

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING: Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>2</sup>At 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, <sup>3</sup>where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Zedekiah had said, “Why do you prophesy and say: Thus says the LORD: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; <sup>6</sup>Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>7</sup>Hanamel 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.” <sup>8</sup>Then 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. <sup>9</sup>And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. <sup>10</sup>I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. <sup>11</sup>Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; <sup>12</sup>and 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. <sup>13</sup>In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, <sup>14</sup>Thus 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. <sup>15</sup>For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

*This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.*

FIRST READING: Psalm 40:1-5,16

I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. <sup>2</sup>He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog,  
and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. <sup>3</sup>He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD. <sup>4</sup>Happy are those who make the LORD their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods. <sup>5</sup>You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you. Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted... <sup>16</sup>But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, “Great is the LORD!” <sup>17</sup>As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me.

You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God.

*This is the word of the Lord. THANKS BE TO GOD.*

### ***“A Down-Payment on the Future”***

I’m appreciative of the Rev. Thomas Warren’s<sup>1</sup> expertise in the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his use of Bonhoeffer as an example with this text. For in January of 1943, three months before Bonhoeffer, the peaceful Lutheran Pastor-turned Nazi resistor, was executed by the Nazis, when things seemed at their worst, he wrote these words about Christian hope and faith. They are published in his now famous book, “Letters from Prison”. He wrote, *“...There remains for us only the very narrow way, often extremely difficult to find, of living every day as if it were our last, and yet living in faith and responsibility as though there were to be a great future. It is not easy to be brave and keep that spirit alive, but it is imperative.”*<sup>2</sup>

The Prophet Jeremiah, like Bonhoeffer, was also imprisoned. He was imprisoned in 588 B.C.E., during the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. He was imprisoned by his own king, Zedekiah because he had boldly spoken God’s word to the people Israel, God’s word of judgment and divine condemnation of Israel’s social injustices and idolatry. But now, the prophesy was coming true; the Babylonian army had surrounded the city and the people were desperate for relief. Some prayed for Jeremiah to ask God to remove the army, some wanted to keep fighting to their death, and others just wanted to escape. But regardless, all were starving and afraid...and near despair.

The word of God then came to Jeremiah once again. God didn’t tell him, however, how to fight. God didn’t tell him how the people might escape. God ordered him to...get this... to BUY A PLOT OF LAND, a field in Anathoth, the town where he was born, just outside the city limits! What? Yes, according to a law found in Lev 25, Jeremiah could buy a family-owned plot of land, and God asked him to do so. Certainly, investing in real estate, in the future, seemed to his cousin, Hanamel, who acted as the mediator, and everyone else to be absurd. Jerusalem was about to be destroyed by an invading army. Exile was imminent. But yet Jeremiah was being asked to invest tangibly in the future. The message in this was severalfold.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas I. Warren. “When Battered and Besieged...Buy”. [https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf2002add/when\\_battered\\_and\\_besiegedbuy](https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf2002add/when_battered_and_besiegedbuy). (accessed 9-23-22).

<sup>2</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (Enlarged Edition; London: SCM Press, 1971), 14-15.

First it was to focus the people on what was beyond the immanent months and years, on what was beyond when they would once again populate the land. *“For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land’”*. Jeremiah’s message was all about hope and it was founded on the underlying truth that no earthly king ran the world, not Zedekiah, nor Nebuchadrezzar, nor Putin nor Ali Khamenei, nor anyone else. Only God. And God’s final word was/is not destruction. It is not death. It is life and renewal. God's final word is always life and renewal.

In fact, in chapter 31 (just before), God had said, *“I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people...for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.”* (Jer 31:33, 34b). It was the promise of the new covenant, the promise of forgiveness and restoral of relationship for the people of God, not by virtue of animal sacrifices or anything else that we humans might DO, but by God’s grace alone, acting on our hearts with faith. It is the covenant of which Jesus is mediator. For by his dying and rising, by his defeat of death, he restored life, now and forever, for all who believe.

