

## **Sermon Bytes: Charged with non-support**

Jeremiah 2:4-13

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In order to understand the work of the prophet Jeremiah, we need to spend a little time setting the historical context. The high point of his 40 year ministry occurred during the almost 20 year reign of the reforming king, Josiah, who died in 609 B.C.E. Over the next 20 years he would admonish the kings who followed until Jerusalem went into exile in Babylon 20 years later in 587 B.C.E. For those last twenty years Jeremiah confronted the leadership of Judah, In the capital Jerusalem, challenging the grievous shortcomings of a system in decay

Today's lesson would not have been popular with the king and priest so Jeremiah's day. Because Jeremiah uses the image of a courtroom to bring Israel and its leadership before the court of creation, with an indictment of non support

Yes, the people of Israel are being put on trial, and God is speaking for the prosecution and all creation is invited to be the judge and jury. The indictment reads:

The people have strayed from God  
They have followed worthless idols  
Literally the windbag or blowhard  
and so become like so much hot air  
They have forgotten the God  
that brought them out of Egypt  
and led them through the wilderness  
and brought them to a good land.  
They have defiled that promised land  
and even their priests do not seek the will or his presence of God

It is all summarised in verse 13 when God says:

"My people have committed two sins:  
They have forsaken me,  
The spring of living water,  
and have dug their own cisterns,  
broken cisterns that cannot hold water."

And yet when you read closely, while God feels abandoned, God is not interested in condemning his people. After all, God had promises to Abraham to Jacob and Joseph in Egypt, to Moses and Miriam in the desert years. God had led those people from bondage to freedom and had given them a rich and fertile land - literally – the Land of the Promise. God wants his people to prosper. But for this to happen, they first of all have to do a really hard thing – listen.

The land of Israel in the time of Jeremiah, was much like the land of Israel in the time of Jesus and much like we are today. Yes, there are lots of differences, but similar to then, people worked hard for a living;. they married and raised families; they sought, as

best they were able, a piece of the pie, and some had more of it - and some had much less, but the dynamics of living are similar even though time and place change.

We are social creatures with a social pattern. We are human creations – mere flesh and blood. And these can conflict with the other thing that we are, which is made in God's image - spiritual beings on a human journey

If we go back to the sins of Israel, there were two main issues – in forgetting God and his goodness; and in treating the world as our own personal fiefdom. Relying upon cisterns that they dug but not tended to be their source of the waters of life rather than upon receiving what they need from the living springs that God has provided.

In dry land - a land like Israel, heck in any dry land, even here where we live among 10 thousand lakes, as we learned this summer, when hundreds or our neighbours wells went dry, that water is a precious resource, And needs to be treated like the gift it is

I imagine settlers on this land learned long ago. that in places where deep wells and springs are few and far between that cisterns are a good thing. But cisterns that aren't tended go to rack and ruin, and soon the reservoir of life is empty- and there is nothing to sustain the people

When Jeremiah spoke of life giving springs, he was referring to special spots like Bethsaida, and which lays in the heart of Jerusalem , bringing life to the city even in times of drought, and especially when the enemy was at the gate and the city was besieged.

"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, and have left them to ruin so they are cisterns that cannot hold water.

You know, the sins of Israel at the time of Jeremiah, and the sins of Israel at the time of Jesus, and our sins, are kind of the same. And they are reflected in our personal faith journey. Or as a community of faith that strays from its purpose. Or a nation that has turned its faith history into mere fairy tales, forgetting their intimate connection with God.

We allow our social conditions and patterns, and human nature to rule over us and imperil the fullness of life that we could be experiencing, the life that God created for us in the first place. We try to capture mere drops of life through our technology, our labour, our institutions, saying that God is dead and proclaiming our allegiance to science that will fix everything, replacing God with bottles of Evian or Dsani instead of drinking deeply of the springs of living water. Counting on our own wisdom instead of remembering stories of God's faithfulness, we declare ourselves to be gods in our own right instead of taking up the challenge to do our part to care for and to heal God's creation

A few weeks ago you may have heard of an algae bloom that is turning the ocean waters off of Vancouver Island green. Scientists aren't sure yet what is causing it but some believe a lot of it comes from the fact that the city - like many other ocean cities -

still has not made much progress on pollution abatement and by far the largest percentage of its sewage is dumped in the ocean. The problems with the water in Rio this summer could have been Victoria or Tokyo or many other ocean ports

There is another thing that scientists are not sure whether the algae plume has anything to do with - the floating island of garbage out in the Pacific that is now twice the size of Texas. By the way - there are smaller such garbage islands in the Atlantic, the Indian oceans. And we continue to make them grow. Some scientists are beginning to wonder if these islands are now so big that they are affecting wind and ocean currents and ultimately affecting climate change

We need to hear this charge, of non support., of non care. This tuning out from what our inattention to the basic things of life, this indictment from time to time, so that perhaps - we can give our head a shake, get the proverbial boot in the backside and get ourselves back on track, as people, as communities of faith, and as people of the world.

As Jeremiah says elsewhere, one reaches out to grab what is without substance, and one's hands grab hold of –air or nothing. Judah's rejection of YHWH has them reaching for hebel, says Jeremiah, and as a result they have become just like what they have reached for.

As people of faith, the choice is ours: broken cisterns or springs of living water welling up unto eternal life