

## **092522 First Champaign and Windsor, Jeremiah 32:1-15 “The Field of**

**Anathoth”** Other sermons: 10/28/97 Presbytery of Eastern VA, Oct. Stated Meeting, Jer. 29 - “The Jeremiah Project”, 9/25/16 McCarter Presbyterian Church, “Called to be Transformed: The Rich Man and Lazarus”, Luke 16:19-33, 9/30/01, Craddock Presbyterian Church, 9-27-92 Memorial Pres., Atkins, AR

### **First Reading Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15**

1The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar. 2At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, 3awhere King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him.

6Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came to me: 7Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours." 8Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the LORD, and said to me, "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." Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.

9And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. 10 I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. 11Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; 12and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. 13In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, 14Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and

this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. 15For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

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If we hadn't read the scripture first from Jeremiah, you might have thought I was going to reference some Tolkien land. The field of Anathoth...it has an exotic sound to it, a Middle Earth sound. But, it is not from the Lord or the Rings or the Rings of Power. Anathoth is a small town near Jerusalem. And, the field Jeremiah buys is a powerful symbol for the people of God, a symbol of hope and encouragement in a time of suffering, war, and exile. It is a symbol that will lead them home.

National symbols are powerful. They move people, for good or bad. As we saw earlier this month with the Queen's funeral, whether we liked all the pomp and circumstance or not, it sent a strong message of transition to the world that her death has brought about the end of an era and we are not likely to see anything like it in hundreds of years. if at all ever again.

The field of Anathoth is not as familiar a symbol as the Queen. We might need some back story on the field of Anathoth. At this point in the book of Jeremiah, the people of Judah of the Southern Kingdom were in the middle of the Babylonian invasion. Israel of the Northern Kingdom had fallen 135 years earlier. Unlike other prophets who were speaking hope, Jeremiah was a miserable dooms day prophet. Jeremiah was adamant that the people of Judah were going to have to live in exile for a long time. "Babylon is the place, folks. It's going to be a long

road ahead and none of you will live to see the end. So, dig in. Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Have families. Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” “Thus says the Lord...” via Jeremiah back in chapter 29.

King Zedekiah, King of Judah, asks Jeremiah why he keeps prophesying that Judah will be defeated and he, Zedekiah, will be taken captive by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, which tragically does happen in a gruesome way. This is a war as real as Ukraine’s war. War is gruesome and exile is not fun.

In fact, King Zedekiah did not just ask why all the dooms day prophesy; he was pretty angry with Jeremiah and had him imprisoned in the courtyard so he could keep an eye on him. Jeremiah was decidedly unpopular with the king. But, Jeremiah is not entirely without hope. His prophecies of doom always have a silver lining, survival. He believed that God was going to use the exile of the people for good.

Total transformations frequently happen in crisis moments like this, in exile, out of one’s comfort zone. In order for the people to live, they had to dig into foreign soil, collaborate and compromise with the Babylonians. Indeed, we know that the Babylonian exile became critical to the identity of the Hebrew people after that.

So, finally, at this point in the story, in the tenth year of Zedekiah’s reign, the prophet Jeremiah receives this message from God. At the very last moment,

before Jerusalem is captured totally, the Word of God comes to Jeremiah in the opportunity to purchase a family field in Anathoth. Jeremiah buys the field in this town that is doomed. When all his relatives are trying to sell out and get out of town. Jeremiah sees that someday God will bring them back. So he buys the field. “For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land, the land of Jerusalem.” The field of Anathoth becomes a symbol of God’s long standing promise.

What a risky thing Jeremiah is doing, investing in something that he might never see again! But, Jeremiah had been waiting on the Lord. He had been listening for something that would give him hope. People of God, sometimes we have to wait and listen. We have to ponder and pray. We have to wait upon the Lord, wait upon the Lord, wait upon the Lord, as the song goes. Jeremiah was waiting for something to indicate to him that God meant for the people to come back to this land one day down the road. When all hope is all but over, Jeremiah hears God’s Word and buys the field. Now the prophet of doom had a Word of hope to give the people.