Yes, in faith we can trust that the Lord will give us a future, now and beyond this life, even when circumstances seem to say otherwise. We can be confident, trust in that future. We can defiantly trust in that future. I recall a pastor of mine once saying that *“we Christians are different from many other religions because we do not have to deny suffering, pain, hardship, and toil, we can defy it.”*

*In 1987, George Bush spoke about having attended the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. He told about the Marxist rhetoric and the coldness of the funeral, which had no reference to God. Then Bush said, “I happened to be in just the right spot to see Mrs. Brezhnev. She walked up, stood motionless by the coffin a long time and then, right before the coffin was closed, she traced the sign of the cross on her husband's chest.” There in that totalitarian state, in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all, hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross,*

*and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband.*<sup>3</sup>

Yes, Jeremiah bought the land. He carefully weighed out the money, signed the deed, sealed it, got the proper witnesses, and the ordered that the papers be put in an earthenware jar, in order that they would last for a long, long time. And indeed, there was a day, more than 70 years later, when the people Israel returned from exile to Jerusalem and repopulated the land, the land where houses and fields and vineyards again flourished. And so, brothers and sisters, the message here is not only that in faith we can trust that the Lord will give us a future; a future of renewal; a future not only in heaven but on earth, but that we can act! We can act confidently on this truth NOW. We can act despite the tendency for despair or withdrawl amid the hardship.

*Do you recall the story of Eugene Lang and the sixth-grade class in East Harlem? In 2016, Mr. Lang, a self-made millionaire, was asked to speak to a class of 59 graduating sixth-graders. He wondered what he could say to inspire these students, predominantly black and Puerto Rican, most of whom would drop out of school. As he stood before them, he found himself looking at them looking at him and then discarding his notes and then recalling for them the words of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, urging them to pursue dreams of their own. And then — with no forethought, he made a vow that would change their lives and his. "I didn't stop to do any arithmetic," he said, "I just said, 'You can go. I promise that each one of you can go to college.'" The immediate response was "the most delightful mob scene a human being can have." For the first time they had hope. Said one student, "I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling." Nearly 90 percent of that class went on to graduate from high school this year.*<sup>4</sup>

Christian hope, what Jurgen Moltmann says is "expecting what faith believes that God promises"<sup>5</sup>. does something to us. It creates for us impetus to act for a better future, to make a down payment on it. With hope we can risk extraordinary things, do extraordinary things because our future is already secure. Hope can fuel change. It calls us out...out of the status quo...to look at the world differently and respond to it differently. We might be called to throw

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<sup>3</sup> Ken Klaus. "Confess the Christ". <https://www.lhm.org/dailydevotions/default.asp?date=20080402>. (accessed 9-23-2022)

<sup>4</sup> From Parade magazine. <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/h/hope.htm> (accessed 9-23-22)

<sup>5</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 6.

ourselves into a cause that will improve the welfare of the earth or the earth's people, a cause that will break down barriers of inequity and hostility, sustain life and breath, and change history, a cause that maybe we will not live to see fulfilled.

We might be called to relieve small pains, fears, sufferings, and injustices...the homeless person needing shelter, the disabled child needing tutoring, the elderly struggling with confusion and loss, the abused animal needing love, the overworked needing rest. Every day, we may be called to act on such things, to act in confidence, in trust, making a down payment on a future that we yet cannot see.

But we also might be called to do is just something seemingly mundane, something that is equally challenging, like working with integrity in a dead-end job, trusting that God will channel our best efforts to a positive end. Or staying faithful to our spouse, trusting that God will bring a fuller life to both of us in the process, or being generous in our charitable giving, trusting that God will use our gifts to accomplish good that we cannot see...or even imagine.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever we find ourselves called in Christian Hope to do, it will likely not be easy, and family, friends and just the atmosphere of bad news may try to influence us to not invest. However, as Bonhoeffer says, "*It is imperative.*"<sup>7</sup> Indeed the future of our lives, the future of our churches, the future of our world calls us to make a down payment on it. For "*For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.*" Amen.

Let us pray: Gracious God, we thank you for your holy word and we pray for your Spirit to fill us with that word so that we might truly be your people of hope who can have the courage and strength and faith to invest in the future - a future of righteousness and justice and peace. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.homileticonline.com/members/installment/93000018> . (accessed 9-21-22)

<sup>7</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Enlarged Edition; London: SCM Press, 1971), 14-15.