



CRACKED CISTERNS

Jeremiah 2:4-13
Prophets & Pottery Series
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*My people are guilty of two evils:
They have abandoned Me, the spring of
living waters;*

*And instead, they have settled for dead
and stagnant water
from cracked, leaky cisterns of their own
making. (Jer. 2:13-14).*

Scathing words - spoken by the prophet Jeremiah to Israel just prior to the capture of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians in 586 BC. God indicts the nation of Israel for its failure to live up to the mutual promises that bound them in covenant relationship as partners with God.

It's very tempting for some modern day "prophets" to lift these words and apply them to our nation or someone else's nation.

That would be wrong. First, the covenant relationship that has been breached is between Israel and its God and second we as a Christian congregation know are not a nation among other nations; we are a community striving to follow Christ.

However, like the ancient Israelites, we too understand that we are claimed by a gracious God and that we live in a covenant with God. So, there is something in this text for us.

It's obvious in reading or listening to this text that God is really upset. And God is upset with everyone from the king on down. This is an equal opportunity indictment of all the people of Israel.

We don't like to think about God being upset with us. Israel didn't want to hear it either. God isn't supposed to do that. And yet, when our own children or loved ones disappoint us it hurts us deeply and we are more than likely to say things like: "What did I do wrong? I've put a roof over your head and food on your table. I've bailed you out of trouble. Why didn't you ask me

for help? And one of my favorites - "Actions have consequences."

Our words come from a deep well of love, hurt, outrage, and hope; hope that our words will turn a light on somewhere within those we love, and they will stop turning their backs on us. And so it is with God and Israel; God and us.

As Jeremiah imparts these words from God to the people, the Babylonians have laid siege to the city of Jerusalem. The city is surrounded, cut off from aid and supplies. The once flowing aqueducts, pride of the city, have been stopped by the army of Babylon. The city's water is almost gone; their cisterns are dry and cracked and leaky, not to mention full of old stagnant water.

Water – a powerful image. We know how important water is to life. Without it we die. Water was a part of the story of Israel – God provided water in the desert to some very cranky and bitter people after the Exodus from Egypt. Water is a part of our story – cleansing, life-giving, the waters of baptism, the living water Christ promised the woman at the well.

In Jeremiah's time, the people of Jerusalem are dying of thirst – both literally and spiritually. They have turned from the spring of living water and searched for other things to quench their thirst – gold, status, idols, false prophets, and selfish leaders. Sounds oddly familiar doesn't it?

We live in a culture that tells us we are what we possess and the opportunities to acquire those possessions are as near as our computer or our cell phone. Feeling old – this supplement or this lotion or the latest perfume will fix that. Feeling a bit down –perhaps a new purse (my favorite) or a new phone, or a new outfit, or a new tool, a new car, a new home, a new person –

you can supply the new in your own life. Feeling outraged at the news – Facebook or Twitter can help you express that outrage in seconds.

Our idols may be somewhat different than those of ancient Israel, but they are no more satisfying and just as dangerous when they become more important than our relationship with God.

And then there are the idols of addiction – food, alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, pornography, gambling, games on phones – all capable of numbing that feeling that something is missing. Addictions are truly dangerous.

And we hear God's voice asking, "What have I done to make you abandon me? I have rescued you over and over again. Why won't you remember to call out to me. Turn back before you do something you'll regret. I love you and I will save you."

Jeremiah's word from God is scathing and frankly a bit frightening. These two evils are so frightening that in our haste to cover our ears we overlook two very important words – "My people." In spite of Israel failure, their abandonment of the covenant, God says, "my people" God has not abandoned Israel. God will not abandon us.

How do we keep the covenant – especially when we wander off? How do we keep from being lured by all that glitters on our screen and in our malls? We tell the story.

God gave this commandment to the people of Israel in the book of Deuteronomy 4:5-7.

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength. These words that I am commanding you today must always be on your minds. Recite them to your children. Talk about them when you are sitting around your house and when you are out and about, when you are lying down and when you are getting up.*¹

Jesus great commandment in Mark 12:29-31 comes straight from Deuteronomy: *Jesus replied, "The most important one is Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with*

*all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these."*²

We have the most amazing and exciting story – the Good News of Jesus - and yet, sometimes we either tell it like it is only a magic formula for being saved, or we are afraid to tell it because we might be labeled as weird, or we don't tell it at all.

Today we celebrate together at the table of Jesus Christ. We do that because Jesus asked us to remember – to remember and tell the story. It is a story of resurrection and hope, of the worst that can happen turned into something beyond our wildest dreams. It is a story of love.

The consequences of not remembering and telling the stories are clear in Jeremiah's words – we dig cisterns of our own making – cisterns that hold stagnant water and that leak.

Our stories bind us together. Stories of our faith and our life and our history shape us into a community that cares for one another and God's creation; a community working together to discern God's dream.

It's good to know what God considers evil; to know God's outrage and disappointment when we wander off; and to know God's hope that we will turn around.

That is Jeremiah's word for us today – to know that it is so very tempting to pursue that which does not satisfy; to remind us that even when we do wander away God still calls us "my people;" called to love, and to serve; to build together cisterns that are just and that hold living water for all of creation.

Jeremiah says to us – Remember who you are and whose you are. We follow the One who says: *"Whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life."* (John 4:13-14)³

Ours is to give away that water from the well that never runs dry. That is our story to tell.

REFERENCES

- 1 *Common English Bible Large Print Thinline Editions* (Nashville: Common English Bible, 2011), 176.
- 2 *Common English Bible Large Print Thinline Editions*, 968.
- 3 *Common English Bible Large Print Thinline Editions*, 1016.