Hope is risky. I don’t like to take risks. But, risking is what we do when we are in hard times. Recently the Environmental committee heard Kathrine Hayhoe speak during the Faith in Place Summit. Katharine Hayhoe is a Canadian atmospheric scientist, Professor of Public Policy and Public Law in the Texas Tech University Department of Political Science and chief scientist at the Nature Conservancy. She is a modern day prophet who speaks passionately and factually about climate change. She was speaking about the realities of climate change to us at the

Summit and talked about how not to get bogged down in the doom. She talked about hope. She talked about “active hope.” Quoting from Joanna Macy and Dr. Chris Johnstone in their book Active Hope: How to Face the Mess we are in without Going Crazy, Kathryn told us that

“Active hope is a practice. Like tai chi or gardening, it is something we do rather than have...

First, we take in a clear view of reality, second, we identify what we hope for; and third, we take steps to move ourselves or our attention in that direction rather than weighing our change and proceeding only when we feel hopeful, we focus our intention and let that be our guide.” - Joanna Macy, Ph.D. and Dr. Chris Johnstone, Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We Are in without Going Crazy

I think Jeremiah had the kind of “active hope” Kathryn Hayhoe talked about. Once Jeremiah had received the message from God, he identified the direction God was leading them.

And, I was struck by how much this definition of “active hope” that Kathryn Hayhoe described in the face of our climate doom is a critical part of the whole notion of stewardship, taking care of God’s good earth, itself. “Active hope” is what the people of God do. We look at the world around us at whatever devastating situation is in front of us, climate change, war, exile, etc. We identify what we hope for. I will add from this passage in Jeremiah that part of identifying that hope includes God’s saving promise as it has been passed down through the ages. Jeremiah was waiting on the Word of God. He wanted the people to come

back to the land of his people, a land that God had promised to them. In that promise Jeremiah identified what he hoped for in the symbol of the field. He saw the Word of God when it was in front of him as prophets do. We are never quite sure how prophets do that, do we. That is another sermon, isn't it? How do you know it is the Word of God? For Kathryn Hayhoe, it's being realistic with the facts we have. I think Jeremiah was a realistic prophet as well.

Then Jeremiah did the third thing, he exercised active hope. He could only buy the field as a symbol but that symbol over time became a reality. The people of God did come back from exile and resettle the land. You see, we move toward the place we want to go, not away from it. We let the intention guide us. In climate change, we start acting toward cleaning up the mess in whatever little way we can. We start moving forward. If we can recycle, great. If we can buy a hybrid car or solar panel, great. If we can institute laws that encourage limiting our carbon footprint, great. If we just pick up trash, great. We do what can to move toward the goal. In climate change the goal is to clean up what we have messed up. But, in any kind of stewardship endeavor, whether it be caring for this building or us or determining where our mission dollars go, we first wait upon the Lord, then exercise active hope.

What is our field of Anathoth? What God's Word to us, to our session? This is the stewardship question in front us today. Is it children? Then we baptize (like Isaac and James) and we educate in whatever way we find available to us. Is it neighbors? Then we reach out and we get our mission partners (like Salt and Light) to help us, and we ask who are our neighbors and what do they need and

how do we give that need realistically, respectfully and responsibly. Is it our aging members? Then we spend extra time and focus in our mission budget for those ministries of care and discipleship that feed one another across the lifespan. Is it God's great earth? Then we find one thing or two or three that will make a difference to change what we do to make things better.

We did not read from the gospel this morning but there is good news here nonetheless. God's saving activity is present throughout the whole of scripture culminating in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus our Savior. We are God's people. We celebrate that claim in our baptism. The very person of Jesus Christ is a powerful symbol of hope for us. We can be assured because of his life and witness to us that when exile seems the only thing left, when darkness is all around us, even when we are at the very point of death and even after, new life will come again. Whether it is in the promise of a field or in the promise of eternal life, God's saving grace is available to us. That is the hope. And, as God's people, we move toward the certainty of that hope, actively, realistically, intentionally, step by step, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit which goes with us to remind us of the power of love in our lives this day and forever more. Amen.