



September 25, 2022

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

Invest in Hope

Prayer: God Eternal, you inspired Jeremiah to buy a piece of land when no one could see a future in it. Grant us such commitment to the future of your people, that you will always have workers for your vineyard and harvesters for your fields...

On the face of it, this is not that exciting of a story. It's a story about buying a field. And placing the deed someplace where it doesn't get lost or ruined. Verses 9-14 are notable in that they are the most detailed economic transaction recorded in the Bible. People do this now. Purchase a place to live, or to build a home, or to use for business, they do the necessary paperwork, keep the deed someplace safe – like at the bank which holds the mortgage, for example. This is an ordinary business transaction.

But the context of this action is what may give you pause. Jeremiah is in prison, the people are exiled from this land, they are in a war. They do not live in this land, it is ready to be sold to foreigners, it is not accessible to them. Jeremiah is a prophet, and this ordinary business transaction is a prophecy of hope. Despite the current conditions, the siege, the defeat of Jerusalem and Judah, houses and fields and vineyards will again be bought in that land, supporting families and communities and everything that that makes possible – an entire social fabric. By investing in the land, he was buying hope, and letting everyone know.

It invites us to consider our own acts of hope. Despite the pandemic, despite the transition in leadership, despite the misconduct trials in the news, despite the bedraggled condition of the worldwide church, we are beginning our stewardship season, handing out packets because it is another year in the life of this church... How much hope can you buy? How much hope are you willing to invest in? How much hope matters in this community? Filling out a pledge, and then if circumstances allow, fulfilling that pledge, is an act of hope and fulfillment. It sets the church's ministries in motion. It's all we have. Each other; and our faith. Some of you are in the position to move mountains from here to there this year; some of you can share your talents; some of you may have something about the size of a grain of mustard seed. You know who you are, what you have.

In the language of Paul Tillich, an important 20th century theologian, Jeremiah's willingness to invest in land at the very moment that Babylon had Jerusalem under siege would be evidence of the "courage to be." Which is the name of one of his books, "the courage to be." which has to do with embodying faith, with courage to live into it. Jesus is this kind of Messiah, the kind who was and is still becoming our Messiah – not the political kind, but a Messiah of hearts and minds, a spiritual Messiah.

This will be an important year for stewardship here because you are setting the tone and context, and determining the resources for the incoming settled senior minister. You are doing that now, I hope! And I hope that sincerely, we are working together to create fertile ground for South church's future ministries. Resources, priorities, and the way we work together. Time, talent, and treasure are all currencies, and can be invested, with hope. Money is a currency that can buy some things – not everything.

Jeremiah used his currency to encourage his people to hope. By investing in a field.

What can you buy with your currency? How are you living into hope?

We are coming up on the 10th anniversary of the Newtown school shootings at Sandyhook elementary school. The children who are the same age as those killed are now seniors in HS, and college freshmen. There's nothing remarkable about growing up to go off to school, except of course when you are unable to. Seeing a child leave home is bittersweet in the best circumstances. There has been a series of articles about them in the news. I started reading them in our newspaper over breakfast and found myself in tears. My daughter has just gone off to college. Such an ordinary step, such a deep privilege. For the Newtown students, the context of their growing up, when so many of their classmates are no longer with them – gives them everything from hope, an intention to change the world, and sometimes survivors' guilt.

In Newtown there are four elementary schools that feed into the High School. One of their senior traditions is to go back to their elementary schools to do a walk through and to reminisce about their early years. One fourth of them cannot do that. They have been advocating for change since their lives. There have been more than 500 school shootings since theirs.

Mariam Azeez, a student from Newtown who was in first grade when the shootings happened shared this poem in May at a community prayer vigil. She was inspired to write it because of her own experience, and when she saw a photo of Robb Elementary school backpacks lined up in a row in Uvalde, Texas; never to be taken home by the ones who didn't make it out. They were just going to school, they were merely trying to grow up.

The poem reads (in part):

At 6 years old I felt the burden of being the one who had to do something.

At 4 years old I said "When I grow up I will become a unicorn"

At 6 years old I said "when I grow up I will become a police officer"

At 8 years old I said "when I grow up I will become a lawyer"

When I grow up I will become a doctor/firefighter/ninja/teacher/detective/guard...

I don't know all too much about the world and its complexities/I don't know all too much about our functions in society

But I do know this/every baby bee in this hive/ has said these words

When I grow up

When will we let them grow up.

I think the prophet Jeremiah would like that poem. It would be enough to grow up. These children have had the eyes of the world upon them since they have lived through the unthinkable at such tender ages. They know what hope looks like. It is not that mysterious. Hope looks like growing up. It looks like buying a field, building a house, raising a family. In the words of Deuteronomy, planting a vineyard and harvesting from it, making wine, (six years to bear fruit, several more years to ferment the wine) this is housework, and yes, this is hope.

So as you consider your pledge this year to church, and as you consider the hope you are carrying into your own lives this season; be reminded of the prophet Jeremiah, and his field, the gift of a growing child, the gift of the natural seasons and invest yourself in hope.

Question for discussion:

What is bringing you hope right now? How are you investing in hope?

© Reverend Erica Avena, 2022

Congregational Church in South Glastonbury

949 Main St.

South Glastonbury, CT 06073

