



# “Investing in the Future”

Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

I'd like to start with some background of Jeremiah. He lived in Jerusalem at the time when the Babylonians were laying siege to the city. In the midst of the injustice and waywardness of his people, Jeremiah preached death and destruction and pleaded for the Israelites to return to their God-given identity of being instruments of justice and righteousness. And yet, in the middle of the siege of Jerusalem and the impending destruction that Jeremiah had been talking about for 40 years, he shifts the focus of his message rather abruptly. In Jeremiah 32, Jeremiah is instructed to buy a seemingly worthless piece of land in what is soon to be a devastated city. Is this just a real estate transaction following in Mosaic tradition? Or one more in a long line of prophetic symbolic actions led by God? In one commentary it says:

Jeremiah seemed always to take an unrealistic position and seemed always to be at odds with popular opinion. When times were good, he warned of famine and starvation. When other prophets spoke of peace, he spoke of war. When others took refuge in religion, he talked of hypocrisy and false gods. When people were full of joy, he wept. When the king wanted a word of hope, he preached death and destruction. When the people began to slip into despair, he talked of hope and the future. When everything was about to go up in flames, he bought a piece of land and invested in the future!

The city is about to be destroyed, and what value the land may have once held is about to be lost. Yet, Jeremiah in obedience to God makes this investment.

Now obviously there is much more going on than just some legal claim to the land that Jeremiah might have had, but it still seems strange for him to buy land now. And how would it have looked to all of the people who knew Jeremiah and his message to them? the same person who for so long preached death and destruction was now talking about fields and planting and building, and painting a picture of a life of peace and normalcy. I can only guess Jeremiah was so convinced that God would work among his people that he was willing to make a monetary investment in the future of the city.

In verse 15 of Jeremiah we begin to get some insight into God's plan for the future. Jeremiah's actions were not simply rooted in his hope for the future, but for God's purposes for the future. A future where in this place houses would once again be built and vineyards planted.

Finally, though Jeremiah's message was not about revolution, as revolutionary as most of what he said would have sounded to the people. His message was always judgment or hope, about God, and about what God is about in the world. When the people were arrogant and self-sufficient, he spoke of judgment. And now, when the people were beginning to slip into despair for the future, he spoke hope and a future.

Jeremiah begins to lift his eyes to the future that was possible, not by any human resource, but only by the grace, forgiveness, and provision of God. This is how Jeremiah saw it and so he invested in land, which I'm sure served him well in the future. His trust in God was that great that despite the actions and words of the people, Jeremiah relied on what he understood from God and not what he saw the people actually doing or living.

Last week, I mentioned the grumblings that I've heard around here, grumblings that have been around since I came and I'm sure began before I ever came, but I've often wondered when I've heard the despair over not having a permanent pastor in place yet, what you think will happen that can't happen now? Not because I'm here, but because God is here. Our worship and ministry should always be done out of our love for God and, as this passage reminds us, God blesses even when the people are grumbling, lacking in faith and trust, feeling despair and hopelessness. Because God was always in that place with the Israelites, whether it was in exile in Egypt or in a desert or at home. It's We, the people, that make a difference. God in us and we in God. It is that empowerment of the Holy Spirit that can change a church around. Not any one person, not even a pastor. If you are expecting a new pastor to come in here and immediately be able to grow the church, start innovative programs that you will all want to flock to, if you think he or she can come in here and save the church from its sleepy ways to become a dynamic church of the future, then you will be disappointed, because it is a collective work, a collective ministry, it is a collective changing of the hearts to believe that transformation is possible; and that begins with believing that in and through Jesus Christ that true transformation and growth is possible - and not just for this church and the people in it but for the wider world, this community, this country, and this planet.

So that begs the question: Do you believe people can change? Do you believe people's hearts, minds, ideas, can be transformed? Do you believe that God is a miracle maker? A true miracle worker? Able to transform the old into the new?

There are so many troubles in this world, even in this city. Gun violence, constant anger over politics and politicians, rights of women and minority groups being stripped away, the climate crisis, the endless wars around the world, continued rampant drug use that is killing or ruining the lives of so many, and the ripple affect of all these issues is increased anxiety and depression of every age, but especially in our teens and young adults. So how is true change to come about?

And that goes back to you. Do you believe transformation, new life, is even possible in others? In yourself? If the answer is no, then we've all been wasting our time sitting here today and every Sunday, but if you believe that transformation is possible for you, for this congregation, for this community and for this country, then you need to believe so and walk in faith trusting that God is going to do a good thing.

My Methodist pastor friend, whom I've mentioned before, lost his daughter to drug addiction. But the result of that led him to do volunteer work in a recovery house. Since retiring last fall, he has become more involved in the recovery house program, leading Bible studies and counseling these young adults as they find their way off drugs and into a promising future. He couldn't save his own daughter, but that doesn't deter him from believing that God still does miraculous things, that lives can be changed, that miracles can still happen. God still believes that new life is possible and we should too.

God believed this so much that he wrote on their hearts. Helped engrave his laws within them, so that they would never forget. In The New Testament we see Jesus touching the hearts of those he preached, transforming lives, and when done leaving it up to the disciples to now go forward doing even greater things than he did. But we can't do that if we don't believe in the power of Jesus Christ to transform lives.

In this passage, Jeremiah informs the people that God has written a new covenant with the people, that no longer would they have to worship in any one place, but they were free to move about because he has them. He has made a new covenant with them that he has engraved the laws onto their hearts. We have God's laws engraved on our hearts. We have God's loving presence dwelling within us. We have the power within, given to us by God, to go out and transform lives, but it starts first in believing that God can and does transform and that it can be done through you and me. You are the catalyst for change! Not a pastor or anyone or anything else.

What do you believe? Do you believe change is possible for the person on the street? For the person in the pew next to you? For you? Do you believe that the church can be transformed? Do you believe that God can make all things new, that God's love and God's laws are written on your heart? If you can say yes to these questions, then you need not worry or grumble or put too much pressure on your new pastor to make things feel better. You don't even have to wait for your new pastor! Like Jeremiah, are you willing to buy the figurative land to plan for the future? Do you have enough hope

and faith in a good future to invest now so that the things invested in can bring fruit in the not so distant future? Because God is doing all that and has done all that. You've got this! All the work you've done over the past four weeks, reflecting on yourself and the areas you need to give more completely over to God or need to let go of and repent of, is nearly finished.

Next week we march into Jerusalem with Jesus, and then it is on to the cross and the resurrection, but for now we still need to work. Ask God to show you what thoughts and actions need to be transformed, so that you can be transformed, so you can become a more devoted follower of Jesus. Remember the Israelites. They were transformed over and over again. They needed to be because they would slip into their old ways. That is why God now writes it on their hearts. The guide book is written on their hearts and the guide, the holy Spirit, is in their heart as well. It is the same for us. God's laws are written on our hearts and God's love and grace are imprinted there as well. Buy the land for a new day is coming that is full of promise and hope. Amen.

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