

Jeremiah 4:11-28

Psalm 14

1 Timothy 1: 1-2,12-19

Luke 15:1-10

*These sermon notes were prepared before the sermon was delivered and so do not transcribe the actual sermon word for word*

The worldview described in the first reading, like many other biblical worldviews, or event descriptions is completely senseless when read literally.

Jeremiah is describing something of real value and is using familiar symbols that would have relevance and meaning in his time and place.

*“A hot wind comes from me out of the bare heights in the desert toward my poor people, not to winnow or cleanse-- a wind too strong for that.”*

Jeremiah speaks of unwanted forces at work in the world; forces that will not help, but will actually work against the life-giving activities of winnowing, cleansing and cooling. And Jeremiah speaks of these destructive forces as a “judgement” against the people.

We can leave open the question about whether or not there is God who judges our actions as Jeremiah’s prophetic insights have value regardless of our understanding of God.

Jeremiah, in voicing the words of God, ascribes Judgement to the people with clear reasoning;

*“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.”*

Now let’s look at a present day context so that we might more fully engage the process that Jeremiah is seeking to illuminate for us.

How did Tony Abbot come to be prime minister of Australia?

Put aside the obvious answer; that it was the result of democracy at work, and that can be easily put aside when we acknowledge that more people didn’t vote for him than did vote for him.

And let’s also put aside political bias as the question would be exactly the same if Keven Rudd had come to be prime minister.

So again, how did Tony Abbot come to be prime minister of Australia?

Now let’s judge the situation, in parallel with Jeremiah’s process and list off the reasons:

People have lost faith in politicians

The political dialogue is full of untruths

Big advertising budgets promote ideas that mislead people

People are more self-interested than community interested

Many people always vote the same regardless of issues.

We could keep going, and this is the process that Jeremiah is engaged in, but with a prophetic outlook.

Jeremiah is not looking at one people in one place at one time; rather he is asking us to encounter the ‘human condition’, and the evolution of civilisation toward, or away from, its Divine reality.

As we follow the text we see that he continues to illuminate the landscape of humanity.

*“I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void”*; written in 5-600BC Jeremiah identifies these two hallmarks of the human condition, “waste” and “void” or emptiness. And centuries later we still find that ‘waste’ and ‘emptiness’ are two issues that dominate the landscape of humanity.

As we consider this landscape we can see that these two hallmarks are related in a strange way that reinforces each; as we seek to fill our ‘void’, our emptiness with stuff, material possessions, so we add to the waste. Remember, Jeremiah is illuminating our human landscape, the relationship between “void” and “waste” is being spoke of in relation to our spiritual development.

He continues; *“I looked... to the heavens, and they had no light.”*

For Jeremiah’s audience *“the heavens”* is the place, and presence, of God and the light in the heavens is the illumination of God, or God revealed.

And again, Jeremiah is describing the landscape of humanity; *“I looked... to the heavens, and they had no light”*; most of us know this very landscape within ourselves;

John of the Cross called it the dark night of the soul

Valium salespeople call it depression

Refugees call it an Australian election

And for us, we give it all sorts of names, tiredness, fear, loneliness etc etc.

However, remember, Jeremiah speaks with a prophetic outlook; the world we inhabit is a world in which our culture no longer sees the light in the heavens, in fact only very few even look to the heavens.

Jeremiah continues; *“I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro.”* Again as we engage with what Jeremiah is describing, so we glimpse the landscape of humanity as it is today.

Those things we thought were solid and immovable, the things we hold dear, the things we trust are perhaps not as solid as we think!

This is the very landscape that breeds fear and depression. And again, most of us have experienced Jeremiah’s landscape as the mountains and hills, the high points in our lives quaked and moved.

Every death of someone loved feels like a quaking mountain; every break of trust is a hill that moves to and fro.

And if we go back to the political landscape, we find there are no high points at all.

Back to Jeremiah; *“I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled.”*

To see no one at all voices an absence of community – it speaks of a landscape of rampant individualism. Selfishness and self-centredness are the places in which we see no one at all.

*“I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled.”*

The *“birds of the air”* are the angels, the messengers of God; those who move between heaven and earth, those who know that space when divinity and humanity are met together. The *“birds of the air”* are free and go beyond where we fear to go, they are the ones who convey the Holy Spirit and bestow on us our baptism.

Jeremiah’s description is not of some future time of desolation, he is not heralding Armageddon; he is describing the landscape of humanity, and the reality of our world, our culture and our civilisation.

He makes that very clear and follows it with further clarity; *“For thus says the LORD: The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end.”*

He speaks of the whole land: he speaks of our landscape; and he offers a sign of hope; *“I will not make a full end.”*

Jeremiah tells us that all is not lost; and that leads us into the two parables presented for us in today’s gospel.

In light of the landscape of humanity we have explored with Jeremiah, what is it that we need to seek and find?

What do we need to find within ourselves so that we can call others to come *“Rejoice with me”*?

What do we need to find as church and as community so that we can call others to come *“Rejoice with me”*?

The two parables, the lost sheep, and the lost coin, are not about finding a little in the midst of a lot. They are about finding that which was lost.

They are about finding the place of abundance, the place from where we can rejoice, when we are lost in an environment of scarcity.

We are the Church and our faith is a faith of abundance, we are a people called into the place of rejoicing...

In the landscape of humanity and in the world around us it is easy to see in so many ways how we have lost sight of a light that shines in the heavens.

Here we seek to find our calling to Shine as a light in the world.

*Peace be with You*