

Buy the Field — Rev. Denise Stone

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We are staying in the Old Testament for this week's sermon. Last week we read from the 8th Century B.C. Prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Amos. Amos gave a word from God that because of their failure to ensure justice the Kingdom of Israel was going to be conquered by the Assyrians and would be no more.

Today, we are moving forward a couple of centuries to the time of the Prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a Prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. His overall message was unfortunately much like that of Amos. Jeremiah had warned the nation of Judah that they were also going to be conquered and taken away in exile to Babylon. King Zedekiah did not like the message from Jeremiah and in today's text we find Jeremiah under house arrest in the Palace, **while** the city of Jerusalem itself was under siege by the Babylonians.

Ultimately, Jeremiah's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and of Judah came true in 586 B.C. Like last week's message from Amos, Jeremiah's overall message was not uplifting or encouraging. That is with one exception – and we find that in today's text.

The set of events for today begins with verse 6 and following through to verse 15. It is in verse 6 that God enters the story. God speaks to Jeremiah and tells him that his cousin, Hanamel, is going to be coming to him to ask him to purchase from him a piece of land that belongs to their family. Jeremiah is told specifically that Hanamel is going to come and say, “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.”ⁱ

Jeremiah’s cousin comes and things happen just as Jeremiah had been told.

The prophecy and the words from Hanamel may sound odd to us. In the following verses there is quite a bit of technical real estate transaction information. This information may appear foreign to those of us who are accustomed to buying and selling land with the aid of a real estate agent and a title company. Those did not exist in the time of Jeremiah.

What transpires has links back to the Levitical laws. In Leviticus 25:25 we are told “If anyone of your kin falls into difficulty and sells a piece of property, then the next of kin shall come and redeem what the relative has sold.” This is the idea of the Kinsman-Redeemer. If you are familiar with the story of Ruth from the Old Testament, then this might remind you of Boaz. Boaz

would eventually marry Ruth and be a great, great grandfather of King David. Boaz actually fulfilled a version of the Kinsman-Redeemer role towards Ruth.

The idea behind this was that God granted portions of the land to specific tribes of Israel and that individual families within those tribes owned portions of those lands. The land that Hanamel was selling was part of the familial lands to which Jeremiah was entitled right of first refusal.

It is with that background on how the law worked, that Hanamel came to Jeremiah to sell him the land. **HOWEVER**, the country of Judah and the city of Jerusalem was under attack by the Babylonians.

Imagine that you own land where a new landfill is going to go in next door. What happens to your property values? My guess, unless the landfill wants to buy your land, no one else will. Your land decreased in value rapidly.

By the same token, I cannot believe that Jeremiah's family land in Anathoth was really worth anything at this time. Add to that Jeremiah was under house arrest in the palace, I cannot see that purchasing land would really be a high priority for Jeremiah.

Jeremiah however had been told by God ahead of time that his cousin was going to come and offer to sell him the land. Jeremiah took that message from God as a directive. Being told in advance about the land, Jeremiah was ready for Hanamel to arrive and was ready to purchase the land.

Again we are told in rather specific detail the things that took place to complete the sale of the land. It is what is said in verses 13 - 15 that really need to grab our attention.

Reading from the New Living Translation,

¹³ Then I said to Baruch as they all listened, ¹⁴ “This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘Take both this sealed deed and the unsealed copy, and put them into a pottery jar to preserve them for a long time.’ ¹⁵ For this is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘Someday people will again own property here in this land and will buy and sell houses and vineyards and fields.’”ⁱⁱ

Did you catch that in verse 15? “The God of Israel, says: ‘Someday people will again own property here in this land and will buy and sell houses and vineyards and fields.’”ⁱⁱ

Jeremiah, the prophet of the coming destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, takes time to buy land as a sign that the people will one day return from exile. This is evidenced by Jeremiah instructing his friend or servant Baruch to put the deeds in clay pots and to bury them so that they would last a long time. Think of the Dead Sea Scrolls and their survival from the first and second centuries until their discovery in the 1940s.

Jeremiah probably knew or had an inkling that HE would not live to see the people return. He probably knew that HE would never again see the family land that he “redeemed” from his cousin. But at God’s direction he steps out in faith and buys the land anyway.

Author Frank Yamada, pointed out something about the detailed real estate transaction, the witnesses noted in verse 15 are there not just as witnesses to the real estate transaction, they are “witnesses to the future that the LORD has announced through Jeremiah's prophetic action.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Wow. Can you imagine what this message meant to the people of Judah and Jerusalem when they heard about it? These are people that are at that time under siege from another Kingdom’s army. Jeremiah’s

actions are a word of hope for people who really had no hope.

Alphonetta Wines, Senior Pastor of a United Methodist Church in Texas, has said the following,

It is said that hope springs eternal.

There are times, however, when hope is hard to find. Where is the hope when the dread of war is reality? Where is the hope when the lone voice of the one God commissioned to bring hope is locked away in prison? Where is the hope when leaders mistake painful words for words of hopelessness?^{iv}

Haven't we all asked those questions? Haven't we all had times where we wondered "Where is God" in the midst of this? You can fill in the blank for what "this" is. Haven't we all had times where we thought hope was lost or at least nowhere near us?

We live in a world that in many respects seems to have lost hope or is losing hope. Many young people are anxious about their future in light of climate change. Many aging adults worry if there will be enough money to sustain them in retirement or through serious illnesses. Many parents worry about their children and the decisions they make or the

world we are leaving to them. We stress over finances and over the things we hear on the news.

It is all so overwhelming. "Where is God?" we cry out.

Where is God? God is right here. God is right here with a word of hope. It is the word of hope that God gave us in Jesus Christ. We may not be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel in our present circumstances, but for those of us who have accepted that Jesus is our Savior, we have eternal hope.

Author Frank Yamada also says,

Today's passage reminds us God is invested in the future destiny of humankind. Even when catastrophe was imminent, Jeremiah made an audacious and specific financial act, symbolizing God's declaration that judgment and destruction would not have the final word. Judah would certainly suffer the judgment that God had announced. Babylon would destroy Jerusalem and Judah and carry off its inhabitants into exile. The prophet, however, activates the future in the present through a symbolic act of purchasing a field. God's people would be restored and would again thrive in the land (verse 15). Perilous times require the faithful to put into embodied action

the hope that God has announced, which is already here, but not yet.ⁱⁱⁱ

Not all of our problems are easily solved. Sometimes there are enemies at the gate. It is in those times, for those of us who have accepted that Jesus is our Savior, where we must cling on to the hope we have.

God has announced our hope through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is THIS hope that enables us to carry on; it is THIS hope that gives us the courage to share the good news with people we meet. It is THIS hope that gives us the confidence to say with the book of Jeremiah, “Someday people will again own property here in this land and will buy and sell houses and vineyards and fields.”

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ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=743

^{iv} https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3017