

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This morning we are witness to a ***prophetic confrontation*** that occurs when the first Judean exiles have been dragged away 600 miles to Babylon. It is a moment of reckoning when the reality of their circumstances and their future are painfully real and undeniable. The future is bleak, and what lay ahead of them is a frightening nightmare. The two prophets before them ***Hannaniah and Jeremiah suggest futures that lead to very different responses.***

In this bleak moment of recognition the prophet ***Hannaniah seeks to deny*** that bleak reality, saying that their time of bondage will be brief and followed by a triumphant homecoming. Hannaniah's advice suggests, just wait and see; things will resolve themselves in no time. On the other hand, ***Jeremiah***, who has warned the people to repent to avoid these bleak days for more than three decades, ***will have none of Hannaniah's denial.*** He **mocks Hannaniah's** rose colored glasses, emphasizing instead the overwhelming misery they have brought upon themselves, saying essentially, "*Real prophets don't bring such good news. The day the LORD's prophet brings such tidings will be the day God comes Godself to redeem Israel.*"

Jeremiah will send a letter to the first group of captives recommending settling in for the long haul saying,

⁴ Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear

sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷ But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Jeremiah tells them to do this because *the consequence of their not listening to and following the LORD Will leave them in bondage and distress for generations.*

Life often forces us to come to terms with appalling and dire circumstances and events. Sometimes we bring such difficulties upon ourselves – say for example deciding to build a house. Sometimes we simply fall victim to realities beyond anyone’s control: sickness, tragedy, natural disasters. Sometimes the grim situation results from everyone’s shared responsibility – say for example *climate change*; rampant **gun violence** when we fail to properly implement and/or enforce prohibition of assault weapons; *electing leaders who foster war, intolerance, injustice or environmental degradation*; or the **erosion of our social fabric** by becoming more enamored of our technology than our neighbor.

Overwhelmingly **dire circumstances have the power to demoralize or defeat us.** These things happen either *when we live in denial* – Hannaniah’s approach – *or anxiety that paralyzes.* I must admit I have a tendency towards the second. When I was young I was a **world class catastrophizer.** I recall a particular occasion when a clicking in my car’s tire turned into vivid images of me being friendless, unemployed, toothless and homeless in a matter of minutes.

Back in those anxious days a good friend of mine presented a scenario to me. He said something like this:

*“In life we frequently find ourselves crossing a perilous, fast moving river of events with nothing except a slippery log or set of stepping stones between us and being swept away. The suggestion that we will never slip and fall into the raging current is unrealistic; it does happen. **What we do when we fall in is the important thing.** As I see it, on those occasions when we fall into the raging river there are **four responses and a choice.** The **first**, swim against the current with all your might, which inevitably leads to exhaustion and drowning since the river is more powerful than we are. The **second**, tread water. We could do this, but with two results – we are carried further and further from the destination of our journey and eventually we become exhausted and drown nonetheless. **Third**, we can swim with the current, but the results are the same as the second. The **fourth** choice and only option for survival – swim across the current. Identify the river bank and swim towards it. We will surely be carried far from the path of our journey, but we will survive and can walk back up the river bank to the path.*

*Here’s where **the choice** comes in. We get to choose which bank we swim towards. We can swim towards the bank we started on, in which case we are no further along than when we started. Or we can keep our wits about us, and swim towards the bank we intended to reach in which case the river will have been crossed.”*

It occurs to me that both Jesus and St. Paul recognize the peril of the raging river that confront us, and have elected the fourth response and the deliberate choice of continuing towards their destination even in a raging current.

St. Paul identifies the current of this world as a great danger, and his recommendation is not to be carried away by it, but rather

continue in the direction those in Rome have been on, and move towards their destination.

Jesus – who continues this week to address His disciples before sending them out in pairs into the world – likewise advises retaining the integrity of purpose in every encounter. *Recognize those on the path towards your destination and welcome them*, Jesus tells us. You will benefit from their company, whether they be ahead of you in the journey or just beginning their journey.

Of course *Jesus chooses integrity towards His chosen destination Himself*. When confronted with opposition, malice, violence, even death, Jesus does not alter his destination towards His Father's will. He refuses to deny the truth He knows even to save His own life, but continues on with integrity, trusting that His chosen path is the way to Life with the Father.

Jesus is correct of course – *as the resurrection on the third day demonstrates, and He continues to call us to walk that same path of integrity, self-denial and purposeful* action towards real life for the world.

Jesus, Paul and Jeremiah – they all recommend remaining on a purposeful path towards the destination of God's way, whether in the face hatred and opposition, a culture inured in the ways of self-absorption and self-indulgence, or a future of self-imposed captivity.

Let us swim across the current together as God's people towards the solid ground that leads to a God's Kingdom and bright future.

AMEN !!!