

Reflections July 26, 2020
Bolton & Palgrave United Churches preached by Rev. Eleanor Scarlett

It has been four and a half months since we have entered the COVID19 lockdown. Some Provinces are doing much better than others at controlling the virus. Here in Peel and the GTA we are still lagging with new cases every day. Is this a bad thing? I am not sure it is, some sources are saying it speaks to the fact that more people are being tested. Here in Canada all levels of governments are involved, including Public health officers are all working together to make sure that safety is our priority. There is one thing we can all work together at doing well and that is we all wear masks when in public. This will provide safety of others as well as to ourselves.

There are some high points with the loosening up especially around families and close friends, that brings some of us a sense of joy. Some of us who lived alone and were at times feeling overwhelmed with loneliness can now create our own bubble of families and friends. What lessons have we learnt from this experience? Communities in many ways are like churches that are continually changing. This time though, these changes are radically different.

Normal will never be the way it was. We find ourselves at a crossroad. We ask ourselves what will this new normal look like? How will we do this? Will be able to get over this hump? No one really knows. How will we move from the known to the unknown? Some communities of faith are charting out new pathways with the hope of returning in the fall. We are putting into place protocols around safety of ourselves and those around us. Our faith calls us to place our trust in God, the same God who journeyed with the people of Jeremiah's time to be with us also.

The reading from the book of Jeremiah is a harsh reality for us and our world today. As I was preparing this week's message, I could not help but to ask myself the following questions,

- (1) What messages are there for us and our world today?
- (2) What were some triggering points for Jeremiah and his world?
- (3) Is it possible for us to make connections with Jeremiah's world and the issues facing us and our world today?

We must remember that Jeremiah lived twelve hundred years before Jesus; and we are now living more than two thousand years since Jesus' time. Yet some of the issues that Jeremiah wrestled with during his reign, we are still experiencing today. The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. Earlier in the book, Jeremiah spoke about a hot wind that will be coming toward the people, he also spoke of disasters, destructions, and diseases.

Jeremiah reminded the people that when these things happened the birds would disappear, and all the fertile lands would become desert. The cities would also be destroyed. Let us think about this for a while, hold it, and reflect deeply. These were harsh realities for the people, no one wants to hear stories of destructions, especially at such magnitude.

Is it possible for us to connect these stories to our world and time? Where are the prophetic voices of our world coming from today? Whose voices are they? What are they calling us to do? What parallels do we see

between today's world and Jeremiah's? Is it possible for us to examine issues between Jeremiah's world and ours, in order that we may have a better understanding of some of the issues facing us today?

Jeremiah knew then, what many today are just beginning to understand. There are still those who believe that COVID19 is a joke and that global warming and environmental issues are conspiracy theories orchestrated by special interest groups to create power and inflict fear and control upon others. We see some world leaders buying into these conspiracy theories and not living into the recommendations of public health authorities.

During the last three decades we have seen and experienced one disaster after the other. There have been various kinds of Influenzas, HIV, SARS and now COVID19. The environment has rapidly changed creating a variety of weather patterns. I can remember when we were able to sleep comfortable at nights without air conditioning and when summer days were warm without the kind of humidity we are currently experiencing.

When I lived in Nova Scotia in the early to mid-1990, fishery was a major industry. I can still remember seeing salmon swimming freely in the waters and that fishermen lived economically independent lives. On my return in the mid-2000, I was reminded that farming was another major economic way of life. Yet all of that has changed due mainly to weather patterns. In today's reading God's promise for God's people is a message of hope in knowing that deliverance will come for God's people.

What is God saying to us today? Or better still what message is there for us? The major issue for us today is to get this virus under control. As Jeremiah assessed the situations that were taking place around him, he reminds the people then, that God still sees and calls them "my people." The new paradigm that God offered to the people of Jeremiah's time was radically built upon by Jesus.

In verse 14, of the text Jeremiah reminds us of the following. The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. "'In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; this branch will do what is just and right in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it^[a] will be called: The LORD Our Righteous One.'

At times we feel that hope is lost. Yet, even now, there is reason to hope. God and humanity have been together for generations, God is always in relationships with God's people and instead of saying "your people" God says, "my people." God is always giving us second chance reminding us that we have opportunities for change to happen of selves, as well as for the future of our world.

As we navigate our way between the two major issues plaguing our world today. COVID19 and Racism we do so, knowing that the God of Jeremiah will continue to journey with us. This same God, who stayed with Jeremiah's community promises to stay with us through times of struggles. The One who walked with society's outcasts, those suffering from incurable diseases, the vulnerable, the homeless and the broken hearted are all included in God's incredible message of hopeful promises.

What is God calling us to be and do today? What is our responsibility toward what is happening within and around us? How will we walk this walk? In the reading from the book of Jeremiah, God's promised hope pointed to the lineage of David. A promise revealed in the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. God's promise hope offers new life even during times of a Pandemic. Hope is present because, ultimately, God's healing and wholeness for us is that we are all heirs to God's amazing grace given to all peoples.

Thanks be to God! Amen!