

## Sacred Space, Sacred Being

Jeremiah 32: 1-3a, 6-15

Land is precious. As someone near and dear to me has said, they aren't making any more land are they? Land is precious. There is a consistent yearning in humanity's soul, to discover new lands, to boldly go where humanity hasn't gone before, to conquer and obtain new lands. That isn't all about land, is it, but still land is precious.

Just as precious as land is, so is space precious. In some ways, space is even more precious than land. I believe one reason our country was founded was so that there would be the space to worship God with freedom. The space of a pilgrimage is certainly about land but so much, so very much more than that-it's about the space to be with God, worship God, rest with God. Space is precious and thin space, where you can feel God reaching down and touching you is particularly precious.

And in today's text, Jeremiah demonstrates an understanding that Land is precious and sacred space is even more precious. Imprisoned Jeremiah is approached about stepping up and buying land. There are many issues that make this land deal, this real estate transaction so very interesting. Jeremiah is exiled, away from his homeland, and not just away but imprisoned, having a very limited, confined space in which to live- a courtyard some translations say. But this piece of property for sale is not where Jeremiah currently is residing, oh no, this piece of property is back home, in Anathoth, a suburb of Jerusalem, and oh, by the way, Jerusalem is and will be occupied by the Babylonians for who knows how long. Hey Jeremiah, after you finish that transaction, I got this piece of property you might be interested in. Don't worry about the swamps on it and how you can't get to it from here. It will be fine, just fine. And here is the kicker, its Jeremiah's cousin that is selling the land. Jeremiah's cousin Hanamel who got in a financial jam and wants Jeremiah to help a cousin out and buy the land to keep it in the family. And in Jeremiah's time, buying land for a financially challenged family member was the way of the world, the accepted religious cultural practice. Land is precious.

But Jeremiah is nobody's fool. Jeremiah knows this is not just about the land. Jeremiah knows that even though land is precious, family and relationships are more precious. This is not just anyone that is coming to Jeremiah with some piece of property he wants to unload. This is family, a cousin, someone who has meaning in Jeremiah's life. Purchasing the land means preserving the family, honoring the familial traditions and relationships. Precious land, precious space, more precious relationships.

And yet, there is one more, even more precious reason for Jeremiah to enter into this transaction. God has profoundly shared with Jeremiah that this is part of the plan that the Lord has for God's children. In the opening verses of our text, the word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah and lays out the plan, that Hanamel will come, that the land purchase is to be made and that redemption will occur. And by golly, isn't that what exactly happens. Jeremiah knows with his heart, his soul, his being that he is to purchase what seems like a God forsaken piece of land in a place occupied by the enemy, the over taker. This piece of land is probably a flip this house nightmare, without running water, with sinking soil, without a firm foundation, with a leaky roof and a heating and air conditioning system that needs a complete overhaul. Yet, that doesn't matter. Jeremiah buys it for 17 pounds of silver, not 5, 10 or 15 pounds, but 17 pounds of silver, sight unseen. And to top it off, Jeremiah doesn't make this a backroom, under the table deal. Oh no, Jeremiah is completely transparent about this transaction, having Baruch his secretary get witnesses who signed the deeds plus all those sitting observing together and, places the deeds in clay jars to preserve them so future generations will know. Precious land, precious space, precious relationships, precious God.

But the story doesn't end there. Look at verse 15. Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land. This is more than a real estate transaction that is noted in the Saturday newspaper. This is a passage of HOPE. Jeremiah said similar words earlier in chapter 29, about buildings and gardens being built in the land of exile. Words of despair then. but now, now Jeremiah is again speaking on behalf of the Lord and saying, we have a future, our future is in God, we need to trust and do. Precious Land, precious space, precious relationships, precious God.

So how will we be today as a presbytery, will we be looking back to the good old days when per capita was merely pennies and there were active, vibrant Presbyterian churches on every corner or will we be thinking toward the future and dreaming dreams that could change our way of doing ministry? Will there be despair in our actions or will there be hope and trust? What is God saying to you?

