

Sermon

3 May 2020

West Kirk of Calder/Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Reading: Jeremiah 1:4-12;17a;19

Hymn: CH4 154 How great Thou art

READING

Jeremiah 1:4-12;17a;19 (NIV)

4 The word of the Lord came to me, saying,

5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;

I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

6 “Alas, Sovereign Lord,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.”

7 But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the Lord.

9 Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I have put my words in your mouth. 10 See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

11 The word of the Lord came to me: “What do you see, Jeremiah?”

“I see the branch of an almond tree,” I replied.

12 The Lord said to me, “You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.”

17 “Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them... 19 They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the Lord.

MESSAGE

The passage we read together from the Bible this morning, describes how Jeremiah was called to become a prophet of God. In Old Testament times God spoke to his people through his prophets. So prophets had a very important, but daunting, job.

And Jeremiah didn't feel ready for this. He calls himself a child. He was still young, and in that society young people had to know their place. No respected person would take anyone younger than 30 seriously, so Jeremiah had a good reason to not want to do what God asked him to – yet, God had a different plan. God wanted him to do this, despite any shortcomings Jeremiah thought he had.

That's what God created him for, that was his calling. He felt that he didn't have the right words for this, but God promised to give him the words he would need. He didn't have to do any of this alone.

God knew Jeremiah would feel uncertain about this, so he gave him a sign. He showed him the branch of an almond tree.

The almond tree is a very significant tree in Israel. It's the very first tree to bloom at the start of Spring. The root of the word “almond” in Hebrew means “to be awake/watchful”, and that makes sense, because this tree seems to be awake while all the others are still asleep.

Once the beautiful, white blossoms of the almond trees appeared, people knew that spring was just around the corner. It wouldn't yet be visible anywhere else in nature, but the blossoming almond tree was a promise of good things to come, of the winter ending.

God gave Jeremiah this sign to indicate that although it was not apparent to anybody else yet – He knew what was coming, and that is what he wanted Jeremiah to tell his people. And in all this, God promised to be with him all the time.

But you know, this image of the almond tree blossoming, made me think about what is going on around us in nature at the moment.

The Corona-virus brought our lives to a standstill in a big way, but none of this is visible in nature. The flowers and the trees are growing, blooming, and making a promise of better times to come.

Tomorrow is our May Day Holiday, the official start of Spring in the UK. And thank goodness for that, because I can really do with a day without home schooling, and I am sure plenty other parents out there will agree with me! Home schooling is one of the more difficult things we have to cope with during lockdown.

But there are nice things too! One good thing we have been able to do most days during lockdown, is to go for a nice walk as a family. And I would like to take all of you along on one of our walks quickly:

When lockdown started, all the trees were bare; but then, the daffodils started to bloom; and now the tulips are looking spectacular; there are

beautiful pink blossoms on the cherry trees; and radiant white blossoms too; and the bare branches are now covered in lush green leaves.

These are the things I see every time I go for a walk, and they are a constant reminder of God's love and grace. A promise that better days are coming.

Just like the daffodils, tulips, blossoms and green leaves show us that nature has not been stopped in its tracks by this virus, it should be a promise to us too that this strange season we are finding ourselves in at the moment, won't last forever.

Because after the dark and cold winter, spring always comes.

After this dark and scary time of the Corona-virus, we will find a sense of normality again. The promise is there – in the flowers and the trees.

One thing that never ever changes, is the love that God has for us. He made every single one of us with a purpose.

Jeremiah's purpose was to become a prophet of God. And just like that all of us have a purpose too. Even during this time of social isolation.

What does God want to use you for at the moment?

- A quiet voice over the phone to calm someone else's fear?
- A supportive friend who knows when to talk and when to listen?
- A volunteer to buy or deliver food or medication to people who can't do it themselves?
- A health care worker who keep us all save?

- A key worker who keeps everything going?
- A faithful believer who prays every day?

It doesn't mean that because it might be hard to see what your purpose is, that you don't have one. God will give you the words, the patience, the strength, or whatever you need to what you have to do.

And through every wee thing a child of God does during this time, the presence of God's kingdom will become more apparent. Let's use this time to show the world in how many ways the love of God can bloom!

And if you feel down, look at spring blossoming outside, and see the promise of God – the promise that although we can't see it, He can see the bigger picture. And while we are living through a tough spot, he is with us, and he will be with us, for all eternity.

God is saying to all of us, like he said to Jeremiah: "Get yourself ready! Stand up and do whatever I command you! Do not be terrified. This virus might be against you, but it will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you."

Amen

PRAYER

Written by Rev Alison Quilter

Lord God we come to worship this morning from our different homes, different lives, different situations, with different concerns and different dreams. Yet we come as one family, a people of shared faith in a God who shared all.

And so Lord, we praise You, that you have risen from the dead to fulfil Your promise to all creation; we praise You that you have gifted us Your Spirit as a companion and guide.

You remain at our side Lord, to comfort and provide, and so we praise You, Lord, that you bless us anew each and every day with your grace and goodness.

You, Lord, are the *Way*, we love you: *Help us to care for your world.*

Lord, we pray for those who are charged to care for the welfare of the nations: for the United Nation's and World Health Organisation, for governments and leaders. We pray that working together, they may find a vaccine to covid19 and many other diseases which affect us and our neighbours the world over.

Lord, we pray for those who look after the sick and the dying, and for those who nurse relatives at home. We pray for the lonely and those who are struggling to deal with bereavement. Let them know your love and peace.

We ask your blessing on doctors, nurses and all health care assistants, volunteers and support staff in hospitals and our communities.

We ask your blessing on all those who are supporting our communities in other ways: for our local council services, their support services and volunteers in food banks and other services.

Lord, we pray for those who are charged to care for the church; for ministers and leaders; for all engaged in pastoral work and all who keep in touch with people in our congregations and neighbours by whatever means we have during this period of lockdown.

We pray that in our service together we may strengthen our faith as disciples of Jesus fulfilling his mission to spread the good news to all.

In the name of our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

HYMN

CH4 154 How Great Thou Art

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy Hands have made
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder
Thy power throughout the universe displayed
*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art*

When through the woods, and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees
When I look up from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze
Chorus

And when I think of God, His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin
Chorus

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And lead me home, what joy shall fill my heart
Then I shall bow with humble adoration
And then proclaim, my God, how great Thou art
Chorus