

Sermon “Such Times”
Kirk of St James
Sunday August 30th, 2026
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We had an interesting week at the manse this past week—it was Theo’s last week of daycare before going to “big kid school.” All week whenever someone asked him how he was doing he would say, “I am happy and I am sad.” It was clear that he was struggling to reconcile feeling two very different emotions at the same time. It just didn’t make sense to him that he could feel both happy and sad at the same time so eventually, he started saying he was “medium.” It is amazing really that humans can feel so many complex emotions at the same time.

In general, in the Maritimes a good number of people appear to feel “medium” this time of year as they mourn the end of summer and anticipate going back to routines. Although I will confess the current news cycle is leaving me feeling anything but medium. Tariffs, trade wars, name changes and an assortment of other things have been both challenging and exhausting—we are living in complex times.

Jeremiah knew a lot about complex social and political situations. He was experiencing contradictory emotions, where trusting in God and doing what was right, was also becoming a frustrating situation. He was doing everything he was supposed to be doing yet he is suffering for it. When situations like this arise, where suffering feels like it is overrunning us it can bring up the question of theodicy— “the exploration of the reality that in spite of God’s goodness and omnipotence, evil exists” or, to put it in more familiar terms the question, “why do bad things happen to good people?”

There is no way in light of how complicated the question of theodicy is that we could deal with it fully this morning. However, it is something Jeremiah is wrestling with in our scripture reading this morning. I find it helpful to hear Jeremiah's thoughts, and God's response.

Jeremiah was a determined prophet with a difficult calling. His job was to stand in the face of wrongdoing and call people to account. He must look at what is hopeless and then proclaim hope. His ministry spans forty years, and it is full of challenges. One writer said "the prophet Jeremiah confronted a blithe disregard of God in the land. People's heads were in the sand as their world came unglued. They heedlessly nicknamed Jeremiah "Danger-Everywhere," and persecuted him for his prophecies. The prophets suffering amid the conflict is laid bare before the reader in passages such as ours. It teaches us what a dogged orientation on God's work and purpose may cause." It can't be easy for Jeremiah. He feels this call from God in his life, he answers it, and then he also has to suffer for it? He is not impressed with that reality. If he is doing what God wants him to do then he should not have to suffer as well.

We hear his deep and honest frustration come through in this passage. This not just about a bad day where nothing went right. It is about a prolonged period of time where he feels like he is alone and doing this work God asks him to do with absolutely zero thanks for doing it. He implies that God has forgotten him and asks him to remember him. He lists the things he did, and then he also lists the things he did not do. He did not rejoice with the merry-makers, no he sat by himself. Throughout his lifetime Jeremiah is threatened, rejected, forced into hiding, arrested and beaten. He comes by his name the "weeping prophet" quite honestly and to be perfectly honest he has had enough. His cries to God are raw "Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable?" Then he delivers a harsh description of exactly what he thinks of God. "Truly, you

are to me like a deceitful brook.” We don’t see many motivational posters or church vision statements using words quite like that.

It is a biting accusation. Water in the ancient world (as it is today) was a vital commodity. It meant life or death for people, crops and livestock. Jeremiah is implying he thought he had found sustaining life in God but instead of steadily flowing, the waters have dropped and receded—there is not enough here to sustain his life. He feels tricked by God.

While an accusation like that may make some people defensive and angry God does not rebuke his honesty. As one writer pointed out “The text does not suggest that Jeremiah should have kept his doubt to himself, but that God will not let Jeremiah remain there, trapped in his dark night of the soul. In this sense, it speaks a word of grace.” What tangles Jeremiah up is not the fact that he is full of lament or, asking questions, or even his criticism of God. What is problematic is how Jeremiah is coming to view his call. Keeping a running tally of what he is doing right (or in some cases not doing) and focusing on himself and how things are in relation to him. Jeremiah is losing sight of why God has called him. So, when God responds he encourages Jeremiah, and tells him he will support him and not let evil persist over him but, he must turn back to God and the heart of his call.

One other interesting point I came across while reading this week is that Jeremiahs’ suffering is also God’s suffering. God has repeatedly relented from judging his people. God desperately wants people to turn from what is hurting them and embrace what can heal them. It feels almost impossible, to watch someone we love, make choices that we know hurt them—yet we continue to love them. Our hearts ache for them. God feels that way for God’s people. “Whatever we might say about the reality of human indifference, God has never been, and never will be, indifferent toward us.” Jeremiah was keeping a list of all the rights and all the wrongs,

but he had lost sight of the motivation—God’s love for humankind. Jeremiah needed the reassurance that God was there despite all the frustrations and setbacks he was experiencing.

We can likely all relate to the feelings of Jeremiah in our lives. Moments where we feel abandoned, unloved, or forgotten. Moments where it feels like the good in the world is being overrun by the evil in the world. It is okay to lament, and ask questions, and even call God a deceitful brook if we must. To be human is to live in the complexity of our emotions and experiences in light of a God who loves us. Sometimes things will fail, or we will get sick, and things will not go our way. However, just as God promised Jeremiah, “for I am with you to save you and deliver you” those promises still stand for us today.

Friends through the hills and valleys may you know God’s loving presence, and when you don’t may you be surrounded by those who can remind you. When we experience moments of doubt, may God help us to continue to trust and hold on. Even when it feels like evil is over running the world, and greed instead of care for the earth and people are valued. To close today I kept coming back to a scene from “The Fellowship of the Ring,” when Frodo and Gandolf are discussing the danger and burden of the ring. Frodo says, “I wish it need not have happened in my time.” And Gandolf replies, “So do I, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.” May we use the time given us to share God’s love and care for creation and for people as widely and as deeply as possible.