balance of who has and who does not. What might that look like for us?

Is it:

- Standing beside people of colour in a rally,
- Listening and believing someone who is abused by the very person who claims to love,
- Rethinking old attitudes to First Nations peoples,

- Taking new steps to broaden affirmation of LGBTQ2SIA+ people,
- Reconfiguring markets and banking to a fairer and more justice based outlook,
- Teaching our children and grandchildren the truth of our mistakes and our hope for renewal.
- Setting aside our own efforts at security in our bank accounts and status in favor for God's security and promise?

I truly believe that in the midst of our discomfort, God is present. More than that, God is moving us in a new direction. Things will not return to the way they were – and for that let's give thanks.

Let's be grateful for the lessons that open us to new possibilities of being a global community founded on love and all that those four simple letters imply. Amen.