

9.24.23 – Pentecost 17
“Confidence and Humility to Serve”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Jeremiah 31:1-11 (Contemp. Eng. V)

Israel Will Return to God

¹ The Lord said: Israel, I promise
that someday all your tribes will again be my people,
and I will be your God.

² In the desert I was kind to those who escaped death.
I gave them peace, and when the time is right,
I'll do the same for you. I, the Lord, have spoken.

The Lord Will Rebuild Israel

³ Some time ago, the Lord appeared to me and told me to say:
Israel, I will always love you; that's why I've been so patient
and kind.

⁴ You are precious to me, and so I will rebuild
your nation.

Once again you will dance for joy and play your tambourines.

⁵ You will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria
and enjoy the grapes.

⁶ Someday those who guard the hill country of Ephraim
will shout, “Let's go to Zion and worship the Lord our God.”

Israel Will Return to Its Own Land

⁷ The Lord says: Celebrate and sing for Israel,
the greatest of nations.

Offer praises and shout, “Come and rescue your people, Lord!
Save what's left of Israel.”

⁸ I, the Lord, will bring my people back from Babylonia
and everywhere else on earth.

The blind and the lame will be there.

Expectant mothers and women about to give birth
will come and be part of that great crowd.

⁹ They will weep and pray as I bring them home.

I will lead them to streams of water.

They will walk on a level road and not stumble.

I am a father to Israel, my favorite children.

¹⁰ Listen to me, you nations nearby or across the sea.

I scattered the people of Israel, but I will gather them again.

I will protect them like a shepherd guarding a flock;

¹¹ I will rescue them from enemies who could overpower them.

Leader: This is a Prophetic Word from God! All: Thanks be to God!

1 Peter 5:1-11 (NIV)

To the Elders and the Flock

¹ To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

⁵ In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

“God opposes the proud
but shows favor to the humble.”

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Leader: These Holy Words are for Instruction. All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord, we thank you for the opportunity to worship you and be encouraged to serve you and others through the ministries of this church and Mission Center. We know that we often prioritize ourselves and our needs but know that your calling to serve is primary. We seek your insights this morning as we hear both prophecy and instruction to continue your Kingdom work here on earth. Fill us anew with your Holy Spirit; let us recommit our time and focus as we hear your Words and your voice as you speak through mine. Amen.

A season and weekend of rain and tropical storms remind us that we are not in control of everything we think we are. It also reminds us to have confidence in God's protection and security, while being humble enough to do whatever work is necessary to protect our property and lives, such as clearing gutters, drains, and putting lightweight things away or under a deck. That is how I spent Friday morning, in preparation for the expected high winds and bad weather.

Both of our passages today are set in the context of challenging times for God's people. Jeremiah's forty-year ministry began in 627 BC as he prophesied that destruction would come to Israel and the temple as punishment for Judah's disobedient behaviors and depraved lifestyle. He tried to change the hearts of men through four kings of Judah until he was forced to go into hiding. Babylon was gaining strength, after Assyria was defeated, so during this difficult time, God called Jeremiah to remind the people of his covenants. God's promise in Jeremiah 31 is to restore Israel to himself, not just the tribe of Judah, but all the clans. **They will be known as God's people once again.** Those who survived Assyria's destruction of Israel will experience God's favor. Why does God lead them into the desert for a new Exodus? Because he loves them and wanted them to remember his covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:17-21) and another covenant with the nation of Israel through Moses (Deut. 28:1-30:10).

As you hear today's lessons, be thinking about what the same messages and following images might mean to our church and to the church in general. Jeremiah paints images of three outcomes for Israel: 1.) She will once again dance with joy and tambourines. 2.) Peace and prosperity will come when people plant their vineyards on the hills of Samaria; and 3.) Watchmen on the hills will call the people to worship at Zion for a time of recommitment. God will gather his people back together from all over, while restoring the blind and lame. He'll provide for every need, so they will not stumble, because he is their father and will protect them. The people must have courage and confidence and remember that they will receive their material benefits like a well-watered

garden in the desert oasis. Verse 9 says the Lord will lead them to flowing streams and watch over them like a shepherd. There will be sufficiency, peace, joy, and tranquility, even if they cannot imagine it now.

Through this poem-prophecy, he asks his people to be confident and to be certain that God will take care of them (and asks the same of us). We know through hindsight that God has taken care of our sin through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and will continue to do so until Jesus returns again. Jeremiah's main complaint was the ostentatious temple and how the people slipped quickly into idol worship. He preferred the inward worship of God done with humility and privacy. A person who worshipped God in this way received an inner reward of what we know as grace and mercy. Our culture today does not support quiet inner rewards, with the technical visibility and pressures of outward social media, entertainment, and opinions. Perhaps we can take Jeremiah's message to heart by knowing that as Isaac Watts' hymn title states, "My Shepherd Will Supply My Needs." The lyrics of the first verse sound like part of this passage:

1 My Shepherd, you supply my need,
 most holy is your name;
 in pastures fresh you make me feed,
 beside the living stream.
 You bring my wand'ring spirit back.
 when I forsake your ways;
 you lead me, for your mercy's sake,
 in paths of truth and grace.

The 1 Peter passage is not prophecy, but rather encouragement. He calls us as Christ's representatives on earth to lead, much like we heard in last week's appointment of the 70 deacons. The elders are called to be

encouraged in difficult times of persecution, and to be confident yet humble in that service. Peter is addressing Christian believers who are mostly Gentiles all through Asia Minor, but they too are in hiding. He first addresses the ministers among them about “feeding the flock”, but realizes they are all ministers and apostles trying to spread the Gospel and teachings of Jesus, and as such, they must serve one another too. Peter’s authority came from his being a witness to Christ’s sufferings, having received the same words of instruction from Jesus to “tend my sheep”, he instructs the ministers and elders to do the same.

They must accept new responsibilities confidently but also with humility. They must share one another’s burdens and counsel one another but be clothed in humility to do so. Peter warns them to accept the burdens willingly not because they must or because of a title, but because they have a desire to serve. There cannot be any dominance, only submission. Believers are to serve under the hand of God, praying for strength, confidence, and the humility to be obedient to his word. Christ equips us to lead and to serve others; as in Jeremiah, we must trust God’s provision of all things both material and of character.

The speech reminds them to watch out for conflict and temptations of evil. Peter understood this deeply. He tells them to stand strong in the face of persecution and difficulty, especially from the culture around them. Does this sound familiar? For such a time as this, we believers must rebuild the church within and beyond our walls, inwardly and outwardly. God himself will give us the power and strength if we are both confident in him and humble in our spirits. True humility (not a fake modesty) recognizes the bigger visions of life and faith, understanding that God as

creator and sustainer is in charge and we are willing participants. Can we be examples to show others a better way to live in community in this world or will we be the last of our legacy? As we serve others on mission in the community, can we also share the love and grace of Jesus with people who have not yet met him? I think we can be models of this love if we practice it more, stretch our confidence a little, and open our doors in humble faith. Amen. |/

Please pray with me. Strengthening God, we thank you for this reminder and encouragement. Let us reset our vision by hearing Jeremiah's and Peter's warnings. Help us to be more obedient, trusting, yet humble in spirit. May we tell others about your grace, love, and mercy. Thank you for the confidence to serve, and please fill us with boldness and the humility to tell our faith stories to others. In your Son Jesus' name, we pray, **Amen.**