Date: November 1, 2026 (Memorial Sunday)

Texts: Jeremiah 29. 1-14 / Matthew 7. 7-12

Title: “What’s Your Story? : Jeremiah”

Intro -

and now… - a word from the Lord in a time of distress…

(even if - those times seemed far over the horizon…

so far over… that the people got lazy / lackadaisical…)

in any event -

Jeremiah - one of the Major Prophets (so called, because they wrote

“big books” - as opposed to the Minor Prophets, who wrote

small ones…

ahhh - the deep, intellectual significance of biblical nomenclature)

in any event, as we were…

Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry during a time of renewal

and revival in the Kingdom of Judah under King Josiah

the people had suffered under years of oppression at the hands of

the Assyrians, but - that was lifting…

a great revival broke out, accompanying the discovery of the

Book of the Law (or - the books of Moses…

the core, foundational writings of the Jewish faith…)

along with this came a new sense of their destiny as the people of God

it was in these heady times

that Jeremiah was given a word of judgment and disaster

(come again…?)

the people of Israel began to feel full of themselves…

not because God was blessing them, but because …

well… they must be awesome, to be doing so well

as sayings go: pride goeth before the fall

but pride doesn’t take to a message of impending fall very well

Jeremiah was mocked and locked up… ignored, and tossed into a cistern…

until…

his words came true, and the Babylonians swept in - brutally

defeated them - and carried them off as plunder

the best of times gave way to the worst

(not that they hadn't been warned… they just didn't want to hear it)

at this time -

Jeremiah's message became not a note of disaster, but -

a word of hope -

hope grounded in the affirmation that God was the one who

was in charge

- not the Assyrians… not the Babylonians… not any of the nations

arrayed around them… but also -

not themselves…

they were not "masters of their own universe…"

how did this message come to them…?

how does it come to us…?

I) Realism

it begins with a little dose of realism

cf. - they had turned their backs on God, and - God had withdrawn

his blessings

God *stayed* with them -

it's just that they needed a time of refining…

a time of purifying…

a time, quite frankly, of coming to terms with

the fruits of their folly… their disobedience…

i.e. - they were defeated in battle… and carried off into exile

(they were not forgotten of God… but -

they were not where God had given for them to live…)

the dose of realism begins with these words (vs. 5ff) -

"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce…

Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and
give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have
sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease…"
i.e. - play the hand you've been dealt
live your lives - where you find yourselves…
as opposed to doom-scrolling or going down the
rabbit hole and focusing on everything that
does not measure up to expectations…
i.e. - clinging to a negative attitude accomplishes nothing
(even if we have a hard time letting go…)
note - this may seem like "modern therapy 101" -
the stuff of pithy aphorisms:
don't sweat the small stuff, and - it's all small stuff…
keep calm, and carry on…
don't make a mountain out of a molehill…
(pick your own favorite and insert here…) - etc.
cf. - may seem trite… simplistic on the surface… but -
speaks to an underlying truth that where there is hope in God…
that is where there is the capacity to deal with
the daily grind
(especially when that daily grind finds its expression in exile…
in a distant land… cut off from all that you once loved…)
live your lives -
grounded in the realism of where your lives are currently
to be lived -
but more than that -
take an active stance for the good of where you are -
vs. 7 ~ Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which
I have carried you into exile.
Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." ~
This is now your home - live like it…

relate re: time in Taiwan - 40 years ago

there was still a generation in power who had fled the mainland…

fled the Communist take over…

and held onto the hope that they would return "home" …

they they would reclaim the mainland

and I remember talking with our Foundation liaison and with people

in positions of power and influence in the government -

and the issue facing them that there was a hesitancy to "invest in" Taiwan…

to commit to where they were as they actual home…

(because in their minds - it wasn't…)

cf. - that has all changed over time, but what Jeremiah said to his people,

in his day…

is what he would have said to people in Taiwan,

in their day…

is what he say to us, in our day:

get involved… be supportive… seek to thrive

relate - we probably won't have it as bad as the people in Jeremiah's

time - brutally defeated in a vicious war…

or - the Nationalists who fled mainland China under Chiang Kai-shek…

but we may be tempted to move… to relocate…

to Florida… to Canada…

I know people who moved to Switzerland…

- wherever we are… for whatever reasons…

get involved…

"live" there…

and show you have hope…

II) Hope

… because you live with the mindset… in the the confidence…

that God is in charge

God who says to us:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord,

"plans to prosper you and not to harm you,

plans to give you hope and a future.

Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

I will be found by you," declares the Lord…"

God who warns us:

"Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you.

Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have.

They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,"

declares the Lord."

Jeremiah encourages us to look for and to find hope…

in the midst of the gritty reality of our lives -

where we are…

caught up in what we're doing…

among the people who share our lives with us…

Jeremiah tells us to be careful of false prophets -

in the church…

in elected office…

on our phones (as "influencers")

wherever they find a platform

(and - their platforms are legion…)

- beware what they are selling you:

it's a false hope that brings us nothing

but the hope of which Jeremiah speaks…

what he wants us realize that God offers…

is right here with us

all we need do is call on God… pray to God… and seek him