

19th Sunday after Pentecost (Year C)

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Zedekiah had said, '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;

Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me: Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.' Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the Lord, and said to me, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.' Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord.

And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

Those of us here on Shelter Island, and New York in general, know the value of property. The price of a parcel of land depends on two main things: location and situation. Basically, what determines a property's value is where it is and what's happening around it. One needs only open the real estate section of the Shelter Island Reporter to see that this is true. A piece of land on the water of Silver Beach is going to be far pricier than a piece of land on the interior of the island. But location is not the only factor; as I said, what is going on around it matters, too. A piece of land in the up-and-coming Brooklyn district is going to be far more expensive than a piece of land in the economically-depressed Detroit area.

The prophet Jeremiah was told to buy a plot of land from his family, a piece of land in Jerusalem. Now, those of you who have purchased land know that there are smart real estate decisions and poor real estate decisions. Smart real estate decisions are based off of buying property in an area where the value of that property is likely to increase, thereby giving you a profit when you decide to sell it. Poor real estate decisions are based off of buying property in an area where it's value is only going to decrease.

Jeremiah found a beautiful piece of land. It's location was perfect; right in the middle of Jerusalem. It was a big city. He could do whatever he wanted to with it - make a vineyard, open a store, build a home, rent it out - the possibilities were endless. There was only one small factor that brings this real estate

decision into the absurd: the city of Jerusalem was currently under siege by the Babylonians and Jeremiah himself had already prophesied that the city would soon fall to their enemies.

Imagine buying a plot of land in Baghdad shortly before the American invasion. Imagine buying a field in London shortly before Germany began firebombing it. Imagine purchasing a plot of land on the Florida coast whilst seeing the largest hurricane ever approaching.

That was what it was like for Jeremiah to purchase this land.

It was absurd! Why would you *ever* invest in property when the very property you are considering purchasing is surrounded by a very large, angry, foreign army that is days away from storming the gates and burning everything to the ground?

And, yet, the prophet Jeremiah is called to purchase this land in the midst of a coming invasion.

How are we to make sense of this?

Well, here it is helpful for us to be reminded that it is no new thing for prophets to do really weird things. The prophets of God were called to do what they did and say what they said to accomplish one thing: to turn the people's attention toward what God was saying and doing in the world. Therefore, the prophets of the Old Testament were known to do some pretty weird things in order to get the attention of the Israelites.

For example, the prophet Hosea came to Israel at a time that the people were not being particularly faithful to God. Therefore, God had Hosea take a prostitute as a wife to symbolize Israel's infidelity (which, certainly, is NOT to say that men cannot be unfaithful as well!).

Another example is the prophet Ezekiel who, apparently, lied on his side for 390 days to symbolize the years that the Israelites had spent in sin.

Yet another example is Isaiah who walked around naked as a jay bird in the streets for several days. Now, I can't really remember what point he was trying to make with that prophetic act, but I'm sure it was very important!

Prophets do weird things. Weird and *public* things. Things that turn heads. Things that get people talking. In a time when everyone was sticking their heads in the sand, Jeremiah was purchasing a plot of land and preparing to care for it lovingly. Friends, make no mistake about it, this act was a prophetic act of hope in the midst of hopelessness.

Just two weeks ago, we observed the 15th anniversary of September 11th, 2001. As terrible as those events were and are, they gave us many tangible examples of hope in the midst of hopelessness.

A lone security guard staying in the towers long after his floor was evacuated to help others escape. A flag being raised at ground zero by three firefighters. A president standing amidst the rubble with a loudspeaker saying "I can hear you!" The first production of "the Producers" on Broadway after that Tuesday which ended with the entire audience singing together "God Bless America" with the cast. The season debut of Saturday Night Live after the attacks in which Lorne Michaels, the producer and director of SNL, asks Mayer Rudy Giuliani if "they can be funny" and the Mayor replies "why start now?"

Friends, we are no strangers to glimpses of hopefulness in the midst of the hopeless. Jeremiah knew the power of hope and decided to practice it where it was needed most. Simply put, at a moment when Jeremiah was surely tempted to throw in the towel, he *invested in hope*.

We, as a church, are called to do likewise. When every one else is running crazy, when everyone else is crying “doom,” when riots blaze, when our newsfeed is yet again filled with shootings of black men, we are tempted to join the crowd and panic. However, when all else is pointing to crazy, what if we paused for just a minute to appreciate a prophet buying a plot of land amidst apparent disaster? What might be stop and ponder?

Perhaps we might ponder the ways in which we are called to do prophetic acts of hope when hopelessness runs rampant.

One of the ways that we, as a congregation, have invested in hope is the work that we began last year with Maureen’s Haven, the homeless shelter on the North Fork. This time last year, we partnered with Southold Presbyterian Church to help them with Maureen’s Haven, with whom they have been working for many years. In the next month or so, we will begin our second year of partnering with them, providing warm, nutritious meals and shelter to those without homes during the cold winter months of Long Island.

Another way that we invest in hope is the money that we lend to KIVA.org. In just over a year, this congregation has loaned \$3,225 in 111 loans to people in 35 countries around the world. If you are interested in learning more about KIVA and how you can join our KIVA team, you can see the page in our bulletin for more information. In a few weeks, our Mission Team will meet to consider setting a challenge goal for us to achieve before the end of the calendar year.

While Maureen’s Haven and KIVA are perhaps two of the most visible ways that we invest in hope here at Shelter Island Presbyterian Church, just as important are the countless ways hope is invested in behind the scenes - the small acts of kindness and hope that do not make the front page of the newspaper. The numerous visits to the sick person in the hospital. The cheering on of youth at the local cross country meet. The various meetings with contractors to replace our carpet in the fellowship hall and the paint on the ceiling above your heads. The hours that Al and Tippy Bevan (and friends!) put into the food pantry every month. The space that is made available and cared for by our congregation for the use of so many different groups around this island - that are too many for me to list here in this sermon.

But the specific acts of this congregation go beyond official “SIPC” events. Each of you leaves this sanctuary every week and goes back to the classroom, or the kitchen, or the office, or the grocery store, or the ferry, or the library, or the town hall, among many other places. You encounter people just like you, trying to get by as best they can, in a world that often appears much more chaotic than peaceful, much more cruel than just.

You - yes, you! - have the opportunity every week to embody hope, to invest in hope, when you are tempted to give in to fear and panic. You see, good news is on the way, and you and I can embody it right now; we don’t have to wait! The very last line of today’s passage goes like this: *“For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.”* Friends, we have been promised that the time is coming when houses and field and vineyards shall again be bought. The time of peace is coming again. It may not look like it now. But it is coming. And you and I must welcome it with open arms!

In the meantime, you and I are called to hunker down and tend some land. We are called to “keep calm and live into hope!” Yes, others may look at us - as I’m sure they did with Jeremiah - and say “look at those foolish people; don’t they understand that everything is going to hell in a hand basket?!” But, I say unto you, that is not our job to listen to those people. It is our job to listen to the God who has, time and time again, come through on our behalf. It is our job to listen to the prophet who implores us to turn our hearts to God’s promise of salvation and righteousness.

So friends, as you return to your life this week, consider the ways that you are being called to publicly invest in hope when others are investing in hopelessness. Think about the ways that God has formed you for the purpose of instilling hope where it is needed the most. You and I, we are all “Jeremiahs” who have been called to do this weird thing called hope.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.