



Daily Meditations

March 22-27, 2021

The Biblical readings are taken from the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer for Year 1 and written by the St. Stephen's Meditation Writing Team: Dave Boyd, Jon Campbell, Becky Denton, Pat Gillory, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, and Carroll Wilson.

Click on the scripture reading for each day to go directly to link. Current and past copies of the "Daily Meditations" may be found at: ststeve.org/daily-meditations

COLLECT: Fifth Sunday in Lent

O Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men: Grant unto thy people that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ Our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

When Bad Things Happen to Good Figs

Monday, March 22, 2021

Jeremiah 24:1-10

"The Lord showed me two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the Lord. "

A strong, stout fig tree grows in our front yard, the gift of a previous generation's foresight and labor. Its fruit is plentiful, but we can say neither that it is "good, very good" nor "bad, very bad" because it is "vanished, very vanished." Plump and promising, our figs vanish before reaching their prime. Our best fruit sleuthing deduces that squirrels, or some such critters, are satisfied with the green, immature produce, hoarding before it's fit for human consumption; although Adam and Eve could have fashioned garden wear from its broad, verdant leaves.

In Jeremiah's metaphor of the Diaspora (dispersion or scattering of people from their homeland), he sharply contrasts the very good and very bad figs; but their undeniable similarity is they all are very gone, carried away by a hoarding oppressor before they had fulfilled their purpose.

He uses antithetical parallelism to reinforce God's good intentions for the good figs.

+I **will** build them up
-**not** pull them down

+I will plant them
-**not** pluck them up

Hopeful news!

The bad figs haven't so much forward-looking hope. The Lord is flat-out finished with them: harm, reproach, curse, sword, famine, pestilence, consumed. Frightening lingo from the omnipotent One who can absolutely make good on every threat.

This passage ascends to the peak of verse 7, then pivots to avalanche through the conclusion. The verse 7 pinnacle encapsulates God's purposes for the exile: a heart transplant.

Reflection: If I am exiled, how does God want to change my heart?

Do What?

Tuesday, March 23, 2021

Jeremiah 25:8-17

"...because you have not heard my words..."

All signs indicate this is not the "Do what?" hearing-aid commercial where the gentleman is straining to hear his son say, "I love you, Dad." Quite the contrary, this is not symptomatic of a hearing impairment at all; rather, a heart impairment. They heard words with their ears and eyes but no tympanic resonance vibed with their stone-cold hearts.

It gets worse. Not only are God's people not His designated servants, but guess who is! Whether international politics, the mafia, pro wrestling, your local HOA, or the will of God, priorities and circumstances require strange bedfellows. Nebuchadnezzar is an idolatrous, narcissistic enemy, but for divine purposes, God likes his resume for the EVP of Disciplinary Initiatives, and he will be God's servant to kill all joy, steal all happiness, and destroy all prosperity. Take your medicine daily for 70 years until desolation is fully manifest on the world stage.

Prophecy is a fun gig, isn't it?

I have personally reenacted this plot countless times. Reading with my eyes, hearing with my ears, and repelling the message with my hard or indifferent heart with predictable outcomes including loss of joy, happiness, and peace.

How can I better hear with my heart?

Presence
Humility and servanthood
Gratitude

Tell Us How You Really Feel, Lord

Wednesday, March 24, 2021

Jeremiah 25:30-38

"None will mourn them, none will gather them for burial; they shall lie like dung on the field."

"Live, Laugh, Love: Jeremiah's Guide to Prospering Through the Babylonian Exile." I wish!

Truth is, he's been turning up the heat on the pressure cooker. Our texts this week have progressed from hopeful figs on Monday to yesterday's desolation under Nebuchadnezzar and today's Charlie Daniels' "Sit down in that chair right there and let me show you how it's done."

Our key verse is 33, loosely paraphrased "I, the Lord, will slay everyone, leave the bodies strewn like compost and there will be NO CRYING!" They did not just break the law, they flipped the switch off Almighty God's patience. Done.

I don't know about you, but all this desolation, death, and despair has me yearning for a savior.

For Christians, this is the importance of Old Testament history and prophecy. Theologians call it *Heilsgeschichte* (holy history or salvation history). Seminarians are required to drop this German into a conversation at least once a year (you're welcome). It is a perfectly fit word for the study of how salvation came to us, including covenants made and broken, sacrifices made, suffering endured, blind obedience in return for promises not seen in their lifetimes but taken for granted in ours.

