

Sunday school lesson for the week of September 28, 2014

By Rev. John Brantley

Lesson scripture: Jeremiah 33:1-11

1 The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still confined in the court of the guard: **2** Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it—the Lord is his name: **3** Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. **4** For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah that were torn down to make a defense against the siege ramps and before the sword: **5** The Chaldeans are coming in to fight and to fill them with the dead bodies of those whom I shall strike down in my anger and my wrath, for I have hidden my face from this city because of all their wickedness. **6** I am going to bring it recovery and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. **7** I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. **8** I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. **9** And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them; they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it. **10** Thus says the Lord: In this place of which you say, "It is a waste without human beings or animals," in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without inhabitants, human or animal, there shall once more be heard **11** the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord: "Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!" For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the Lord. [NRSV]

Focus: An empty place is not worth shouting about

Reflections:

As powerful as Jeremiah's purchase of land for the future rebuilding is as a sign of God's faithfulness, God is not longing for empty structures. God's heart longs for our relationship. God is ultimately focused on working to restore and reestablish a living relationship with all those who want it.

It was heart breaking, while visiting Israel a couple of years ago, to see the shells of buildings left from the seven-days war. Just over the hillside is no-mans-land on the border with Syria, where Abrams tanks rumbled with steady pounding of current fear and threats continue trembling. These are not the signs of glory and healing? Where is God then? Where is God now?

God reveals the answer to Jeremiah in a time and place of separation. The message is for those who will both listen and call out to God. The answer is found by those willing to look for God and retell the message of hope and recovery. God says, "I will bring recovery... I will heal ... I will restore ... I will rebuild ... I will cleanse ... I will forgive ... I will provide, thus says the Lord." Jeremiah doesn't say, 'we' will do these things. God will do these and more.

God who made the heavens and the earth, designed with order, purpose and beauty, also has an order, purpose and beauty that includes us. God is not interested in building a terrarium; God is working from God's heart with our hearts as the focus. We are loved. We are included. We are being reformed, repurposed from our will toward God's, if we choose.

God is not simply working a mental exercise, God is reshaping us, through the brokenness and chaos, into the people, the jewel and first love. That's a song worth singing. That is hope with sharing. That is praise worth shouting!

Homework: Give someone permission to share with you one example where your words and actions have prevented healing, closed a door, or exclude someone. Ask for their forgiveness and return the exercise with others.

Prayer: Dear God, mold and shape me into the person who have hoped and dreamed I would become. Let me find the wholeness in the freedom you give to choose to serve you this day. Amen.

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