

“Hopefulness” - September 29, 2019
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Jeremiah 32 and Psalm 91

Jeremiah is standing in a world that is under siege. We are told that he is confined in the court of the guard in the palace of King Zedekiah, in the city of Jerusalem. The city is under siege by the Babylonian Army and Jeremiah is telling King Zedekiah that soon the King himself will be on his way to captivity in Babylon, along with everyone else. And into this setting of siege and destruction, Jeremiah buys a piece of land, 3 miles from the city center of Jerusalem. And we get this detailed account of the process of the purchase of the land, including the deed of purchase, containing terms and conditions, signed and sealed in front of witnesses and followed up with the sealing of the documents in an earthenware jar, “in order that they may last a long time.” The siege of Jerusalem began in January 588 BC. The land transaction of our passage took place that summer or early fall. The city of Jerusalem fell in August of the next year 587 BC. And so, Jeremiah’s purchased land would have sat there through a year of battle.

And imbued into Jeremiah’s act of the purchase of the land comes an understanding of this: God’s gift of hope is wrapped up in what looks like a bad real estate deal. For Jeremiah finishes his prophecy with these words: “For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.” The fields will in a future time feel the blade of the plow, the tendrils of the grape vine will once again reach up to the sun’s warmth and curl along the post. There will be food and wine and community again. And the news of the prophet in prison who bought the land in a war zone spread like wildfire. And his action of buying the land and his words that yes, ‘houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land’, brought hope to all those who could see no hope. My commentary wrote, “Jeremiah 32 is a story of prophetic symbolic action. Jeremiah bought a field. That was a simple act. What made it prophetic was its location and situation.”¹

A question for us today is where do we see prophetic action today – where are we being called to ‘buy land’? I read that “during the biblical period, land could mean the difference between life and death. The agrarian type of society structures its culture to prize land theologically.”² How do we think theologically of the land we live on, the water we drink, the air we breathe? Where is God in all of this? How do we consider ourselves part of all that we see in the world around us?

Theologian Paul Tillich determined we need to perceive God differently, “We must abandon the external height images in which the theistic God has historically been perceived and replace them with internal depth images of a deity who is not apart from us, but who is the very core and ground of all that is.”³ Diana Butler Bass will take it further, “Spirituality is not just about sitting in a room encountering a mystical god in meditation or about seeing God in a sunset. It is a deep awareness that we are creators, creators who work with the Creator, in an

¹ Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 4, Theological Perspective, 98.

² *Ibid.*, 98.

³ Diana Butler Bass, *Grounded: Finding God in the World – A Spiritual Revolution*, (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 31.

ongoing project of crafting a world. If we do not like the world or are afraid of it, we have had a hand in that. And if we made a mess, we can clean it up and do better. We are what we make.”⁴

The signs by my side are some of what we carried during the Climate March in Richmond Hill on Friday. How did we get to this point where we’re marching with 7 million other people globally, to tell our governments that decisions have to be made in the interests of our planet? Here are two chants from Friday:

Fires burning, melting ice;
we’re the ones that pay the price!

Climate change is not a lie;
do not let our planet die.

You have read or heard on the news the scientific warnings that to stop the global temperature from rising another 1.5 degree Celsius we must cut greenhouse gasses by extraordinary amounts in an extremely short time frame. In 100 years, will there be land that is arable, water that is drinkable, and air that is breathable? What prophet would buy and sign a deed for land in this questionable state?

The young are buying that land now. Because it will be their land long after we are gone. The young are buying that land, in their climate marches, in their words to politicians and world leaders and United Nation assemblies. One day in August 2018, Greta Thunberg skipped school to demonstrate outside the Swedish parliament building in Stockholm, Sweden. She would skip school every Friday. One girl with a sign that read ‘School Strike for Climate’ just over a year ago. On Friday, 7 million joined her.

During her address to the United Nations on September 23, Greta, with lips curled in anger, spat out the words, ‘How dare you.’ She continued, "For more than 30 years, the science has been crystal clear. How dare you continue to look away and come here saying that you're doing enough, when the politics and solutions needed are still nowhere in sight."⁵ Greta is ‘buying the land’ in the way her words have caught fire with other voices. Greta is ‘buying the land’ and offering hope in the sheer magnitude of the global response in response to her simple beginnings - a girl with a sign.

We have our own ‘Greta’ in Canada in 16-year-old Autumn Peltier. Autumn is from the Wiikwemkoong First Nation on Manitoulin Island in northern Ontario. She was named the Chief Water Commissioner by the Anishinabek Nation. She prays for the water. Her voice is led by her Anishinabe teachings. At age 13, Autumn Peltier urged the Canadian government to respect the sacredness and importance of clean water, asking for safe drinking water and clean waterways for indigenous peoples. She told Prime Minister Trudeau that he wasn’t doing enough. Yesterday, Autumn addressed hundreds of international guests at the Global Landscapes Forum

⁴ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁵ <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/23/763452863/transcript-greta-thunbergs-speech-at-the-u-n-climate-action-summit>

at the United Nations. She urged the global community to respect the sacredness and importance of clean water. She said, “I’ve said it once, and I’ll say it again, we can’t eat money, or drink oil.”

At the Climate rally in Richmond Hill on Friday, a high school student stood at the mike and told us how he has done away with all plastic, including deodorant and shampoo. We stood there thinking, how did he do that? He researches and resources what he needs and only buys what can be carried in a cloth bag. *Can I do that?* Can I figure out how to buy products that do not come in a plastic bottle or container? How do we teach ourselves these things and in doing them, teach others? Here is a teenager in high school figuring out how to live without plastic, and I’m still proud that I don’t ask for a straw for my drink of pop.

I began with the account of the purchase of land by Jeremiah. A commentator noted that “the transaction is not private and solitary, but public and collaborative ... Among Jeremiah’s people, this transaction required Hanamel, Jeremiah’s cousin, and Baruch, Jeremiah’s secretary. The transaction also had wider air time because it required Judeans sitting in the court of the guard ... the role of the Judeans points to the public nature of the transaction. Symbolic action here takes place in public.”⁶

As the recent climate strikes reached me through my fb feed from around the world, it was almost dizzying the locations, the people, the languages, the chants, that while so diverse were crying out the same words: Do not let our planet die. What began as a simple and seemingly private act of one girl with a sign is now a global cry.

Parker Palmer writes, “The God who cares about our private lives is concerned with our public lives as well. This is a God who calls us into relationship not only with family and friends, but with strangers scattered across the face of the earth, a God who says again and again, “We are all in this together.”⁷

The Psalmist reminds us that when we call to God, God will answer us; God will be with us in trouble.

Our hope is in God;
a God who leads us through young girls and boys,
from unexpected places,
and in challenging times.

Our hope is in God;
in the global unrest that is agitating the world powers to think differently, and immediately,
so that in one hundred years,
our children’s children, and their children
will have land to plant crops and grow vineyards,
will have clean water to drink and air to breathe,

⁶ Feasting on the Word, Theological Perspective, 100.

⁷ Parker J. Palmer, *The Company of Strangers: Christian and the Renewal of America’s Public Life*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), 25.

and will have a dwelling place to call home.

Our hope is in God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.