

Reflecting on God's Word

Readings: Jeremiah 32:1-15

Reflection

The text verse for the sermon is:

¹⁵ For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.'

What is hope?

The Bible says hope is to be certain of the things that are unseen. In laymen terms, it is to buy a plot of land in a time of war!

This is exactly what Jeremiah did in our reading.

But let's start at the beginning.

The land of Israel was divided into two parts, Judah and Israel. Israel fell into the hands of the Assyrians in 722 BC while Judah remained independent. But the kings and the people of Judah did not follow or obey God. God warned them time and time again to return to Him. Instead they choose to follow the idols and other gods of the nations. The kings did not listen to the prophets who told them what God wanted them to do which resulted in the invasion of their territory by Egypt, and then after which they became a "tribute" to Babylon. And from then on all their kings rebelled one by one, until Zedekiah finally angered the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar so much that he invaded Jerusalem.

Our reading takes place in the last remaining days of the city of Jerusalem. Zedekiah imprisoned Jeremiah, most probably because of his negative message to the people of the imminent falling of the city to the Babylonians. Jerusalem was a city under siege when he received the prophecy from God saying that his uncle will come to him with the request to buy the families land. And that he must buy it! Yes in this time of crisis where it is evident that they have no future – he Jeremiah must buy property!

Jeremiah knew pretty well, that Jerusalem is going to fall any day,

but he listened to God. So when his uncle came to him with the request, he bought the property in Anathoth. He did everything according to the book so that no one could query the transaction. And then he ordered his secretary Baruch to put the sealed and unsealed copies of the transaction in a clay jar so that they can be saved for a long time. He also said that this piece of land is the symbol of hope, of what is to come namely that Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.

It is a potent sign, ownership of a field suggesting possession of the whole land. It is all the stronger against the background of the siege and likely loss of everything, not least the very field which Jeremiah has just bought.

Yes it was definitely a leap of faith on the side of Jeremiah. He could do it because he had hope that was sustained by his trust in God.

Eventually in 587 BC the Babylonians did invade the city of Jerusalem. They totally destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. They killed most of the citizens. The survivors were taken as slaves to Babylonia. And for almost 48 years, they were the captives of the Babylonian empire. Yes almost a whole generation had to die off before they could return to a city and a temple in ruins.

SO the message of hope became true. God gave them their land back. They could start all over again.

It is usually in times of war that people start asking questions about God and the meaning in life. It is usually in times of war that you read about individuals who despite their circumstances could hope for a better world. How did they manage?

In all their stories, in all the letters it is evident that they had hope because they trusted in the Lord God.

Why did they trust in God?

Well, they knew from the Bible that God came to the world through Jesus Christ. They believed that He died for their sins. They also believed that He was resurrected from the dead and ascended to heaven. They all knew that this life was not their true destiny. Their true destiny is to be with God in all eternity where there are no more tears, death or struggle.

They also knew very well from personal experience that no human being can be trusted, something that is echoed in the words of Winston Churchill who wrote at the end of the second world war “Poland, for which Britain went to war, is neither free nor quiet; Germany is still divided; there is no peace with Russia”. (Churchill 1954:560). Even in his victory broadcast on the 13th of May 1945, he said: “I wish I could tell you to-night that all our toils and troubles were over”.

And he was certainly right. When the First World War started on the 4th of August 1914 everyone was certain that it would be a war that would end all wars, especially when it ended on the 11th of November 1918. But it did not. And then after the Second World war ended, new wars broke out between nations of which the war in Afghanistan is the latest.

If there is one thing we must remember on a day like this is the fact great sacrifices were made just to ensure “freedom”, “democracy” and “liberation”. Originally this commemoration was to honour those who had fallen in the First World War. Over time it has come to include all those who have lost their lives in armed conflict and, once again, this is happening today. In this service, we remember all the victims and we think particularly of those who have lost their lives in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

May we too as Christians remember to have hope like the soldiers did a long time ago, may we carry the hope with us as the modern soldiers do on a daily basis. Hope in the everlasting kingdom of God!

May we look to the future, not to the past.

We cannot change what has been but do not need to repeat its mistakes. May we focus on our common Christian values, love for God, ourselves and others to build dreams, and, with God’s Holy Spirit, turn them into reality.

Amen