

Reflection Jeremiah 31:27-34 ‘Aspiring to Create God’s Perfect and Just World.’

We took a bit of a detour away from what Jeremiah had to say to us last week due to Tate’s baptism, and today, we’ll go back to hear what he has to say to us today. Most of us don’t realise that although he had a lot to say about the exile of God’s people, he didn’t live to see them return. However, that didn’t stop him from having his hopes and dreams of the day when Judah and Israel would be restored. The work of justice is way too big for any one individual, however, that shouldn’t stop any one of us from dreaming of and working towards reconciliation, recognition of those who sit on the edge of communities, or to be involved in communities supporting the vulnerable.

Once more Jeremiah reminds us of a promise from God, as he talks of a time of a great change and a renewal for God’s people. The current world events resonate with Jeremiah’s words as we see a pause in hostilities in the Middel East, the recent pandemic, which still touches our lives, and the complexity of recent elections in different parts of the world. His words lay bare our longing for a perfect and just society, one where the very fabric of our existence is woven with peace and righteousness.

Through Jeremiah we hear God expressing a commitment to instill a new covenant with the people and one which isn’t marked by what’s seen on the outside, but one which is witnessed through an internal change deeply connected to what’s been ‘engraved’ on their hearts. Perhaps that’s the origin of where our saying ‘having a change of heart’ comes from. This intimate connection between God and us is where we can distance ourselves from an authoritarian’s perspective which often fails to accomplish true justice or peace. Instead, it evokes a world where justice comes from the very core of individuals, naturally shaping their actions and thoughts.

The context of God’s covenant (promise) is significant. The prophet Jeremiah was speaking during a tumultuous time for the Israelites, whose identity and stability were continually being challenged. The people he was speaking to were facing exile, oppression, and deep societal divisions. In that kind of environment, the desire for a just and perfect world becomes a desperate plea. It’s an aspiration that echoes right through the annals of history even into today’s world. We pray for conversations about things to change for the

better – we are very good at stating our dissatisfaction when the existing structures no longer deliver our needs with equity or dignity but rarely offer alternative solutions.

When thinking about changes that take place at the end of hostilities, we find ourselves grappling with how things will change. Wars and conflicts fracture communities and instill deep-rooted grievances that take generations to heal. In the face of international difficulties, the longing for a just world can feel unattainable. Yet, Jeremiah's words remind us that peace isn't just the absence of conflict but an internal state of unity. The journey towards healing begins when we commit to reconciling our differences, understanding one another, and building relationships grounded in sharing who we are as God's people.

The world is a bit different this week to last week because it's a little more peaceful – what we hope comes next is the transformative justice that Jeremiah speaks of beginning in the 'heart.' This is where Jeremiah's lessons resonate; a perfect world begins with individual change leading to cooperative harmony. True justice flows from understanding rather than from punishment as well as making a commitment to making better and fairer decisions than those of the past. Such a mindset calls for empathy and the courage to forgive, acknowledging our common struggles and shared hopes and dreams for the common good for all people.

In a similar way, the recent global pandemic challenged our sense of justice and equity like never before. The contrasting impacts of COVID-19 exposed glaring inequalities in health, employment, and security, especially within marginalised communities. Here, too, the prophetic assurance of a new covenant or promise takes on a high degree of importance. God's promise to write God's law on our hearts invites us to think deeply on our personal responsibilities for each other – not to live or operate as silos in a multifaceted and multicultural community. We can ask ourselves what we can do to help in the areas of health, mental health, the disadvantaged, environment, and social justice issues to embrace justice as one of our cornerstones.

Perhaps I can start to form an answer to that question for us here at St Ninian's. My thoughts turn to the long and established social programs that bring men and women together over breakfasts and social activities. My

thoughts also turn to the various clothing and book sales, musical events, Easter and Christmas services, the garage sales, the mid-year sales and the annual fete, and now to the Market@The Meeting Place. All of these missional activities reach out to the community, offering a place where hearts and minds can be changed for the better. A place where healing and spiritual growth has an opportunity not just to be sown but to be well watered and nurtured.

In times of difficult elections, both before and after the result is known, the yearning for a just outcome turns into frustrations as polarisation for one side or the other divides us. The struggle to select representatives who can enact meaningful change often feels unachievable with each election reflecting deeper societal divides. Jeremiah's vision stands as a beacon as he suggests rather than giving in to despair, we may ask ourselves how we can embody the ideals of justice and peace ourselves, in how we converse with each other, and our wider community using the language of forgiveness and grace rather than one of division.

Whilst there is an awareness that this ideal may not be shared by all in leadership across the world, there is still in existence many whose desire is to live in a peaceful and just world, in one which involves each of us committed to our principles, even in the face of disillusionment.

Living in a perfect and just world, as envisioned in Jeremiah, isn't about waiting for us to make external changes, it's heavily concerns pursuing the deeper internal changes within us individually and as a community – one heart, and one mind at a time. It beckons us to embrace the responsibility each of us has in becoming a society where love, justice and peace flourish. As we go about accomplishing this, we can begin to get a glimpse of the fulfillment of Jeremiah's words – a reality where the knowledge of God/Yahweh is as pervasive as the air we breathe. As we strive to manifest these ideals in tangible ways, we participate in the unfolding of God's promise in our lives and of those around us as we go in peace to love and serve the Lord in the name of Christ.

Amen