

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD

Jeremiah 23:5

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It's a strange story. The kind of story that defies reason and logic and common sense.¹ The City of Jerusalem is under siege. It's a battle that's been inevitable for many years. On one side of the nation of Judah; on one side of Jerusalem, is the kingdom of Egypt; one of the great powers of the ancient world. And on the other side is the kingdom of Babylon; a new and rising power. And for year after year, decade after decade, the city of Jerusalem and the people of Judah have been forced to sit there in the middle, pulled in one direction or the other as this great battle has been waged around them; collateral damage, we might say, as those two great superpowers battle for supremacy; as little more than the landscape upon which others have been fighting for control. And now, the army of the Babylonians, the army of King Nebuchadnezzar is laying siege to the city. It is, as we can imagine, a bleak time. It's a time of incredible darkness. Some imagine, hopefully, naively as it proves in the end, [some imagine] that God will never allow the holy city to be defeated; that somehow God will magically rescue them for the sake of his Temple and his people. For the sake of his promise. For the sake of his honour. But, in fact, all of that is little more than a dream; the wishful thinking of desperation and fear; the wishful thinking of those who stand under the threat of doom; who sooner than later will have to face up to the reality that their nation is going to be defeated; that their city is going to be conquered; that the nation and the city and even their own lives will be destroyed and torn apart, one stone from another, until all is gone.

And even as all of this is unfolding, even as the city of Jerusalem is filled with hopelessness and fear and despair, the Prophet Jeremiah sits under guard. He's been arrested and thrown into prison. For treason, no less. All because he refused to say what the King of Judah commanded him to say. All because he refused to promise deliverance and rescue. Because he refused to lie about what God was telling him to say. *The city will fall, he tells them. The people will be carried off into exile, he warns them. Fight as you wish but you will not succeed; and your best hope is to just recognise all of this and surrender.* Says the Lord. And for saying all this, for speaking as God was commanding him to speak, the prophet Jeremiah is imprisoned. Even as, in a very similar way, the city of Jerusalem sits imprisoned by the Babylonians.

And that's the point where the story gets really weird. Because even as he sits in prison, Jeremiah is visited by his cousin. Who tells him that a piece of land, a field back in the village just outside of Jerusalem, where he was raised, is for sale. And that it falls to Jeremiah, as the closest male relative to the owner, to buy that field. To redeem it. To ensure that the land stays in the family. To ensure that it remains part of the inheritance which has been passed down from father to son, for more generations than they might count. By all appearances it is a completely ridiculous suggestion. Jeremiah sits in prison with no obvious hope that he will ever see that land again. And, even more so, the nation sits in prison, with the Babylonians about to tear it apart from top to bottom. So why would he buy a field when there is no hope? Why buy a field

¹ The story recounted here is found in Jeremiah 32

when the Babylonians are about to overthrow everything; to take away all that Jeremiah and his people have carefully held, passing on from father to son, for more generations than they might count? Would you buy a house when it's on fire? Would you buy a boat as it's sinking? It's too foolish to imagine; and yet, that's exactly what Jeremiah does. For seventeen shekels of silver, we're told; weighed out on the scales, the deed signed and sealed; properly witnessed to make it all legal. Buying a piece of land even as the walls are about to come tumbling down.

Now, I don't know how often the Prophet Jeremiah gets on your radar. He's not one of the great captivating characters of the Old Testament. He doesn't have the great power and glory of King David; or the great wisdom of King Solomon. He is no Daniel bravely standing up in a lion's den. For some, including for those in his own time, he is altogether too dismal. He has been called the 'weeping prophet;' known perhaps most of all for his lamentations over the fallen city. Which is perhaps all too unfair. Because while Jeremiah laments all that is about to be lost, the one thing that he never loses is hope. You don't spend what little money you have to buy a field when your enemy is at the gate, if you don't have hope. Not hope in things that cannot give hope. Not hope in the transitory power that humanity so desperately clings to. Not hope in fantasy or fancy; or in deception or in lies. But hope in God.

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD

That's what we're hearing this week: *Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. Behold, the days are coming.*

Days when God will act; days when God will come to rescue his people; days so amazing that every other day, every other thing that he has ever done, will pale in comparison: *Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD*

When the world lets you down, God doesn't. When the world forgets you, God doesn't. When the world turns its back on you, God doesn't: *Behold, the days are coming.* That's what the Season of Advent is all about. Not just a time to do all the things that we need to do to get ready for Christmas. Not even just a time to look back to what God did long ago. But a time to make ready for what God is doing right now; and for what God has promised to do. And this Sunday, this Stir Up Sunday, is a time for hope to be stirred up once again in our hearts; to be reminded, even as we cannot always know where all of the disorder and confusion of this world are taking us; [to be reminded] that the Christ is coming to us just as surely as he came that day to Andrew and Simon and Philip and Nathaniel. To be reminded that we do not need to live fearfully or despairingly or desperately or selfishly because we know what he has promised. Because we know that he will come again. As he has promised. Because we know that 'all shall be well.' That all manner of things shall be well.²

Because the days are coming, says the Lord.

² In her thirteenth showing, Julian of Norwich received a comforting answer to a question that has long troubled her:

"In my folly, before this time I often wondered why, by the great foreseeing wisdom of God, the onset of sin was not prevented: for then, I thought, all should have been well. This impulse was much to be avoided, but nevertheless I mourned and sorrowed because of it, without reason and discretion. But Jesus, who in this vision informed me of all that is needed by me, answered with these words and said: 'It was necessary that there should be sin; but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.' These words were said most tenderly, showing no manner of blame to me nor to any who shall be saved." <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/incontext/article/julian>