

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost 25 September 2016

[Jeremiah 32: 1-3, 6-15; Psalm 91: 1-6, 14-16; 1 Timothy 6: 6-19 ; Luke 16:19-31](#) from Vanderbilt

[Proper 21C / Ordinary 26C / Pentecost +19 Sep 25, 2016](#) from Textweek

The reading from Jeremiah is the sort of script we might find as a Facebook posting following the earthquake in Nepal last year; it is a story set in troubled times and that adopts a positive orientation in the face of turmoil; and for most of its early audience it would have been received as a story of hope.

Jerusalem is besieged, Jeremiah is imprisoned; the instinctive reactions of fight or flight would have already kicked in for most, if not all, in the audience.

Jeremiah is documenting an alternative to those primitive, instinctive, reactions; and it's an alternative, in Jeremiah's terms, associated with listening to

“The word that came... from the LORD”.

It is more than a simple story of hope, for its very context is set within the midst of hopelessness. When we listen to the news of Aleppo, when we hear another report of a boatful of refugees sinking, when the latest tragedy unfolds in the Sudan; surely we all feel helpless; and that in turn leads to hopeless.

As Jerusalem is falling all around him to the forces of Babylon, Jeremiah buys a piece of real estate; and that transaction is described in great detail thereby drawing our attention to the actual ‘process’.

He sees beyond the turmoil, and he doesn't just light a candle and make a wish; he actually sets a new agenda for himself and for those around him; and it is an agenda of re-creation:

“Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.”

The process described is perhaps the same, and yet a more believable, version of the process told to an earlier generation in the story of Noah.

This reading gives us a relevant story, describing a process, that is applicable in every moment and that is perhaps relevant to any and all circumstances of turmoil.

The global turmoil of 9/11 was responded to by the United States with an instinctive fight reaction and response and the consequences of ongoing violence are still with us some 15 years later; an instinctive response that resulted in violence begetting violence; there was no voice of Jeremiah to be heard.

In our own lives, on a quite different scale, we all encounter turmoil as we confront the changes and chances that come to us on our journey through life.

In most cases we respond instinctively to such changes and often the movement from helpless to hopeless goes unnoticed until we find ourselves in the cultural swamp of “I can't do anything about that”; a place where the best we can do is to look after ourselves; maybe light a candle and make a wish!

Jeremiah illustrates a very practical transaction; a process we might even be able to adopt for ourselves.

If we look beyond the downfalls of the place we currently inhabit and resolve to participate in a new order; to invest in a new version of today; then we no longer see ourselves as left helpless in the swamp; but rather are once again moving with a principle and purpose that echoes the 'Word of God'.

It is a matter of creating the transaction, of buying a field to make manifest the reality of a new future; and a good example that is often used to motivate action comes from an account of the Scottish Himalayan Expedition in 1951: the leader, William Murray, was having trouble getting all the arrangements together so that he could set the date for the expedition; and so he made a transaction that initiated action and this excerpt comes from the book

The Scottish Himalayan Expedition (1951):

We had put down our passage money— booked a sailing to Bombay. This may sound too simple, but is great in consequence. Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way. I learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets:

Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it!

Murray's passage money to Bombay was Jeremiah's real estate purchase; an investment and an action of re-creation to bring about a new reality.

Looking back to the reading, when you picture the first lines of the text, what image takes shape for you?

"The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah".

For much of the Old Testament the 'Word' came from above; and for much of the 'new testament that same 'Word' came from the past; however when we listen for the 'word' within, the 'Word that became flesh', and discover that 'Word' within then we have already begun to move out of hopelessness, for finding the Word of God within is enabling of an investment in a new creation and so a new future.

The second reading is again relevant as we reflect on global and individual turmoil and the growing sense of pessimism that pervades the world we have created around us.

Paul very much echoes the process documented by Jeremiah:

"17 As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. "

And just so we understand who Paul might be referring to when he speaks of "*those who in the present age are rich*"; we in Australia, certainly most of us, and probably all of us here, are in the richest 1% of people in the world.

Reading through the text of the second reading we can readily appreciate that some of the phrases have made their way into the common language; and yet they remain unheard:

“we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it”, “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil”.

Paul, like Jeremiah offers us an investment plan for a new future; his version of Jeremiah’s real estate transaction:

“18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, 19 thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.”

And what is once again strikingly underlined is the whole idea of

“the treasure of a good foundation for the future”;

that which Jeremiah put into a sealed clay jar.

Here, again, we are encouraged to look beyond the instinctive investment we make in ourselves, look beyond all that we take to fill our hands with; and we are encouraged to share, to give and so to empty our hands so that we might

“take hold of the life that really is life.”

And what “*really is life.*”, is life measured not at an individual level but life as the life of God’s whole creation. What really is life is not that which only 1% of the planet experience, but that which 100% of the planet experience.

And that finally brings into focus the chasm of the gospel; which is not a story about what will happen after we die; it is a story, like the previous two readings, about the re-creation of tomorrow a realisation of a time lived in accord with the word of God, the very breath of creation.

When we look toward tomorrow across the chasm that is the gap between rich and poor; and when we realise where we stand today, on the 1% side of that gap, then we might appreciate that it is us, it is our hands to ‘mind the gap’.

Paul and Jeremiah offer us an investment plan for a new future; it is now in our hands to mind the gap and to invest in a tomorrow that realises the divine promise:

"The world is wonderful and beautiful and good beyond one's wildest imagination."