

Message 8/9/21

When Hope Is Elusive (Joel Kline)

In the days leading up to the time when much of ancient Judah was forced to live in exile in Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah minces no words in asserting that a time of judgment was at hand. While much of the political and religious establishment of the day proclaimed that God was on their side, and therefore good things were in store for Judah, Jeremiah would have none of it. Decrying those leaders, the prophet laments, “They have treated the wounds of my people carelessly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” Continuing on, Jeremiah claims, “They acted shamefully, they committed abomination; yet they were not at all ashamed, they did not know how to blush” (Jeremiah 8:11-12).

They did not know how to blush. Sadly, we live in a time when similar assertions could be made of religious and political leaders, a time when integrity is all but lost, a time when those who thirst for justice and peace frequently find themselves standing alone. In the face of all this, how do we maintain a sense of hope? When hope seems elusive, perhaps we need to pay attention to the prophets/poets in our midst—those who encourage us to see life differently, those who urge us to re-envision life.

One of the most striking things about the proclamation of Jeremiah is that, once the Exile has occurred, once life as the people had long known it is shattered, the prophet does not gloat. Jeremiah does not assert, “I told you so.” No, the prophet now seemingly reverses course, offering a message of stunning hope, of anticipation for a return to the beloved homeland, of promise that God is in the business of restoring life and making all things new.

When things seem at their darkest, when life appears to involve little more than struggle and pain, those experiences may well serve to point us in the direction of a far deeper reality—the promise that ours is a God of unending compassion, overflowing mercy, extravagant love. Ours is a God who enables us, in the very face of discouragement and pain, to invest our creativity and our energy in the creation