

Letting the Truth of the Past Create God's Hope-Filled Present

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Like a growing number of Americans I no longer get my news from print versions of newspapers anymore. I've discovered this fantastic new technology they call the IN-TER-NET. And on this IN-TER-NET I can access just about every piece of news that has been in print for the last 150 years.

I like to make myself anxious and depressed, so I read electronic versions of business sections from all over the world. Last week I found myself reading some articles on the current housing crisis. I read a host of depressing articles with vast sums of troubling statistics and terrible stories, but one article really hit home for me. The title of the article read, "Collapsing Housing Market is Taking an Emotional Toll." And I thought No Duh!

The article was from the *New York Times*, and I read it over and over again. It's a really powerful article, and it really hit home. And the more I read it the more its truth confronted me. The article tells of the fear people have, and the hopelessness of the hopeless mess that many people find themselves in. The article went on to talk about people losing faith. People losing faith in our economy. People losing faith in our government, and people losing faith in our nation. I thought to myself, "This journalist really has his finger on the pulse of the country. This article is timely. This article is important." So I gathered up all of my friend's email addresses to send the article en masse, and just as I was about to hit the send button I looked up into the left hand corner of the article and noticed the date. April 13, 1990. April 13, 1990. I was shocked. The article was written seventeen years ago. This timely and important article was older than the hand held cell phone, the DVD and even the Google on which I was googling it. But there was something timeless about its truth because the truth of the past always finds a way to speak to us about the present.

I got that same feeling as I studied this morning's reading from the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah lived almost 2700 years ago, and yet in his ancient writings there's still a truth that speaks to us today. God's word still has the power to find us after almost three thousand years. That's because for more than 3000 years God has been about the business of searching for the ones God loves; to bring them hope in troubled times and to call them to a new way of living. Time and time again God put this job in the hands of prophets like Jeremiah. And just when things seemed to be at their most hopeless God sent prophets to bring hope to hopeless situations.

Like our own day the world of Jeremiah was a messy place. The people of God were in trouble. Their economy was being hammered by internal and external forces. They were a nation divided by civil war with the country split into a kingdom to the North and a kingdom to the South. Great armies of foreign empires were just beyond their borders waiting to take Israel's cities. The situation was pretty grim. And in the midst all of this

physical and political turmoil Israel experienced a crisis of the soul. The world around them was this deafening storm of bad news. And inside this storm they couldn't hear the voice of God. They couldn't hear the truth of their past. And so in response to all of this hopelessness they did something all too human. They looked for new ways of bringing hope to their hopeless lives. They built new gods to save them from their moral, political and economic troubles. Israel prayed to gods of their own making.

And as the crisis of their souls deepened and the deafening storm of bad news became louder and louder the truth of their past became quieter and quieter. They forgot the great acts of God in history...the exodus from Egypt and the escape from pharaoh. They forgot the crossing of the Red Sea, the manna in the wilderness, and the God who guided them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Their past was evidence of God's love for them, but its truth could no longer speak to their present. Israel needed a prophet.

A prophet is someone filled with the Holy Spirit who comes to remind God's people about the truth of their past. A prophet is one filled with two things: 1.) Holy memory of God's work in history and 2.) Holy desire to remind the people of the hope that memory brings. Jeremiah was one of these people set apart for this work of reminding. Jeremiah wasn't blind. He saw the troubles surrounding God's people; the turmoil around the nation, its economic uncertainties and political chaos. Jeremiah knew that in their hopelessness Israel was reaching out of their darkness for anything that might lighten the dark night of her soul. But Jeremiah also knew that the things they reached out for couldn't sustain them. They were idols, not the true God. So Jeremiah spends his life calling God's people to remember the truth of their past; to remember the loving works of God all to bring hope to a hopeless present.

Like Israel of old we live in troubled times; the housing crisis, the roller coaster stock market, economic uncertainty, terrorism, radicalism, isolationism and xenophobia. All of these things sap our hope for ourselves, our families and our futures. And amidst this deafening storm of bad news we do something all too human. We reach out for hope. But like Israel we reach out to the gods we've made; television stars, political pundits, investment strategies, and fad diets. We even look to the power of our own spending for hope. In these things we look to find at worst distraction and at best salvation. But like Israel of old these are gods of our own making. They didn't free God's people from Egypt. They didn't send Jesus Christ to save us. They can't hear us when we pray. They can't find us during our dark night of the soul.

And that's what makes what we do here this morning so amazing. Despite all of the hopelessness and uncertainty that surrounds us in the world. Despite all of the false gods the world looks to throughout the week. We are gathered in this place to hear the truth of the true God. We have come from places far and wide to listen to the story of God's people. We have come to hear the truth of the past and let it speak to our present. We are called here to remember.

We worship in this historical space built by those long dead but who hoped in God. We pray venerable prayers that have sustained God's people for generations. And we take part in ancient sacraments as remembrances of God's love and generosity. These weekly reminders of worship, prayer and sacrament call us to put our faith in a God who is greater than any economy, housing market, or political party. Economies, housing markets and political parties are not the true hope of God's people because they are things made by human hands...our hope must rest in the God who made us not in the things we've made...

I have hope today because in this room the Holy Spirit of God has gathered a people wanting and willing to hear God's voice. That same living Holy Spirit that spoke to the prophet Jeremiah speaks to each and every one of us. We are a congregation of Jeremiahs. And so we share in Jeremiah's calling. Like Jeremiah, we are called to remind each other of the great love of God as we've experienced it in our lives. We are called to share the stories of God's work in our lives. Because as the deafening storms of bad news grow louder and the world blindly reaches out for hope who will speak for God if not us? And when we heed God's call to us we will share the truth of God's loving past and so create God's hope-filled present.