

## **Plotting Our Future**

Jeremiah 32: 1-3a, 6-15

September 29, 2010

United Memorial

Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

How many people remember when this church was full each week?

When there were dozens of children in Sunday School... when there were mid week groups for youth... when this place, and all churches were at the heart of the community...

I am younger than some of you, but I remember a time when most people went to church on a regular basis.

Those days are gone...

And not because church going people did anything to cause it.

There are a multitude of reasons why this happened...

People are having smaller families...

People have to work on Sunday...

There is distrust of religious and other institutions...

The culture outside the church changed...

I know some of you look around on Sunday morning and see the empty places where people you know and loved once sat and you are sad... some of you are mad... some of you despair... some of you are in denial...

You are experiencing grief.

Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, who has become known for her work among people who were dying, identified shock and anger, along with withdrawal, bargaining, and acceptance as being aspects of grief.

While Dr. Kübler-Ross does not offer steps or stages of grief, a pair of grief counselors in Montreal do.

Roger Regnier and Line Saint-Pierre specifically offer four 'phases' and see in the sequence a promise of better days to come.

Their phases are numbered.

First there is shock, where we can't even believe that something has happened or is happening.

Then there is destabilization, when the ground upon which we have stood is no longer firm or safe feeling.

Then incubation, when we can explore our loss, review what resources we have and we try to answer the question 'Where is God?'

Then the final stage of reorganization coupled with reinvestment.

Reorganization, with its issues of adaptation and integration speak of incorporating the loss into our understanding of life, not forgetting our loss, and not getting back to 'normal,' but assessing what life will be like now.

Finding out what the new 'normal' will be.

Reinvestment is taking part once again in all that life has to offer, but differently, because our lives are different and we are different.

They see in the whole process a promise of what is to come.

And they believe, as I believe, that it will be good.

I believe that it is at this last stage that we find Jeremiah in our reading this morning from the first testament.

Judah and Jerusalem were under siege, literally and physically.

A siege that may not feel all that much different that what we have felt in the past few weeks.

With all of its fear and uncertainty and anxiety.

And in the midst of that, what does Jeremiah do?

He makes an investment in the future of Israel, and he buys a **plot of land**.

What an absolutely ridiculous thing to do under the circumstances!

In his particular style, he does it with flair.

There are definite rules for property.

You can't sell to just anyone, because the property in question is linked with the tradition and history of the people who came into the land and had the land divided according to Families.

Jeremiah would belong to a particular family whose property was an essential part of their heritage and their very identity.

So he goes through an elaborate routine, making sure that it is seen.

In today's terms, he provides a photo-op!

And the message is a message of hope, spoken in action on behalf of God.

In the midst of the doom and gloom and destruction he invests in the future.

What is our investment in our future? (pause)

A few things come immediately to mind:

- Last year, we invested in the future when did some major repairs to this building, trusting that there will continue to be a community of faith to gather in it.
- We invested in our future when the Official Board invited Janet Marshall from East Coast Potentials to help us envision what our future could be.
- Many of you gave an investment of time and wisdom as we gathered in small and larger gatherings to ponder our future.
- We invest in our future when we continue to try and live out Jesus' message of love, hope and promise of new life.

But the future won't look like the past.

And our faith enables and challenges us to embrace that future even if it means letting go of what we thought it would be.

I believe that there is a hopeful future ahead of us and I invite all of you to come to the meeting tomorrow night to hear and discuss the Visioning Report.

People and relationships were at the heart of Jesus ministry... People continue to be at the heart of ministry today... Helping each other to find and see hope.

Today, we had a wonderful, symbolic act of hope in the future when we baptized Maya.

A baptism undertaken not out of fear for her soul, but out of love.

An act of faith that there will be a church for her to grow up in.

That there will opportunities for her to grow in faith and in love.

As there will be opportunities for each one of us to grow in faith and in love and a deeper understanding of United Memorial's role in the world in this time and place.

I am closing with these words, which are supposedly written by Mother Theresa, entitled: Do It Anyway.

People are unreasonable, illogical and self-centered.  
Love them anyway!

If you do good, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives.  
Do good anyway!

If you are successful, you may win false friends and true enemies.  
Succeed anyway!

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow.  
Do good anyway!

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.  
Be honest and frank anyway!

The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people with the smallest minds. Think big anyway!

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.  
Fight for some underdog anyway!

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.  
Build anyway!

People really need help but may attack you if you help them.  
Help people anyway!

Give the world the best you have, and you may get kicked in the teeth.  
Give the world the best you've got anyway!

I will add my own: people may think you are crazy to dedicate your time and energy in this place, dedicate anyway!

Thanks be to God for promises of hope and new life even in the midst of uncertainty. Amen.

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