

September 29, 2019 | Journey worship service

TEXT: [Jeremiah 32:1–3a, 6–15](#)

THEME: Just Christians

TITLE: Hope in Action

By the Rev. Heather Schoenewolf

What brings you hope? Stop and think about it a second. What gives you hope when life is scary, when security is threatened, or when you're having a bad day?

A December poll asked “105 thinkers”—academics, scientists, physicians, and entrepreneurs—what gives them hope for the future. Answers, while unique, followed general trends: “young people, technology, equity and social justice big picture responses, human ingenuity, human kindness and compassion, and (even) critiques of hope.”

Tabetha Boyajain, astrophysicist at Louisiana State University says “Kids these days know that brushing their teeth prevents cavities, and also that human activity is contributing to climate change in a major way.” Carla Gannis, artist and professor of digital arts at Pratt Institute answered in emoji's—which translated, mean: “Technologists, scientists, and artists are together building multi-sensory explorations of virtual and extraterrestrial life that increase our scope of existence.”¹

So what would your answer be?

My answer would include our youth: their readiness to embrace diversity, the ease with which they honor the importance of asking someone's pronoun without making assumptions; their activism against gun violence, racism, the climate crisis. I find hope when an older kid is kind to my young child, and every time my son says “thank you” without being prompted, with genuine gratitude for something he's received. I find hope in acts of compassion, kindness to strangers, and in those who take risks to ensure the well-being of others—who speak out against injustice even when their opinion isn't a popular one. I find hope in stories of everyday redemption—surprising forgiveness; restorative justice; obstacles overcome and wounds healed. I find hope in the promises of the Gospel: that in Christ sins are forgiven, that death is overcome, that gracious love is offered to all, and that God is a God of life.

Our Hebrew Scripture lesson for this morning lays out for us, in great detail, a real estate transaction between the prophet Jeremiah and his cousin Hanamel. We learn that Hanamel reaches out to Jeremiah asking him to purchase his field at Anathoth. Jeremiah has the right, as next of kin, to buy the land in order to “redeem it”—essentially ensuring that this piece of land will stay in the family. And Jeremiah does just that. He weighs out the money, signs the deed, seals it, all in front of witnesses. In

¹ https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/7xyewg/we-asked-105-experts-what-gives-them-hope-about-the-future

something of a public display, he presents the deed of purchase to Baruch, his scribe, in front of Hanamel, witnesses, and all of the Judeans guards who were in the court of king. They put the deeds—the sealed deed and the open deed, in an earthenware jar, in order to preserve them for a long, long time.

While this transaction is straightforward enough, we know from its context that this land sale is anything but simple. See, the land that Jeremiah buys for a healthy sum is, in many ways, *worthless*. The field was located in Jerusalem, a city on the verge of Babylonian siege. They were surrounded by Babylon's armies. Occupation was an imminent reality. Furthermore, Jeremiah himself was under court of guard in the king's palace, locked up as a result of his prophecies, and seen by the King as a traitor.

The land was, on many levels, inaccessible to Jeremiah. It would amount to *nothing*.

But Jeremiah purchases the land and he makes a spectacle out of it. He pays a fair market rate in a market that is not fair. And he does it all for others to see—for he knows that this act will make an impact upon others.

See, Jeremiah's purchase of this worthless land was more than an act of kindness from one cousin to another. Jeremiah's purchase of the field at Anathoth was nothing shy of a prophetic act. Having discerned that Hanamel's request was God's he stepped forward in faith trusting that this act is a testimony to the future God has in store for God's people. Jeremiah declares, as the deeds are placed in the earthenware jars, "For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be brought in this land."

Jeremiah purchases this land to enact the hope to which he calls God's people. He is literally PUTTING HIS MONEY where his mouth was. Although the socio-political situation was nothing shy of grim, Jeremiah used this act to proclaim the good news that God is God—God is powerful, God is loving, and God will provide for God's people. As one commentator states:

Jeremiah emphasizes that he is responding to the will of YHWH. Redeeming this land is not an act of foolish hope or the ability to ignore the obvious. Rather, it is the enactment of faith in the future and in the promise of YHWH to fulfill the covenant between YHWH and YHWH's people. Jeremiah acts on the promise that despite the current siege and defeat of Jerusalem and Judah, houses and fields and vineyards will again be bought in that land.²

In August of 2018 Greta Thunberg, a then 15-year-old Swedish climate activist began her school strike for climate, sitting outside of the doors of Swedish parliament to call for stronger action to address global warming. Initially her strike lasted for three weeks—from August 20 until September 9, when Sweden held their general elections. She has

² Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Volume 4. Season after Pentecost 2 (Propers 17 – Reign of Christ).

continued her strike every Friday over the past year, inspiring youth—even here in Pittsburgh—to act against climate change. This simple act of sitting in front of Parliament’s doors each week with a hand-painted sign has propelled her to the global stage. She has addressed world leaders across the globe—most recently at last week’s United Nations Climate Action Summit—where she made an impassioned plea to those with power and authority to make lasting change; to have the courage and creativity to do something to prevent the escalating crisis. Last year, Thunberg addressed a Swedish TedX audience, and she left them with these words:

“And yes we do need hope, of course we do. But the one thing we need more than hope is action. Once we start to act, hope is everywhere.”³

She’s right. Jeremiah’s right. Once we start to act, hope is everywhere.

Our ability to invest in an uncertain future, to take risks, to believe that change is possible, that good things can come out of bad, that there is reason to hang on—does not rest in our ability to look on the bright side of life, but in our individual and collective ability to invest in the future we believe is possible. Hope is not a fuzzy feeling. Hope is not a sense of optimism that everything will work out in the end. Hope is not a force that runs the risk of lulling us into complacency with its empty promises. Rather, hope is a motivating belief that things can change; that God’s will can still be done; that the Spirit can empower and stir and compel us too; that, by God’s grace, our initiatives can make a difference. Hope is a reflection of our belief that the God we worship and serve is a God of grace, abundance, mercy, love and new life. Hope is a belief that it is OUR call to enact these promises too—that God can even work through us too.

Hope reminds us and encourages us that WE need to ACT too.

We think mercy is possible? Then we can forgive.

We think peace is possible? We work to resolve conflict.

We think an equitable society is possible? We work to dismantle racism, sexism, heterosexism, xenophobia...We make conscious decisions about the companies we support. We learn. We stand up for others even when it’s difficult or threatens our own artificially constructed power. We vote.

We want to preserve our planet for future generations? We lower our carbon footprint. We eat less meat. We learn about the crisis and we pick up the phone and call our legislators.

Our lives—like Jeremiah, like Greta, like so many others—have the potential to be a prophetic witness. Our actions can testify to what IS possible, with God’s help. Our lives can bear witness to the kingdom brand of justice we profess. We can live out our foolish

³ https://www.ted.com/speakers/greta_thunberg.

belief in the incarnation—that God loves us so much that God put on flesh, dwelt among us, endured the brokenness of humanity that we might be reconciled and made whole—by, ourselves, enacting love, by investing in others, by proclaiming the gospel not just in word, but in *DEED*.

Friends, when we start to act, hope is everywhere. Thanks be to God. Amen.