

Prophecies and Pottery: Journey with Jeremiah

Week 4: “Shards: Still My People”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

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The Old Testament lesson is from the book of Jeremiah, chapter 4, verses 11 through 12 and 22 through 28. ¹¹At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem: A hot wind comes from me out of the bare heights in the desert toward my poor people, not to winnow or cleanse—¹²a wind too strong for that. Now it is I who speak in judgment against them. ²²“For my people are foolish, they do not know me; they are stupid children, they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil, but do not know how to do good.”

²³I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. ²⁴I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro. ²⁵I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled. ²⁶I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger.

²⁷For thus says the LORD: “The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end. ²⁸Because of this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above grow black; for I have spoken, I have purposed; I have not relented nor will I turn back.” This is God’s word for God’s people.

Please pray with me. Holy and loving God, who pours out amazing grace on us all, thank you for your presence as we come together asking your blessing on this word. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Jeremiah was a mouthpiece of God, speaking God's word truthfully to the people as they were moving closer toward God's judgment. They wouldn't listen and soon would be exiled to Babylon. Instead of repenting they rebelled and resisted and did as they pleased.

It's a national tragedy when God's people refuse to listen. One might wonder where God is when reading this passage or why God would allow such pain and anguish, but the national calamity was caused by their own sin. The Israelites did it to themselves, but we see that death and devastation don't have the last word. God's grace continued to run through his people's lives.

At many points, authors of the Hebrew Bible texts have tried to make sense of what feels like an absence of hope by imagining God's displeasure and distance from the people and their circumstances. When we feel at our lowest we can feel alone and see life as a wasteland. On the front cover of the bulletin, the shards held in the hands of God appear to be beyond repair, yet in the lection for today, we see examples of God's great love for us.

In the scriptures read, God reveals a plan where his people suffer, but in verse 22, God calls them “MY people.” This is God’s love and mercy teaching and disciplining. He loves his children and is in covenant with them. Yet, God doesn’t “end it”, He doesn’t end the relationship or abandon the people completely.

God sends warning signs of the encroaching disaster that Babylon will bring. Note the hyperbole or exaggeration in the text. The earth was waste and void and in the heavens there was no light. The mountains were quaking and all the birds of the air had fled. What once was a fruitful land was now a desert and all the cities were laid in ruins (vs 23-26).

In verse 27 God declares, “I will not make a full end.” . . . Have you noticed, when you endure a disaster in your life, or undergo a family tragedy, or the nation you claim as your own is troubled and spiraling down . . . have you noticed, that with God and you, there’s always a glimmer of hope?

God wants his creation to be beautiful and purposeful. He’s determined to pour down immeasurable torrents of grace, love, and mercy, and He’s constantly working a healing and wholeness for those who have distanced themselves from him. God doesn’t want to end the relationship just because we’ve sinned.

Yet, in order to continue our relationship with God we need to take a look at ourselves. Each of us, looking at what we’ve done or haven’t done and confess to God, to get on God’s side about our sin, and then turn. Maybe we’ve failed to take

the time to truly know the Lord in a personal relationship. Maybe our knowledge of God is limited or skewed, or we've been churched for over 60 years and feel we know it all, but still, we haven't taken the opportunity to repent.

In verse 27 the Lord states this: "The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end." In other words, there won't be a complete destruction. Instead, there's a word of comfort amidst the judgment. God remembers mercy. God may correct you, but He'll never cast his people off. He'll leave hope for you and work to restore you to your most beautiful self.

Jeremiah chapter 30:11 says this, "I am with you and will save you," declares the Lord. "Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only in due measure; I will not let you go entirely unpunished."

Praise the Lord we have a Savior who loves us so much to not indulge us. And that our good good Father measures out our discipline, not giving us what we deserve and caring for us all along the way so we don't lose heart completely. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves for our good, it's not pleasant at the time, but painful, but later, it yields the peaceful fruits of righteousness for those who have been trained by it (Heb 12).

Yes we're broken, but not abandoned. Yes, we're fragments of sharp pieces of broken and fired clay, sometimes stiff and inflexible, but as long as we work

with God in changing our hearts and lives, living into his will and way, and allowing Him to make our hearts soft and tender like supple unfired clay—all is well. So allow God to place you on his Potter's wheel and be shaped purposefully into his image. Know that God will never abandon or leave you, and that each of us who knows God—God in turn—knows our name. Let's continue to strive to be that transformed and useful vessel made purposeful for the Potter. Amen.