

Sermon for the Third Sunday after Trinity 2020.

Jeremiah 31:10-12. Ephesians 2:11-18. Psalm 119:169-end.
Luke 15:1-10.

The Collect: Lord we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen.

Jeremiah 31:10 ‘Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands afar off; say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.’

This sermon is **not** a political broadcast on behalf of the current coalition government of Israel. But, I do want to ask you to take another look at that verse of Jeremiah, above, and ask yourself whether you could say the same thing as him? If you put ‘1000 signatures against annexation’ into Google, you will find numerous references to petitions against Israel, not only about the proposed annexation of parts of the West Bank/Judea and Samaria, but about many other topics and allegations about the State of Israel. It has been a sad fact of modern history that an anti-Israel industry has arisen. Yet, Jeremiah proclaims to the scattered people of Israel that they will be gathered back to the Promised Land into which they had been planted, and from which the nobles and many others had now been deported to Babylon (circa 597BC).

Last week I put the question about choosing whom we will serve. The ancient people of the God of Israel had to answer that question (Joshua 24:14-15), and St Paul in our reading from Ephesians 2, has to remind the non-Jewish converts to Christian faith that prior to Christ’s cross they were ‘alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise.’ They could not worship beyond the physical barrier in the Jerusalem Temple precincts forbidding non-Jews from going beyond it to offer their sacrifices to God. If they did, it would be on pain of death. Part of that stone warning sign still exists in a Museum. (You can see it here: <https://holylandphotos.wordpress.com/tag/temple-warning-inscription/>). So, back to my question i.e. could you call people to hear the word of the Lord, part of which was to proclaim that the children of Israel would return from exile to the land?

Well, you might have spotted that there are at least two questions here! Let's just stick to the first one as all else follows from this; namely, could you say: 'Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it afar off'. You might say, 'No! I am not a prophet,' 'No! It's irrelevant to me,' 'No! That's someone else's job,' 'No! I don't believe the word of the Lord.' And so forth. I'm sad to report that many of the 'leaders' of the church couldn't say it either. This morning I listened to a 'Thought for the Day' on Radio 4. What a wasted opportunity these 3-minute episodes have become. Worse, they have replaced biblical transparency with platitudes and virtue-signalling about race and the environment. Today it was delivered by a 'priest...' talking about how rare Turtle Doves are and how they were nesting in her churchyard. I guess that this same 'priest...' would **contradict** the plain sense of Jeremiah's prophecies, perhaps choosing to apply them in some way to the predominantly gentile church, but certainly not to the descendants of the pre-exilic nation of Jews.

So, today, I am asking a fundamental question: If you can't believe Jeremiah, whom can you believe? There is a crisis of belief within the hierarchy and laity of the church. The Archbishop of Canterbury won't come out and say that answers to our crises are to be found in Christ and in his faithful words of Holy Scripture. Thy hand O God has guided...

...Thy flock, from age to age;
The wondrous tale is written,
Full clear, on every page;
Our fathers owned thy goodness,
And we their deeds record;
And both of this bear witness:
One Church, one faith, one Lord.

He was given the opportunity to do this on Friday in the Today programme, but yet again failed to point people to the Bible. The Pope fares just as badly. Or, perhaps the media do not support proclamation of scriptural truth (or of true scripture, there are others holy books that don't get proper examination either, for good or ill).

But, if you seek a word of reassurance and of relevance today, as our portion from Psalm 119 says: 'Let my cry come before thee, O Lord: give me understanding according to thy word. Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word.' Believe Jeremiah, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest. This will feed you. **Do not be lazy!!! Do your homework!**

To God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost be glory now and forever. Amen.