

Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-7

Psalm 66: 1-11

2 Timothy 2: 1-15

Luke 17:11-19

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

The writings of Jeremiah are usually understood as prophetic, and so are understood as a foretelling of what to do in accord with the Word of God.

However, they are more fully appreciated when seen as a writing into history of the Divine activity in order to make sense of history's unfolding and to identify opportunities for course correction.

That in itself is an important insight for all of us in the present day, for it identifies for us a process of reflection that will not only enable us to see and appreciate our own 'divine journey' and the unfolding of wholeness that is our life's unfolding; it also gives us opportunities and encouragement for creativity and for course correction.

Jeremiah is giving an explanation of God's involvement in a particularly difficult time in the history of Israel. The People of Israel had suffered defeat, and had been sent away from Jerusalem to exile in Babylon. After a failed rebellion, an attempt to gain freedom, they face the reality of staying longer in exile, away from their home and also their temple, their place of worship.

Jeremiah seeks to validate this extended stay in exile before their eventual return to Jerusalem which will only occur after Babylon is defeated by the Persians and a new King gives them authority to return home again.

In providing his theological reflection, and reasoning, Jeremiah uncovers a universal truth that can be included in our own theological reflections and in relation to our own life unfolding. Here we find the word that is truly prophetic as it informs our situation and our own writing of the Divine into history.

In the last verse of today's reading, Jeremiah says: "*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.*"

Consider our own cultural understanding of 'self-preservation', it really is quite primitive and understandable so as it is grounded in our animal instincts. It contrasts with the 'truth' that Jeremiah has glimpsed, a truth that is still largely unseen by the world.

Arguably, our Western civilisation has completely overlooked and so missed the opportunity for course correction that Jeremiah's insight provides.

Financial institutions, banks and insurance companies all teach us to 'hoard' and to store up treasures for ourselves. One TV advertisement by one of these institutions stated that 'the most important person in the world is you!'

We even have legislation directed toward the goal for everyone to become self-funded retirees; and all this is quite understandable and acceptable if we retain the common, and primitive, understanding of self-preservation.

However, look again at Jeremiah's insight, and bring it into our present day context; "in the welfare of others, you will find your own welfare".

Self-preservation is only to be found in the preservation of the whole.

It is an insight that is slowly being appreciated by more and more people – we are also still exiled from wisdom and from the Divine temple. The slow appreciation is not being found through a reading of Scripture and other sacred texts; rather it is being unfolded in history through global warming and climate change.

One of the delightful ripple effects, the upside of the whole climate change debate is an appreciation that self-preservation is only attained when we attend to the preservation of the whole; it is not a goal for, or of, personal fulfilment.

We are slowly discovering that the best way to look after ourselves, and to invest in ourselves, is to look after the whole, to care for each other and the whole of creation.

If we were writing, as present day Jeremiah's, we would see the hand of God at work in climate change, a divine hand offering us an opportunity for course correction, a hand that leads us out of exile and brings us back to the temple.

In years to come, the orientation of our civilisation will be outward toward each other; the cultural norm will be to give, and to invest in others. When the future looks back to the cultural norms of this age, it will be with the same astonishment that we look back to those who saw the earth as flat.

The value of the Scriptures, and the wisdom in the scriptures, give us opportunities for insights that can dramatically change our world view. And as we see in today's 'history lesson' from Jeremiah, such insights lead us into freedom and back to our home, back to the temple.

One exercise you might like to contemplate during the week ahead; make a list of the things you have learnt that are important; the 'truths' and insights that you want to pass on to others.

Then determine the time and place you discovered this learning. My guess, and it is quite sobering, is that most of what would be on your list was learnt very early in your life, and was passed on to you from the generation before.

That is normal, acceptable and obviously it works, as it is the basis of our whole educational strategy.

Now consider the major shifts in understanding that have been creative of new futures, the major discoveries that have reshaped our world; they do not come from the past but rather spring from the creativity and course corrections that take us beyond all that is handed to us from the past.

Then, consider where these ‘new creations’ are found in the unfolding of your life; and in particular, have you discovered a new, a deeper understanding of God than that which was handed to you from the past?

In the second reading from 2 Timothy, verse 8, Paul says: “*Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David--that is my gospel.*”

That encouragement, ‘to remember’, is a mantra for us to live ourselves into resurrection. Being dead or alive might reflect our day-to-day writing of history; however it also represents us exiled from the temple.

When we live, and unfold our tomorrow with an orientation that does “*Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead*” then we can course correct and seek to live our lives in that same light, in the enlightenment of that insight.

Jesus didn’t self-invest.

Jesus does not demonstrate self-preservation.

And nor was his goal self-funded retirement; rather, he offers us another orientation that leads us toward wholeness; and orientation of life invested in the welfare and wholeness of all.

Here is another opportunity to pause and consider how your appreciation/encounter with Christ as developed.

Many Christians speak of having ‘found’ Christ and having accepted Christ in their life at some point; some religious institutions call this being ‘saved’.

Paul uses the examples (in today’s reading) of Soldier, Athlete and Farmer, none of these has a “saved” point. If you don’t continue to soldier, you are no longer a soldier, if you don’t continue to train, you will no longer be athletic and if you don’t continue to farm, you would end up with no farm.... “Being saved” is not a place, event or achievement, it is a lifelong ‘remembering of Christ raised from the dead’.

Now, there is a simple wrap up to this sermon by acknowledging the activity of the Samaritan leper in the gospel narrative, the one who offered “thanks”.

So take that as a final encouragement for an orientation that looks outward and seeks to find wholeness in the welfare of all.

However, let me open up a new sermon that compliments the whole idea of creative shifts in our understanding and appreciation of the Word, or hand, of God in the unfolding of our lives and the shaping of tomorrow.

The story of the ten lepers is usually referred to with reference to the one who gave thanks; but it has so much more to offer.

There is no mention of the healing activity of Jesus.

All are directed to "*Go and show yourselves to the priests*" in accord with the traditional Mosaic Law.

Presumably all are cleaned of leprosy in the movement toward the priests.

But one then chooses another 'un directed path'.

Nine find healing in the God who resides in the temple. One finds God enfleshed, alive in humanity, and that one is both healed and made well.

*Peace be with You*