

Sermon Text – Sunday, September 7, 2025 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: Luke 14:25-33; 2nd Reading: Deuteronomy 30:15-20 For the Message: Jeremiah 18:1-11 “How did we get here?”

Reading this scripture from the prophet Jeremiah brings to my mind this question – Is there hope for a nation that turns away from the one true God? There are some tough questions that arise from our other scripture readings today as well – so how did we get here? What’s going on, and is there hope?

I think it’s important to give Jeremiah’s words some context so we can better understand. These words came out of a time of turmoil and upheaval. We believe these words to have been written around the sixth century before the common era. About that time Judah, the lower kingdom, was wrought with invading armies and misplaced alliances. Their King Jehoiakim waffled between creating alliances with Egypt and Babylon eventually provoking the Babylonian armies to invade. Invaders carried his son off to Babylon along with many prominent citizens of Judah / Jerusalem. Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem, and the principal subject of his words were that of surviving this turmoil and trying to move beyond the destruction the invading Babylonians caused. If Jeremiah’s words ring of paranoia – it’s because everyone was against him.

Although scribes and ‘priests’ have heavily edited the book of Jeremiah over the years, there is no doubt among scholars that this material originated with the historical person of Jeremiah. His very real life has become a symbol of the nation’s demise and restoration. What happens to Jeremiah will happen to the people of Judah. Furthermore, Jeremiah’s prophecies are intensely political – explaining that the nation’s tragedy is the result of human sin and not an impotent or capricious God. At that time in Judah, the people held onto the covenantal promises made at Mt. Sinai. They believed they were immune from judgement because they lived in the land God had given them and worshiped in the temple where, they believed, God had taken up residence. They believed this so strongly that they had begun to rely more on political alliances than on God. Because, in their minds, they were God’s chosen ones, and they strongly believed that no harm would come to them if they remained in the land. They designed alliances with Egypt to protect them militarily from Babylonian forces – that failed. They failed to listen to the prophets, instead relying on the strength of others, human strength not God’s, for their safety.

That was the trouble in Jeremiah’s time as we just heard. Pulling this a little forward to Jesus’ time, we tie a reason for this conundrum to Jesus’ words, “what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able.” The people of Jeremiah’s time failed to consider the consequences of their actions – believing that disaster would not come to them. Not only that but they relied on ‘self’ so long they had become unpliable in the potter’s hands. The metaphor of the potter and the clay illustrates that Israel is not autonomous or independent but is completely in the Lord’s control. “Judah of course had had freedom of choice. But that freedom has now been forfeited through sustained resistance

Sermon Text – Sunday, September 7, 2025 – Pastor Paula Kraus

and stubbornness.”¹ At some point the potter will give up trying to mold clay that refuses to be shaped. So, when the people of Jeremiah’s time asked the question “How did we get here,” the answer for them was – because we did not abide by the covenant.

There is trouble in our time as well, trouble that can have us turning to God’s words in Jeremiah’s book for answers. Trouble created by the very choices God’s people make. We have read this morning Moses’ words from the book of Deuteronomy. Moses’ words were to the people of Israel who were about to enter the land God had promised to their ancestors. Hear Moses’ words again “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death, and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you. . .” “Permeating the very fabric of our present moment is the awareness that we possess the mammoth potential to destroy or preserve our planet. We are free to choose life or death.”² This warning not only includes the potential to destroy or preserve our planet by our decisions, but it also warns that our decisions affect all life on this planet, and whether or not other creatures [including humanity] on this planet suffer. Scripture warns us that “the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish” (Psalm 1:6). And we can look to Jesus’ warnings again from the reading in Luke’s Gospel – to sit down and consider the cost of what we contemplate.

The message for us is that we don’t always get what we pray for, we don’t always receive what we believe we deserve. What about when bad things happen to good people or worse when good things happen to bad people? We too end up asking the question that the people of Judah asked, “How did we get here?” The answer to that question might sound like their answer but we should understand that when we make our idols out of the things of this world we are bound for destruction. When we begin to believe that we need only rely on our own selves to make our way in this world, we will most certainly suffer the consequences.

The good news for the people in Jeremiah’s time is mingled with God’s warnings. We can read verses six, seven, and eight again and hear the promise. God can relent and change God’s mind regarding the disaster God initially intended. God is not a harsh unrelenting master, God would listen and respond if the people would repent. God gives these warnings to the people because God cares deeply for the people of Israel, of Judah, and the people living in exile. God’s punishment is intended for discipline, as a father, with love, disciplines his children. “Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.”

When we read further in Jeremiah’s book, or in the words from other Old Testament prophets we hear God’s promises to them – they would be restored as a community, in their own lands in their own homes and they would be sustained by their own crops and vineyards. It brought hope to them to hear Jeremiah’s vision and know that the vessel the potter was shaping, although spoiled in the potter’s hand, was reworked into another vessel, as seemed

¹ Walter Brueggemann. *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile & Homecoming*. Eerdmans. 1998. Print. 169

² Louis Stulman. *Abingdon Old Testament Commentary: Jeremiah*. Abington. 2005. Print. 201

Sermon Text – Sunday, September 7, 2025 – Pastor Paula Kraus

good to him. Furthering that analogy, God promised the people that God would rework their lives according to what seemed good to God.

For us there is also good news, we are clay shaped by the potter's hands, clay that can be worked and reworked until the finished product is pleasing in the potter's hands. We are not chiseled from stone, we can change, and God responds to change. God's plans are malleable, God is willing to change according to the faithfulness of God's people, or lack of faithfulness. The thing is, God is always there waiting for us to listen to God's voice, to obey God's commands. God works in us and through us waiting for us, as clay, to take on a pleasing shape. Life in this world is a struggle, but change is possible. Just like the image of the vineyard we read about a few weeks ago, it is that struggle that brings us closer in fellowship with Jesus and with God – if we so choose.

Yes, we must carefully weigh the consequences of our choices, no we do not always get what we think we deserve – we struggle. However, eventually we find the struggle is not as bad as we initially experienced, not nearly as bad as our imaginations. We come to the end of our struggle, and we are still with God – good news for the people of Jeremiah's time and good news for us.