September 29th, 2019 

Jeremiah 32:1-15 Pastor Jenny Lee, Ph.D.

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**“Buy a Field of Hope”**

 “Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.” Do you know who said this? There are arguments about who said this word because it is a too famous word. I trust that it is by Martin Luther, who is a German Theologian and a protestant reformer (1483-1546). He was an ordained priest in the Roman Catholic Church. However, he was excommunicated by the Pope because he proposed the salvation and eternal life are not earned by good deeds but are received by the faith of Jesus Christ as the free gift of God’s grace. His proposal at that time was a big challenge to the authority and office of the Pope. His proposals included that the Bible is the only source of divinely revealed the knowledge of God. Even though he was excommunicated, he translated the Bible into German so that the ordinary people may read the Bible. At that time, only the Pope and priests were allowed to read the Bible. He died in 1546 with the Pope’s excommunication still valid. Today, much later than 400 years, however, we might imagine how he struggled to hold hope in the truth of God.

Perhaps, many people around him laughed at him at that time. However, we Christians believe that we are saved in the faith of Jesus Christ by the grace of God. “Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.” This word became an essential message toward hope.

The word, “hope” is according to Google dictionary, “a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.” On the other hand, the word, “hope” in the Bible or in the theological dictionary, is interpreted as “faith in God,” or “trust toward the promise of God” (Baker’s Theological Dictionary of the Bible). Martin Luther’s hope perhaps, is toward the truth of God.

There was the prophet Jeremiah who was in the suffering, but trusted the promise of God a much long ago than did Martin Luther. We call him, a prophet of hope, and at that same time, “a prophet of lamentation.” Hope and lamentation are like two sides of a coin as if it is our lives in the world.

The beginning of the text describes the historical fact of Judah. In 588 B.C., the armies of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon surrounded the city of Jerusalem. The prophet Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, the king of Judah that Judah will be destroyed by Babylon soon, Nebuchadnezzar take you to his country as a prisoner. However, Zedekiah, who wanted to hear Jeremiah that Judah will win, was angry on Jeremiah. Zedekiah did not care about what was right, but he cared about what was pleasant. Zedekiah kept the prophet imprisoned in the palace, where he could keep an eye on him. In the situation of Judah, famine was so severe. In other words, many people in Judah suffered in poverty.

In verses 1-3, meanwhile, Jeremiah’s cousin Hanamel visits the imprisoned prophet and asks to buy his field in that Anathoth, Jeremiah’s ancestral home, where was occupied by the Babylonian army at that time. Hanamel proposes Jeremiah’s duty to buy the field. It will bring no benefit whatever to the prophet. Even if he were not in prison, Jeremiah could not work the land any more than could Hanamel. What is more, Jeremiah could not also sell the land, unless he could find someone else in the family to take it off his hands. However, Jeremiah bought the field, which is worthless land giving good money.

The unbelievable beauty in this passage follows the next. Jeremiah calls his trusted companion, Baruch and other friends as witnesses. Jeremiah conducts the transfer of ownership is obvious fashion. Elaborate steps are taken to render highly visible the exchange of money and the execution of the necessary legal documents. The prophet orders Baruch to store the documents in a place where they will be safe indefinitely, which is “in an earthenware jar” (v.14).

We may think of Jeremiah, “how foolish is!” However, Jeremiah had an expectation of sure thing for the future. We may guess with two ways for the understanding of Jeremiah’s acts: one is his duty before the Israelite’s custom; the other is a prophet before God’s word.

First, there was an ancient Israelite custom. It was based on an understanding of the solidarity of the nation with the law of redemption (Leviticus 25). If anyone that belongs to a family or relative falls into jeopardy of being lost, it is the duty of the most senior male family member to do what is necessary to claim for the family that person or thing. Hanamel might be in poverty and needed money. However, Jeremiah’s situation was also not better than Hanamel.

The second is that we may understand Jeremiah before God’s word. At that moment, God said to Jeremiah, who was imprisoned to buy a field from his cousin Hanamel before Hanamel came to Jeremiah (v.6). In verse 8, when his cousin Hanamel came to the prison and said to Jeremiah to buy the field, Jeremiah said, “I knew that this was the word of the Lord” (v.8). After all procedure of legal to buy the field, Jeremiah orders Baruch to store the documents in a place where they will be safe indefinitely, which is “in an earthenware jar” (v.14). One thing we should not overlook is that the reason Jeremiah was imprisoned. He is imprisoned because he said to the king Zedekiah the word of God in truth.

Nevertheless, without any complaint, Jeremiah accepted God’s order to buy the field. For sure Jeremiah held the word of God. In verse 15, “For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and Fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.” Jeremiah surely held the promise of God that the days are surely coming that they can rebuy the land one another.

If we would reframe Jeremiah’s word borrowing Martin Luther’s word, it shall be “Even if it ends the world, I will buy a field,” or “even if I am imprisoned, I will buy a field.” Imagine that the city is about to fall and he is imprisoned. Besides, he had to buy worthless land. Where might he find hope? Jeremiah himself has said so on the authority of Israel’s God. Even the king, the power of the world makes him imprisoned, he saw hope beyond judgment, beyond destruction, beyond the justice of God, which is restoration, mercy, and the salvation of God.

God gave the word to Jeremiah, “The days are surely coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest” (Jer.31:31-34). Jeremiah already received the word of God that we are saved by the faith in the grace of God. God said to him, God writes his law on our hearts. Therefore, we shall know who God is in faith.

Today, I trust God gives us hope for our church, our country and the world. I encourage you to have hope for the next generation of the church. Our children and grandchildren are our hope. God shall restore and develop our church through our children and grandchildren. Let us buy a field of hope and plant a tree of our dream in the field. Trust that our children and our grandchildren are our dreams.

**Thanks be to God. Amen!**