What events shaped and formed salvation into its culmination in Christ? One answer is the harsh judgments of God on both His enemies and His chosen people. The penalties were so great and unbearable, He bore them Himself at Calvary.

Under Arrest

Thursday, March 25, 2021

Jeremiah 26:1-16

"Perhaps they will listen and turn back, each from his evil way, so that I may repent of the evil I have planned to inflict upon them for their evil deeds."

If we did not already know the character in this text was Jeremiah, we could have easily and with an acceptable degree of accuracy guessed it was Jesus. The parallels are undeniable. While Jeremiah may not fit the most tedious theological requirements of being a type of Christ, for our devotional purposes, I'm saying he is. This is a partial list of commonalities (cf. Matthew 26, 27):

- Openly rebuked the priests in the Temple
- Arrested by the priests, prophets, and people
- Brought for a healing before the political leaders
- Found innocent by the Princes of Judah

These are noteworthy overlaps, but the vital difference is verse 15's declaration of Jeremiah's innocent blood. By sparing Jeremiah's life, they spared their own lives and consciences; coincidentally, the suicidal consequences of Judas Iscariot. The Jeremiah quote was, "But know for certain that if you put me to death, you will surely bring innocent blood on yourselves..." Paradoxically, the shedding of Christ's innocent blood is today revered through holy communion as the necessary, sufficient and unique means of forgiveness of our sins. (Gal 2:21, Heb 9:22)

Jeremiah's bold obedience in speaking truth to power further paved the way of salvation we know today.

Who in future generations might need my bold obedience to the pattern of Christ today?

Grow Where You're Planted

Friday, March 26, 2021

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-13

"For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for woe!"

Wimberley is an enviable place to call home, isn't it? For us, this was a "want-to" move. Judging from the weekend crowds on the Square, Houston wants to move here, too. But have you ever "had to" move? A job change, war, marital status change, fire, flood, financial hardship, health problems, prison, and on goes the list. Now that I think about it, these reasons all have biblical stories that map directly to 21st Century life.

Buried in Jeremiah's doomsday declarations are some practical instructions for a "have-to" move. He smooths the jagged edges of exile in verses 4-7, acknowledging the penalty with compassionate acceptance. A foreign land is where they are for now, but it is not permanent, neither is it terminal. The chosen people will survive, and they will return to the land flowing with milk and honey. In the meantime, "Grow where you're planted."

The decision has been made for you. You don't control this one. This is your new COVID normal, your new Arctic-freeze normal, your new back-pain normal, your new [insert unwelcome adjustment] and it is what it is. Hearing Jeremiah's instruction from the Lord reminds us this is only for 70 years. What??? Figuratively, it lasts until it fulfills God's time. But in our understanding of time, we make new friends, plant trees, raise kids, live in peace, put down new roots and trust Him.

In spite of all this turmoil and discipline, what enables us to live hopefully and meaningfully is a land we didn't choose? Likely, we all have Jeremiah 29:11 on a coffee cup, poster or tattoo somewhere. We are empowered to live a forward-looking life because God thinks thoughts of peace, a future, and hope toward us.

Ch,Ch,Ch,Ch,Changes

Saturday, March 27, 2021

Jeremiah 31:27-34

"Yes, a day will come when the watchmen will call out on Mount Ephraim: 'Rise up, let us go to Zion, to the Lord, our God'."

Covenants have defined God's relationship with mankind from the beginning. By adding -ic to a prominent biblical character or place, you can generate a familiar promise of God; for example, Edenic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic. The list alone flashes scenes of biblical history through our minds. Stories of being expelled from the garden in vegetarian undergarments, or survivor's guilt from the first cruise, or land grants that are even more volatile today than then, or laws and kings, and so forth. While it's interesting reading and good cinematic material, the hero was (and is) always our faithful God, and the failures were always, well, us.

Enter verses 31-34:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers...

But...I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

Mic drop!

That was BC, this is AD so we can see some obvious knitting and weaving of Jeremiah's prophecy in the fulfilled messianic prophecies. The Word that was one chiseled in stone was made flesh and now lives in our hearts. The law moved from external tablets to internal conviction. The temple moved from the outside structure to our reborn bodies and spirits. God moved from external concealment to indwelling Holy Spirit.

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