

## **SERMON: “Plans to give you hope and a future**

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, June 24, 2018, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Brampton

[Discouraged/worn out/overwhelmed:hopeless – God’s promise/s fulfilled = hope]

Jeremiah lived and prophesied in the region of Judah between 622BC and 580BC – a contemporary of Zephaniah/Habakkuk/Ezekiel and served under kings Jehoahaz/Jehoiakim/Jehoiachin/Zedekiah – who ruled Judah just about as well as I pronounced their names! Jeremiah’s ministry spanned the decline and fall of Judah and the exile in Babylon. For most of his life Jeremiah was reviled/despised. Time and time again, Jeremiah called for the people to repent; each time he was ignored and abused – his only reward for his prophecies was being beaten, excluded, and imprisoned, even thrown into a sewer. The reason: the people didn’t like/want to hear his messages of doom and gloom. Jeremiah was no Isaiah or Elijah – he struggled (accounts of him breaking down/weeping as he proclaimed God’s judgement) but he was faithful to his calling and persevered despite the fact that no one listened to him.

By the time Jeremiah was called by God the Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen due to its failure to keep its covenant with God. You’d think that this would make the Southern Kingdom of Judah more vigilant/faithful, but it didn’t. They knew of God’s judgement on Israel, but they didn’t repent from their fallen ways. Things were so bad that God, tired of their disobedience, tells them that He’s no longer interested in them/their sacrifices/their idol worship: they’ve strayed too far. In unflattering language, God describes Judah as an unfaithful wife/prostitute who has spoiled the land, who will die at the hands of one of her lovers. It is to a lost/sinful – a disobedient/immoral/idolatrous – people that Jeremiah is sent to tell them that the end is near – and that God has a plan.

Throughout the Book of Jeremiah we can hear the drum beats as the enemy armies of Babylon close in on the rebellious people of Judah. Jeremiah is burdened with the vision of what is coming: he alone sees the darkness/destruction/devastation that will be Jerusalem’s fate at the hands of a foreign nation; sees how the land will be stripped of everything, how the temple will be ransacked – how the armies will come without warning and will cut down everything/everyone in their path; sees the bodies in the streets. Jeremiah alone knows what the future holds – and what it will take to avoid this fate. Jeremiah stands outside the temple and tries to warn the people but they didn’t listen – instead they plot to kill him. Things haven’t been going well for Jeremiah; yet he continued to follow God’s call.

[Even in a dark world/God is faithful/has plan/is with us: 78yrs:Battle of Britain/“Never surrender”/give up/hardship – yes/hard work = hope/victory.]

But it’s hard not to grow weary/grumble: after all hadn’t God Promised to be with him and protect him? Where was God? Why had He abandoned him? Like Jeremiah, all who follow Jesus/to obey God’s calling know; there are hard days along the journey of faith. There’s no real answer as to why we experience pain/suffering/sadness/rejection, but we will experience hard times: the challenge is how we respond to the test when the going of

faith gets tough? Like us, Jeremiah lets his frustration out in the form of a prayer – a messy/angry/emotional prayer that tells God how he feels: yet, from the depths of his pain/sorrow, Jeremiah’s heart shows through; he still longs to follow the God who formed/called him. Then, what Jeremiah had spent 40 years of his life trying to avert comes true. In his despair Jeremiah writes the Book of Lamentations conveying what God felt over the fall of Jerusalem and His people – and in doing so he learns that God has also suffered, that God’s heart is broken by our disobedience and failure to live by faith, that God wants the best for us. And this is where our ‘selected verse’ comes in.

In the midst of all the turmoil/despair as Judah is overthrown and Jerusalem is destroyed, Jeremiah is granted a vision that offers the people hope – a promised future filled with hope/success – and no suffering – a promise that God will one day redeem and save his people. Over the next two chapters, Jeremiah lays out God’s promised New Covenant – like vows made at a wedding – culminating with a new agreement with His people (31:31-37) that points far into the future – a covenant that would only be fulfilled with the birth/life/ministry of Jesus Christ in which God came to be with us – and later to dwell in us in a new/dynamic relationship through the Holy Spirit. And this is good news to/for many of us here today: our hope/faith is built upon this covenant/promise. Friends, God has a plan/purpose for us – has promised He will bless us – a promise He has fulfilled for you/me/us. *“I will bless you with a future filled with hope—a future of success, not of suffering.”* Amen.