

Nothing Too Wonderful!
Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-17
First Presbyterian Church
July 4, 2021

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The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. ²At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, ³where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him,

⁶Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came to me: ⁷Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, “Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.” ⁸Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the LORD, and said to me, “Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.” Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. ⁹And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. ¹⁰I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. ¹¹Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; ¹²and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. ¹³In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, ¹⁴Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. ¹⁵For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. ¹⁶After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD, saying: ¹⁷Ah Lord GOD! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.

Sermon

SHE was looking back on ninety... and HE had already hit 100... so when the angel told them that the stork was on its way at last, they both almost collapsed – laughing. Abraham laughed till he fell on his face... Sarah was more discreet – chuckling behind the door of her tent. You see, God made a promise to Abraham – and had repeated it several times – “I will make you the father of a great nation.” But over time, an enormous problem emerged: Abraham and Sarah were childless! How could she and old Abraham become the parents of a multitude if they had no children?

Well, this went on for years – God promising and nothing happening. Until finally, when Sarah was 99 years old and Abraham 100, an angel came to them in the form of a stranger traveling down the road, to tell them Sarah was about to become pregnant. At the news, the old couple just laughed. The angel asked Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say: ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old? And then he said: “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?”

Many years later, the hand of the Lord took hold of a prophet named Ezekiel and led him to a valley that had bones scattered all around – bones of a people once alive – bones enough to keep paleontologists busy for a very long time. This valley, it was very hot... and these bones, they were very dry. And the Lord asked Ezekiel, “Can these bones live?” Ezekiel responded: “I don’t know, Lord, but you do.” “Then speak to the bones, Ezekiel, speak to them and tell them for me that they WILL live.” And he did... he spoke to them and suddenly there was a noise – a rattling sound – and they started all fitting together... connected by tendons and muscles and surrounded by skin, but there was no breath in them. So finally, the Lord said, “Ezekiel, tell the breath to come into them and it did – from the four winds – the breath came into them, and they stood up and they LIVED! Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?

She was just teenager – 13, 14 years old – living in little bitty, blue-collar town named Nazareth. Like most girls her age, her marriage had been “pre-arranged” but hadn’t officially happened. HIS name was Joseph – her future husband, that is – her name was Mary. And one day just out of the blue, the angel Gabriel came to Mary, and said: “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” Mary was confused... and not a little afraid, so the angel assured her God was pleased with her... and in fact, had chosen her conceive and have a son and name him Jesus. Oh, then he added that her son would be given the throne of David and would reign over the house of Jacob forever and ever, Amen! Well, Mary had but one question (she probably had many more, but Luke tells us of only one): “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” “Well,” Gabriel responded, “all I can say is God’s gonna take care of that... and in fact your relative Elizabeth – the one who had always wanted children, but never could have them – your relative is six months pregnant.” And then, he said – making the main point once again – “For nothing is impossible with God.” And you know what Mary said? I know some of you do. She said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Ya’ll have no doubt heard that the real estate market is downright crazy right now. Tight inventory... bidding wars... folks bypassing inspection... buying places sight unseen for tens of thousands over the asking price – clearly, a seller’s market. Needless to say, it was NOT THIS WAY in Israel back in 6th century BCE when the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah instructing him to buy a piece of land. “Your cousin is going to offer you right of first refusal on your family farm back in Anathoth.” Though the text doesn’t exactly say this, I’m thinking his cousin is selling to raise enough money to move to Egypt – which is what lots of Israelites were doing. With the Babylonians viciously besieging Jerusalem... and the rumors of mass deportations making the rounds... NO one – absolutely NO one – was looking to invest in Israeli real estate.

Least of all a prophet who was in prison for preaching a message the king just didn't want to hear. Almost any way you look at this deal, it was no good for Jeremiah. But he did it anyway... and he did it for one reason – he knew it was the WORD of the Lord... he knew it was the WILL of the Lord. NO MATTER how little “business sense” it made, he knew that when his cousin Hanamel made the offer... and when he weighed out for him 17 shekels of silver for the purchase... (totally seeing the situation for the disaster it was!)- he had heard the word of the Lord and believed it. He walked by faith, not by sight.

This is the great challenge we share with Abraham and Sarah and Ezekiel and Mary and Jeremiah – the challenge is to look at any seemingly hopeless situation we find ourselves in and to walk by faith in the word of God. And to KEEP WALKING by faith, even when nothing seems to change. Remember, Jeremiah knew it would take a long time for the promise to come true. That's why he had Baruch seal up the deed in a clay jar for safe keeping. You may recall the Dead Sea Scrolls were kept safe for 2000 years in just such clay jars. Jeremiah was under no illusion that life was going to return to normal any time soon. But he bet his money... his property... his life... on God's faithfulness to his word... and that's our challenge in the difficult days of our lives.

But this text is not only about the challenge to live by faith. It is, even more, about God's ability to do what to us seems impossible. It's no accident that Jeremiah concludes this little real estate transaction with a prayer in which the key line is in verse 17: “Ah, Lord God. It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! “Nothing is too hard for you.”

During a preaching conference a very long time ago, Professor Fred Craddock gave a talk in which he strongly encouraged each of us to go back home to our churches and preach on the stories of Jesus. “Just preach the stories of Jesus,” he said, “about what he said and what he did. “They need to them... they need to know the stories of Jesus... maybe not that particular day... or that week... or even that year. But they WILL need to know them... something will happen to them or something will NOT happen to them... and they'll need Jesus with them. So, they will need to know the stories and I want YOU to make sure they do.” Well, I thought about that this week – it has probably been 30 years ago – but I thought about that this week. Because really all I have done this morning is to tell you four stories... stories that I BELIEVE YOU NEED TO KNOW. You may not need them today as you head out to the lake or the bar-b-que... or next week when you get back to work... or even next year. But the time WILL come that you will need them... you'll need to know what they SAY... you'll need to know what they MEAN...you'll want to cling to what they PROMISE – which IS - there is nothing to wonderful for God.

Charge:

One historian, commenting on this story in Jeremiah 32, called it “the worst land deal in history.” That's true if you look at the historical context. But it's not true, if you believe the promise of God. That promise will be given full throat next week as we complete this series of sermons from Jeremiah.