

Reflection: September 14th, 2025

‘THIS WORLD IS FULL OF HOPE’

I think at one time or another we've all heard or seen stories about towns or villages overseas which have experienced a devastating environmental event caused by industry. One such town is Donora in Pennsylvania. In October 1948 a severe industrial smog event involving a thick and noxious cloud of smoke enveloped the town for several days. The smog resulted in the deaths of 20 people and caused over 7,000 residents to become seriously ill. The Donora smog incident was a pivotal event that brought public and governmental attention to the issue of air pollution and helped spur activism and legislative action for environmental protection. There have of course over the decades been other environmental horror stories, and each one of them has brought about a change in the way we and governments look at how we care for the precious world we share. Within the stories of horror comes a theme of hope. The actions of the different groups of people coming together to restore beauty to previously damaged towns are a bit like the prophet Jeremiah's message, there is a realisation that acknowledging the past could lead to renewal and a brighter united future.

And this is where we join in with the prophet of Jeremiah. Hope is woven through his message as God encourages us to be resilient in the face of difficulties, and hardship as we make a change of direction. When we enable ourselves to do this, and go through the process we open the door for renewal. As we progress through Jeremiah, we uncover a layered understanding of hope that resonates deeply in our experiences and discover our own renewal.

Jeremiah isn't known for holding himself back- he is well known for his deep emotional bond with God and the people of Israel as he speaks about the stark reality of God's judgment. He describes a landscape that's laid waste, a scene of sorrow and desolation. Yet, this is exactly where the seeds of hope are sown – the change of direction so to speak. The imagery of the earth mourning and the heavens being disturbed serves as an intuitive reminder of the interconnected nature of creation and our actions. While all may seem to

be grim, it also implicitly invites us to *take action* – recognise that change is possible we just have to do something so that change occurs.

Jeremiah starts with an announcement – something big, really big is coming, there's going to be a shift, one that will force the people to confront the choices they've made and face the consequences of their choices – it's called accountability. The message, though despite its rather somber tone, ultimately carries with it a hopeful undercurrent. The very act of warning suggests that there's still opportunity to make the necessary changes – there's still hope, all isn't lost. God is just and demanding accountability from them, being patient and gracious is required in this time of waiting. The contrast features a fundamental aspect of hope: the opportunity for change is always open to us, and the flip side is it comes with the promise of restoration.

Jeremiah's lament about the people's lack of understanding and their inclination towards foolishness is a reflection of our tendency to overlook the warning and refusal to take notice of the calls that change is needed. The prophet is quite clear in telling us that when we become so immersed in our own agendas, our particular points of view, we can't see the greater despair of what's happening around us. He reminds us that ignorance often doesn't bring bliss, it often breeds suffering, not just for individuals but for entire communities and nations. Here, hope emerges not solely as passive optimism half-glass-full, but as an active engagement in self-awareness and personal responsibility. The challenge is to be aware of the reality of our choices and their repercussions, urging us to consider how our actions contribute to larger life experiences.

His imagery of the earth's devastation is striking and relative for today, Jeremiah paints a picture of desolation similar to chaos. Yet, contrasted against this chaos is the promise that nature will respond, the seasons will change, and life will find a way to flourish. This cyclical pattern of destruction and renewal serves as an analogy for our spiritual lives. Even when circumstances appear hopeless, we know that through the promises of God there is hope and rejuvenation. God's intention for us isn't to remain in desolation, but rather to flourish and reconnect any brokenness that may

exist between us and God, *that's God's* desire for us. Through the act of reconnection, the idea of hope is intrinsically linked to *our choices and our willingness* to seek a path back to being a full relationship with God again.

When we ponder on our reading for today, we don't think about it in isolation from what's going on in the world around us. We happen to live in an era marked by uncertainty, trouble, and division. Natural disasters, social injustices, and global conflicts can create a heavy sense of despair. Yet, just as Jeremiah spoke to the Israelites during a turbulent time, we too are called to recognise that hope can arise from the ashes. The act of acknowledging our current state – the same way ancient Israel was called to confront theirs can provide pathways towards healing and changes.

Hope requires action; it invites us to adopt a perspective based on faith and resilience, rather than to give up. While despair can lead to paralysis, hope calls us to engage actively with the world. It calls for advocacy, compassion, and a commitment to see things set right not just for one party, but for all involved.

Jeremiah's lament over his people's foolishness serves as a wake-up call to recognise the critical role each of us plays in nurturing hope – not only for ourselves but also for future generations. We are called to be restorers in the relationships between God and God's people. How? By remaining faithful to *all of the teachings of Christ*. Our part in the story is to echo God's promise that a future brimming with potential awaits us if only we commit to reclaiming our collective humanity.

To go a bit further, the importance of community in this process can't be overstated – we continue to meet for worship, fellowship and engage in discipleship. Like the people of Israel who were the prophet's targets our hope and healing lie within the bonds we nurture with one another. We are reminded of the power we have when speaking as one united voice coming together to love and support one another in times of grief or distress. This love and support has the potential to create spaces where hope can flourish.

Nurturing relationships which are built on trust and empathy, we become participants in an environment which nurtures spiritual growth and renewal, reflecting God's intention for the people God created as well as creation itself.

Throughout today's reflection I've attempted to convey the message of hope woven throughout Jeremiah's passage. This hope transcends time, reminding us that even in the depths of despair, renewal is possible. The call to recognise our responsibilities, embrace our community, and engage actively in the work of restoration echoes strongly within our experiences in our time.

Like I've said on previous occasions, hope isn't just a passive state of being; it's an active, living force that propels us toward change, urging us to seek understanding, advocate for justice, and cultivate compassion. Like the Captain of a ship navigating through the open seas from one port to another, we navigate the complexities of life, we can draw strength from the promise that with God, all things can be made new, inviting us to believe that, indeed, this world is full of hope. Amen