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Jeremiah 31:27-34

Let's consider the text we have this morning an improvement. But first, to see what I am talking about, we have to start at the beginning. You see, when we began this journey with God, way back in Genesis, it seemed like all was going to be ok, more than ok really. God was pretty happy with what God did, pretty pleased with himself really, as the heavens and the earth came into being, the light and the dark the day and the night. The sky and the land, the sea and all the vegetation. Then came the sun and the moon, the stars and the fish and the birds, sea monsters of ever kind. God saw that they were all good. God blessed them. Then came the cattle and creeping things and wild animals. And then came the people, the human creatures. And God blessed us too.

I wouldn't say God was say clueless then, but God hadn't had much experience with this human thing that God had made. And so when God had given humans our own hearts and our own heads and our own souls it was a complicated mater. For humans had their own minds and wanted to do their own thing and God seemed to be shocked by this, or it seems to me that our Scriptures tell us this, God was shocked by the ramifications of us having our own ideas, not God's ideas so clearly on our sleeves.

And so the story began pretty quickly, by chapter 3 even of the first book of our Story, the story began of the human creature doing what it darn well pleased. By chapter 4 the human creature was murdering, by chapter 6 God had had it and sent a great flood to the earth, convinced at this point that humankind was wicked, that all of our thoughts evil. God was so disillusioned by us that he was "sorry that he had made humankind on the earth." But this sorrow was so great and God felt so deeply that it grieved God's heart.

But not so fast, that isn't the end of the story, that isn't even the story for today. There was one human creature, Noah, who pleased God, and Noah gave us a second chance. Noah was given a chance and God told him to get an ark and he took a few people with him and a few animals. And Noah was remembered. Because of Noah God realized that God had made a mistake. God made a mistake again, but this time God's mistake was wanting to blot us all out, wanting us destroyed because of our humanity. And so, essentially, God apologized, and promised to never "curse the ground because of humankind" again. God realized that humans had evil inclinations from young and so God would not stoop to our level and try and destroy us, for we have done a good enough job ourselves that we don't need any assistance in that arena.

This relationship between God and humanity develops and grows through the Hebrew Scriptures of God learning how to live with God's creation, with us and all of our fantastically manipulative and far-out behaviors. The relationship develops as we learn that maybe, just maybe we should trust God with our whole hearts and minds, despite our inclinations to try and go it on our own.

By the time we get to Jeremiah this struggle of relationship had been going on for a very long time. By now, since we are well into the prophets, and the major prophets at that, we have God speaking to people, through people, God had been in relationship with people for some time now, not just frustrated and disappointed with us, responding by creating floods, but by this time communicating directly with us, us human creatures could address God and God could address us. Even though we continue to do our best to avoid the nurturance of this relationship, God has done God's best at developing it.

At this point, when we come to Jeremiah, we were all still fighting with each other, murder hadn't subsided, the questions of who was on the in crowd and who was on the out crowd persisted, we were well on our way walking over a Real Live Bridge to Nowhere. After a long time had passed, after many years of fighting and confusion and misunderstanding and preconceived notions were set in stone, destruction was becoming imminent. The entire nation of Israel was on the brink of destruction, by its Babylonian neighbors. Babylon was encroaching, debates were flying...do we give in or do we fight back? How do we save ourselves? If we collapse has God forgotten us? How can God allow our devastation? Has God turned away from the covenant made at Sinai? Is our God powerless compared to Babylonian Gods? (The New Interpreter's Bible Intro to Jeremiah p. 1051)

This idea of human sin certainly had not gone away, not one bit really. In these days, but not in the days to come, but in these days it was clear to the prophet Jeremiah talks about it this way: that "the parents have eaten sour grapes, and their children's teeth had been set on edge." But God knew what God had gotten into and, so let's consider it an improvement: here we have God speaking to and through human creatures, in this particular instance to and through Jeremiah. God was done with floods and threatening sacrifice. God was sticking in there with us.

Not only that but in the midst of it all, in the midst of some of the greatest conflict the world had ever seen, we have a God who, through Jeremiah, is pretty darn hopeful. The world isn't going to hell in a handbasket as fast as we thought it was. Despite it all we have the promise that a new covenant will be made, not one we will thrash against the rocks as we already had a few times before, but a new covenant, one with us, one between Israel and Judah. It will be a covenant that God will put on our hearts and the covenant is simple, it levels the playing field, that God will be ours and we will belong to God. It is a covenant that is not based upon our sinfulness, it is not based upon our abilities or our lack thereof, it is not based on our obedience or disobedience, it is not based on our manipulations or our human desires, it has no escape clauses or conditions. It is not given with strings attached. Despite it all God believes so deeply in humanity that thinks we could pull a covenant like that off.

