

You’ve likely heard of 16-year-old Greta Thunberg who is a climate activist. Greta says she first heard about climate change when she was 8 years old and could not understand why so little was being done about it. For two years Greta challenged her parents to lower the family's carbon footprint by becoming vegan and giving up flying, which in part meant her mother had to give up an international career as an opera singer. Greta credits her parents' eventual response and lifestyle changes with giving her hope and belief that she could make a difference. Since then Greta has spoken before world leaders at the United Nations and organized youth for climate action; Greta has taken a stand, chosen to do something and is looking to the future.

I mention her because today we hear a message of hope in God delivered through a young Prophet, Jeremiah. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet when he was a tween or young teenager. Like many he resisted God’s call, but the young man received spiritual assurance that God would put the words he needed to say into his mouth and make him a “prophet to the nations.”

Next, the young prophet finds out he has a daunting task. He is to tell the people of Israel that if they do not change their ways, an enemy would come from the north and cause great destruction. So, Jeremiah spends the first 30 chapters of his book of prophecy condemning God’s people for their false worship and social injustice, calling them to repentance. But in Chapter 31 the prophet’s tone begins to change. We hear the story of God pictured as a divine potter, taking ruined pieces of clay and remolding them into a new creation. We hear that God’s covenant, written on tablets since the time of Moses, will now be etched directly into the hearts of all believers.

God’s covenant to love, and save, and forgive, God’s promise to renew people with abundant life, this is etched into their soul and ours. And that is good because in Chapter 32, Israel finds themselves encamped on all sides by an enemy from the north who is much stronger and ready to do great destruction to them.

Jeremiah’s cousin Hanamel comes and says, “Buy my field that is Anathoth, for the right of redemption is yours.” Jeremiah was from Anathoth but his cousin’s field was currently occupied by the enemy. It was worthless. This was exactly the worst moment for such a transaction by Jeremiah. Buying the field would look more like an act of foolishness than an act of hope. But Jeremiah buys the field trusting in God’s promise of restoration for the people after exile.

UCC Minister Kate Matthews writes, “Jeremiah’s purchase is his way of announcing his trust that God will restore the people of Israel. Jeremiah is saying that God, no matter what the appearances are, no matter what the “market” says, is the One in charge.”

Communities, nations, even our personal lives, when we face times that seem impossible we may look for hope by looking back to a time in the past. We may seek to recreate some imagined glory days of yesteryear. Instead, Jeremiah is demonstrating a very Jewish understanding of hope. Jewish people receive hope by remembering God's faithfulness to their ancestors in the past, how they were freed from slavery, how they survived in the wilderness with Moses, how every step of the way God provided for the people as they continued toward a brighter future. Hope was not about going back, it is about looking back to go forward.

When I think of the foresight Jeremiah had to see past that hopeless moment to a land flourishing again someday...my mind goes to a 2018 Documentary film titled, "The Biggest Little Farm." It's about a young couple John and Molly Chester who decide to adopt a dog named Todd which eventually leads to an eviction from their tiny LA Apartment. The couple decides this is the time to fulfill their lifelong dream to build a traditional farm. Traditional Agriculture is an early style of farming that involves the use of indigenous knowledge, traditional tools, natural resources, organic fertilizer and cultural beliefs of the farmers. Traditional farms are created by the diversity of livestock, crops and fruits which internally support themselves.

In the film, The Chester's purchase 200 acres in the foothills of Ventura County California. The land they've chosen, however, is utterly depleted of nutrients and suffering from a brutal drought. The film chronicles eight years of daunting work and outsized idealism as they attempt to create the vision they seek, planting 10,000 orchard trees and over 200 different crops, and bringing in animals of every kind. When the farm's ecosystem finally begins to awaken, so does the couple's confidence.

All along the Couple's vision is repeatedly challenged to the brink of failure. Insect infestations, wild birds which eat the fruit before it can be harvested and sold, coyotes which attack the chickens, then weeds, and fires all seemingly determined to dismantle the Chester's implausible dream. With each one of these challenges the couple does intense research as they continue to live into their hope of having farm and its natural surroundings live in harmony.

As we gather at Emanuel Church this morning, we are a community. A Community of Hope. How can we help each other nurture the ability to see a bright future in dangerous or hopeless moments? What gifts have we been given to help one another through life's pits? How can we grow in trusting God's vision of abundant life when it seems impossible?

As we consider Jeremiah's act to buy that worthless field from his cousin Hanamel, we peek into the times when our Hope becomes buried by fear. We turn to Jeremiah's example; he looks forward, does something and trusts God's promise of abundant life. He is foolishly faithful in a way which aligns him, and all of Israel, with God's promise of abundant life. Lisa Davidson writes, "looking forward instead of backward is a testament to our faith and trust in God's ultimate control and desire for a world filled with peace and justice."

We gather at Emanuel to be renewed by God's promise, to find companions on the journey of faith and hope, and to gather the strength to do something and look forward even when the

signs of life are dim. It is not easy to be a dreamer, as Oscar Wilde said, "A dreamer is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world." Together lets be a community of hope and trust.

Amen