

2-18-18 Sermon “A Change is Gonna Come” – Jeremiah 31:31-34

The year is 587 BC. And Jeremiah and the Israelites are longing for the ‘good old days.’

As things stand right now, their enemies the Babylonians have conquered Jerusalem and taken over the Kingdom of Israel. Friends and neighbors are being sent into exile by the hundreds. The Jerusalem Temple has been burned to the ground. All the building blocks of the Israelites’ lives – their home, their political systems, their religious institutions, all their ways of finding meaning in life – are going up in flames around them.

And so, the Israelites start to wax nostalgic. They remember the story of the exodus, how God heard the cry of their ancestors in Egypt and delivered them, out of slavery and into the Promised Land. How their God chose them as his own covenant people, how God cared for them and protected them through the centuries. They remember the golden days of Israel, the years under David and Solomon, when no foreign empire attacking Israel would have stood a chance.

They remember the way things used to be. And then they look at how things are, and despair takes hold. “Who *are* we now?” they ask. “We used to believe that we were God’s people...but now? Has God forgotten us? Abandoned us? Turned against us? Once we had faith that God was in control, but our now lives lie in smoldering pieces around us. Once we trusted that God would save us. Now, can we even *be* saved?”

We know how that feels, don’t we? We, too, can look at the chaos of the world around us and find ourselves longing for what we remember as the ‘good old days.’

Have you felt that way recently? Have you heard friends and loved ones longing for the past? “I remember a time when these pews were full,” one person says. “I remember when our political rhetoric wasn’t so caustic, when it didn’t demonize people.” “I remember when everyone around here knew each other, and people actually stopped to have conversations with their neighbors.”

It’s true that things are not the way they used to be. True that we are living in chaotic, even frightening times. The institutions that we thought sustained us – the fundamental building blocks of our church, society, and nation – are in many ways crumbling around us. Perhaps not quite as literally as the Jerusalem Temple crumbling around the people of Israel, but there is something giving way in our midst, isn’t there? I’d say it’s natural to want to go back to the past. What is it they say, “Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t?”

Yet into this fear, the Prophet Jeremiah speaks a word of hope – *for the future*. “Yes,” he tells his fellow Israelites, “the old world is crumbling. Yes, the covenant is broken, and there is no going back. Yes, things are bad right now, and yes they may be this way for a while.”

“But,” says Jeremiah. “But the days are surely coming when God will make a new covenant with us. The God who brought our ancestors out of Egypt is still present – even here, even now, even in the wreckage around us. It may be a long time comin’, but I know a change is gonna come.”

“Do not consider the things of old,” says the Prophet Isaiah. “The past is not always as rosy as we tend to remember it. Look, God is about to do a new thing. Do you see it? Can you feel it in the wind, can you smell it in the air? Don’t get caught up in the past, in former things,” Isaiah says, “For they cannot even begin to compare to the new thing that God is doing today.”

We think we are longing for the world that has been. But what if that’s not quite right? What if, deep inside of us, inscribed on our hearts, is a little taste of God’s Kingdom, of the world that *will* be? What if the discontent we feel – this sense that the world as-it-is is *not* the world as it should be – is not nostalgia for a rose-colored past, but is rather a deep, spiritual

yearning for God's own indescribable future? What if the world we're longing for is not the world as it *has been*, but the world as it *will be*?

"It's been a long time coming, but I know," sing the prophets, "A change is gonna come."

On Ash Wednesday, we came together to remember that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. That we are human, mortal, limited. That it is God, not us, who is saving the world. And at the same time, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to participate in God's saving activity, to share the grace that God has given us. To live in a way that *anticipates* the Kingdom and salvation that God is bringing into our world.

In faith, we trust that a change is gonna come. And because of our faith, we can choose to live that change today. We live as citizens of the Kingdom of God – right now – even when that Kingdom has not yet fully come.

What might that look like for you? To live the change you long for? What would happen if we let our words and actions point not to the past but to the future, to the *new* covenant? If we let our lives proclaim the 'new thing' God is doing among us, the change that God is bringing

I can't even imagine the full extent of what that might look like for all of us. But I can offer you a little taste of what it might look like for me.

Like many of you, I was overcome with horror and grief when I heard about the mass shooting in a Florida high school this Wednesday that killed 17 people.

Wednesday's massacre alone is enough to bring a nation to its knees. But what's even more heartbreaking is that it did not take place in isolation. Wednesday's school shooting in Parkland, Florida, was the *eighth* school shooting in 2018 *alone* that killed or injured one or more students. And – again, just in 2018, in the last 49 days – it was the *seventeenth* incident of gunfire, by accident or with intent to harm, in our nation's schools.

I know this is not the world as God intended it. *You* know this is not the world as God intended it. *All of us* – from pacifists to military officers, from devoted hunters to devoted vegans – know this is not the world as God intended it.

I trust that God holds the future, that a change *is* gonna come. And as a disciple of Jesus Christ, I am going to try to live that change today. I'm going to advocate for stricter legislation of gun purchases and ownership. I'm going to talk and collaborate with people whose life experience is not like my own – with hunters, veterans and active duty military. I'm going to pray. And I'm going to proclaim, with all that is in me, that gun violence has no place in the Kingdom of God, no place in the world we are longing for.

Friends, our hearts know that the world as-it-is is not the world as God intends it. We know that the days are surely coming when we will *see* the world we've been longing for. Not the world of the past, but of the future. God's future.

We know that the Kingdom is coming, so let's live like that Kingdom is here. Because, in Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God *is* breaking into the world we know, and turning it upside down.

It's been a long time coming', but *we* know...a change is gonna come.

Thanks be to God. Amen.