

## DESPERATE WORDS

Some say that today's Old Testament lesson is Jeremiah's noblest prophecy. It certainly needed to be.

Jerusalem laid in ruins. The "promised land" was occupied; many of the Jews were captured, the rest were no more than slaves. The covenant with God was over.

The special relationship... full of promise, was empty.

The Hebrew world was changing,....or..... concluding. It had been changing for some time.

Clarity..... had arrived,.... which is another world for judgment.

The people had been warned, and the signs of pending disaster were easy to see. Surely, they would have remembered the Assyrian conquest of their sibling state to the north – Israel?

For nearly 30 years, Babylon, under King Nebuchadnezzar, had been growing in power, expanding its empire, and even pushing back the Egyptians. All the while, the leaders of Judea were behaving badly.

They disregarded the predictions and abused the prophets. They did not do justice; they ignored their covenant with God, and.... in complete stupid, arrogance, they constantly insulted King Nebuchadnezzar,... even as his armies massed on their border.

Chest thumping and militaristic patriotism usually ends badly.

In the fall of 588 BCE, the Babylonians attacked, and soon Jerusalem was surrounded.

Desperate Jewish attempts at negotiating a settlement were laughed off.

King Nebuchadnezzar wanted vengeance, and in the Spring of 587 Jerusalem was defeated, sacked, overrun, burnt to the ground, the temple, God's portal, was destroyed and the Jews were captives.

The situation was beyond bleak,.....and.... this is all so perplexing, and painful to review.

Why did the people allow their leaders to take them to this despicable destiny?

Why didn't they protest? Why didn't they speak out with the prophets?

Why didn't they demand God's justice to prevail?

I wonder if it had anything to do with financial prosperity?

Located between superpowers had been good for business,.... at least for those at the top, ....and the rest.... are usually seduced with the promises of trickle down crumbs.

I wonder if they were worried about hurting the economy.... or risking their sense of safety and stability,.... which wasn't so safe and secure?

Only Jeremiah and a few others objected and protested.

I wonder why most people don't speak out and thus settle for less?

A few hundred years later, the situation was getting tense and becoming dangerous, yet it seems only one person was aware what was unfolding.

On the surface, at the moment, events were looking advantageous. The lesson from John's Gospel is after Jesus' big entry to Jerusalem. He was the talk of the town, and likely the Gentiles were very impressed by how he cleaned up the Gentile court at the temple.

Maybe that is why some Greek Gentiles wanted to speak with Jesus. Perhaps, they wanted to form a fan club or have a few pictures taken with Jesus.

They made their request known to the disciple who had a Greek name; I suppose that makes sense. Philip told the other Greek named disciple, and Philip and Andrew passed on the inquiry to Jesus, but we are not told if Jesus ever meet with those Greeks. Instead, Jesus dispels the growing misconception about him, and he explains, ....again,.... what it means to be a follower. However, this time his discourse is different. Jesus is feeling the urgency and importance of the message.

Jesus presents the analogy of a seed that gives / releases itself / dies in order to give life / to spread out / to grow.....to grow... more seeds.

A seed of wheat does not look like the green wheat plant; it bears no resemblance. Yet, life more abundant comes from that seed.

Then, as those listening are scratching their heads in bewilderment, Jesus brings it home. His desperate words are personal, very personal.

Jesus shares his feelings, "My soul is troubled. He then presents, an hypothetical question, "Should I tell God, 'Save me from this hour?'"

Should a precious seed be hidden away safely in a pocket, and if so, then what good is it?

What good is unknown, hidden love?  
Can love be securely protected and kept safe?

To disobedient and now defeated people who exist perilously outside of God's covenant and providence, who have lost their faith in God, Jeremiah presents the Gospel message.

The occasion is centuries before the time of Jesus, yet the message is timeless. God offers a New covenant / a new commitment.

One could say it is a desperate appeal to heal a broken relationship ... because it is all one sided / it is a unilateral commitment.

God is promising, risking all,..... without conditions / without demanding payment or contingencies.

Why would God do such a thing?

All the risk and burden is on God.

This new covenant has God doing all the pledging / committing:

“I will make..... I will put..... I will write on [your hearts] that I will always be your God and you are my mine”

You are not forsaken; moreover,.....and amazingly, God forgives everything.....AND.....the past is forgotten.