But let us remember who we are talking about here, let us remember who God is speaking through. Jeremiah isn't exactly the most sensible prophet. He for some insane reason believed that we could all listen to each other. He for some reason held out hope even though his life had no physical signs of hope in it, for he suffered mightily and lost everything. He for some insane reason, just in the next chapter, right in the middle of a literal battleground, he made a tremendously unsound financial decision: to buy a plot, a field, property, real estate right here right

in the middle of the war. This was not the best way to invest in his future in the midst of a financial crises more than anything we have ever seen in the United States. Jeremiah took stands. His was a proponent of the: let Babylon have its way with us and still, yet, God won't leave us and we will learn somehow or another how we will survive and how we will even thrive. And so, the people not so fond of him, they tried to kill him. He was one of those kinds of people that got to the heart of the matter a bit too quickly, a bit too bluntly, a bit too honestly. He spoke his mind even though his mind called into question the status quo, even though his heart made his people very uncomfortable, to say the least. He took radical action that made no, absolutely no sense in the world when everyone around him thought the world was falling apart faster than it could be put back together.

Maybe this is why I like Jeremiah. He helps me loosen up when I am getting too nervous about my job security, when I can feel the belts tightening around my spending simply cause I am nervous about the future, not knowing how much worse it is going to get, knowing I am putting too much stock in the results of our upcoming election. I like him because he is a little off his rocker, because he doesn't think too hard about what is supposed to be done and I am not sure he knows the ramifications of his actions so clearly, for he if did he wouldn't have ever taken them, he does what he thinks is right and good and just because that is what you are supposed to do. He is kind of blunt and I can relate to that, I have never been good at subtlety, it is a Midwestern skill that this Midwesterner was just never given.

Despite all the corruption and greed around Jeremiah, despite the fact that the sinfulness of the world was too overwhelming for much of the world to really handle, to take in, God comes to Jeremiah to tell him that God will watch over to build and to plant, God comes with a covenant based upon nothing more than God's love for us. In the midst of the deepest of sin, in the middle of the most pain and fear God comes to tell us that God will match our desire to break down, to overthrow, to destroy, to bring evil with God's own desire to build and to plant, to make a covenant with us, no matter how regularly and insistently we try and break it. It is an improvement, no? No more floods on this earth with the purpose of destroying us, for we can destroy ourselves well enough. No more of that, but instead the covenant with us that God will be for us and claim us as God's people, building and planting and planting and building.

Perhaps I am too idealistic—you all have heard me preach long enough to know for whom I will be voting for on Tuesday as we all go to the polls to make history together. Perhaps I am putting too much stock into what happens on Tuesday, for I know it isn't going to be easy. I am not at all convinced that our votes really all count or that continued insane attempts at assassination will not continue.

Perhaps I am too idealistic—but for the first time in many years I have felt relatively hopeful about our country and where it may be going. It's a long time coming, an awful long time—but perhaps, just maybe I am seeing a little glimmer of hope that Jeremiah had seen so many years ago in the midst of extreme destruction all around us that we have worked hard to create, establish and maintain. God speaks through Jeremiah and God speaks through all of us as well to proclaim hope in the middle of hopelessness, health in the middle of sickness, justice in the middle of oppression, understanding in the middle of confusion.

It isn't such a crazy thing, you know, to believe that life could be better, and to act and live out of that conviction. It isn't such a crazy thing, you know, to live and work and be church out of the knowledge that God cares for us in the midst of it all, in the middle of life enough that God will write that care on our hearts, that God claims us as God's own precious creation. It isn't such a crazy thing.

We have a long way to go before we deeply understand the covenant made so long before us between God and the human creatures that we are. We have a long way to go before we really live out of the knowledge that we have the option of not acting out of the sins of our ancestors but, instead remembering our past and living out of the actions of us today and now. We have a long way to go before we internalize that all of us, no matter how we may feel today or felt yesterday, no matter how hard we are on ourselves or our neighbors, God still writes God's care and liberation on our hearts, in the most precarious and precious part of our bodies possible, God gives us freedom. God chooses us, not based on our past sins but based on our present possibility and in that choosing we are charged with the hope and action of Jeremiah, as we enter this most important week in the history of our nation and world and every week that we are graced with life. Thanks be to God.