Looking at the immediate past, there is movement and momentum. In Good to Great and the Social Sectors, Jim Collins, says essentially just keep doing it- not the same old thing, but what God has called and gifted you to do, just keep turning the flywheel, keep trying, inch by inch, day by day and slow oh so slowly but then with increasing momentum, action will happen, momentum will build and the wheel that powers the engine will keep moving, faster and faster and faster. The Holy spirit blows not just with gusts but with small breathes on our hearts, inspiring us more and more. This summer, the momentum picked up. Pittsburgh presbytery's GA overture on the plight of the AA male, started out here in this presbytery, it grew and got stronger with concurrences from 5 other presbyteries. With the energy and effort of a cadre of people, particularly the advocacy of Rev. Freedom Blackwell, this overture with an unimaginable and what some viewed as a discouraging price tag of \$5million dollars ended up not only receiving a unanimous vote but also a standing ovation by the entire GA. Hallelujah! But momentum is still gaining and the project has an inspirational name, Freedom Rising, it has partners with the Presbyterian Foundation, PDA and has the potential to raise funds through the Peacemaking and Global mission offering. What was once thought about with trepidation and hesitancy is now thought about with hope and a future. The Spirit is blowing.

For over the past year, a strategic visioning team has been dreaming about the potential for Crestfield. This small group took a bold step and developed a new way of being for Crestfield. Not a new way of being in its entirety, since others have done this before us, but a new way of relationship for Crestfield with this presbytery as we work to share the gospel and draw children, youth and adults closer to Christ. In May, you heard of the dream to become a 501c3 in a covenantal relationship with Pittsburgh Presbytery. Slowly the wheel has been turning, as presentations have been made, acceptance has been generated. Energy is gaining. In fact, because of multiple difficulties at camps Lambec and Westminster Highlands, camps affiliated with 4 of our sister presbyteries, Crestfield absorbed approximately 162 campers over 3 weeks this summer, some even in the middle of the night-literally between midnight and 2:30 am as they traveled down 79 from Erie to Crestfield, seeking refuge as exiles to this precious land, this sacred space. What was once thought about with trepidation and hesitancy is now thought about with hope and a future. The Spirit is blowing.

Admittedly this has not always been an easy decision, such sentiment and loyalty has been attached to the relationship between the presbytery and Crestfield. There is great thanksgiving for the support, the commitment, the love. Yet, the cries of we have never done it this way before have been heard. Tears have and will be shed. I know, because I have shed some of those tears myself. Tears of despair and looking back, saying isn't it easier to just keep on going the some old way or the old same way. But if we do, what will happen in 15 years, 10 years, 5 years. Will Crestfield be held in captivity by financial and governance struggles? Tears of joy, that by welcoming the stranger, we were able to share the Gospel to so many in a new but just as wonderful way. What was once thought about with trepidation and hesitancy is now thought about with hope

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As Joan Gray tells it in "The Sailboat Church", the church needs to learn to trust and I add to hope again, to actively engage the Holy Spirit, to be involved in an intimate partnership with God, trusting God to provide and do what only God can do. Trusting and hoping as Jeremiah did with that real estate transaction. And how can we learn to trust and have hope? We must not despair but know that we are children of God claimed by the waters of baptism. We must engage in Bible study collectively and individually. We must pray by talking to God and by listening. We must establish sacred space within our daily patterns of living and we must dedicate ourselves to sacred being, to trusting and hoping. After all, we are the leaders the role models.

And we must come to the table together. The table is a sacred space that nourishes us to be sacred beings. At the table today, we remember all those who have come before us who trusted and hoped and laid foundations we are building on. We remember all that Jesus has done, redeeming not just the land and the space, but each one of us. At the table, we are fortified to do what the Lord calls us to do, albeit a real estate transaction or continuing a relationship with those in the family of Christ, in a new and different, yet perhaps, more meaningful way. At the table we look forward with great hope to the new kingdom of heaven on earth trusting the Lord is with us.

We hear the news today on our tvs and our radios, more killings of innocent black males, riots in the streets of Charlotte, major companies called to testify about their under the table money making schemes. We think we have cause to sit in despair and look back. May the Lord inspire us today, through the story of Jeremiah, to look forward, not with hesitation and trepidation but with trust and hope and with action. May we glorify God in all we do today, tomorrow and for the remainder of our lives.