A clean slate is given, with a pledge to be personally / to the heart personally in the relationship.

It seems God is signing a blank contract, and this new covenant appears as desperate words by a rejected lover,.... asking, “I’ll do anything if you only come back to me.”

The entire concept sounds rash, foolhardy, even ridiculous,..... to those who do not understand Love / to those who can not grasp the wonder and beauty of putting a perfectly good seed in the soil.

God is NOT promising a free ride or a safe and easy life.

This covenant / the Gospel message is Not about eternal security and having God as a personal body guard.

This desperate message is about love – deeply planted in the heart love.

And, the interesting twist to it, and recalling our Lent theme,... we don’t really have to sign on. God loves everyone—the whole world.

Yet, we can and too often do,.... sign off from it..... because it is a risk to love.

And, without love all the commandments / all the expectations and demands are way too extreme.

The cross carrying, the dying to self, the persecution for speaking out against injustices,..... and the giving ..... all are way too demanding.

We can not follow Christ without love, yet..... we want the benefits, and there lies the snag.

So, in order to cash in without the personal cost, we’ve not only watered down what it means to be a Christian,.... I think we’ve diluted what love means, too.

William Willimon recently noted that some contemporary theologians, such as Schleiermacher and Borg have so succinctly compartmentalized God and devalued the cost of discipleship... that almost anyone can now claim to be spiritual,... without any need to seriously try to follow Christ.

Willimon also remarked on how our popular culture has lost touch with the meaning of love.

In his words, “I love you, so often means in this culture, ‘I love me and want to use you to love me even more.’”

Willimon presents this test about real love: he asks, “Are you able to love God without despising those whom God loves?”

The Gospel message is not about self; it’s not about me or you.

The new covenant is not about saving our own hide / saving our selves.  
It is about Love!

That is what Jesus is referring to when he talks about dying to self,... and the death of the seed..... in order to give life.

Love is a very difficult thing to explain, and that is why it becomes a desperate message.

Let me try to frame it differently.

To all parents who love their children:

What are the restrictions to your love?

If your child cries out for help, will you not respond?

If your child gently asks, “Come here I want to show you something very special.”, will you not follow?

To everyone who knows real love for another: when or how can you erase that love from your heart and your thoughts?

At what point do you neglect them or ignore the ones you love?

And yes, it is possible for love to fade away,..... because love is not static. Love is not merely a declaration or a commodity that can be safely locked away.

Love is much like life itself.

Love must be nurtured and tenderly cared for in order to thrive.

And, by its very nature,..... love pours out; subsequently, love is enhanced / grows when self is invested / when we release... give of ourselves.

Therefore, Love is a desperate risk, .... but that’s okay,... because love is more than life itself– love is divine.

Jesus said it differently. He talked about the wonder of a seed dying in order to give life.

He talked about giving self to God.....no matter the risk,.... because love is that powerful.

But what’s the point?                      How does this work?

Frederick Buechner put it this way:

“you can kiss your family and friends good-bye and put miles between you, but at the same time you carry them with you in your heart, your mind, your stomach, because you do not just live in a world but a world lives in you.”

There is not a day that goes by that I do not think of my daughter and grandson in New York..... because I love them.

And, I try to keep in regular contact with them too–through notes, phone calls, Skype and..... in prayer. They are in my heart.....as are many others.....

The Gospel message / God's new covenant prompts us to discover love, or in another word, God.

In our heart, we know all this rings true,..... because God has planted God's seed of love in our heart.

And, that seed grows when we plant our love in others.

Following Christ..... is love growing from God's seed, and that love creates new seeds.

So what,..... we all know love is a good thing, and so was Jesus; church people affirm all this.

But, what does this love look like for you and me?

What are we suppose to do, and who do we love?

For that answer, we are given Jesus

Following Jesus is a good starting point, and this way of love may include confronting injustices.

But how, and even more importantly, why?

How and Why:

Because we truly do want to love and be loved. That nature is from God, and it is in our heart.

Yet, love is a risk, and love requires a lot of work.

An, this where "choice" / our choice comes in.

The funny thing is that an aspect of love is choice.

That's a sign: thinking about being loving is starting in the right direction.