

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Sunday closest to September 28



Proper 21

Year C

RCL

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

Psalms 91:1-6, 14-16

Luke 16:19-31

The Collect

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him.

Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came to me: Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, “Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.” Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the LORD, and said to me, “Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is

yours; buy it for yourself.” Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.

And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says

the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16 Page 719, 720, BCP

Qui habitat

- 1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,
 abides under the shadow of the Almighty.
- 2 He shall say to the LORD,
 “You are my refuge and my stronghold,
 my God in whom I put my trust.”
- 3 He shall deliver you from the snare of the hunter
 and from the deadly pestilence.
- 4 He shall cover you with his pinions,
 and you shall find refuge under his wings;
 his faithfulness shall be a shield and buckler.
- 5 You shall not be afraid of any terror by night,
 nor of the arrow that flies by day;
- 6 Of the plague that stalks in the darkness,
 nor of the sickness that lays waste at mid-day.

- 14 Because he is bound to me in love,
 therefore will I deliver him;
 I will protect him, because he knows my Name.
- 15 He shall call upon me, and I will answer him;
 I am with him in trouble;
 I will rescue him and bring him to honor.
- 16 With long life will I satisfy him,
 and show him my salvation.

Luke 16:19-31

Jesus said, “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner

evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house – for I have five brothers – that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

SERMON

Overheard at Kroger some years ago:

First Old Man: How you keepin', Luke?

Second Old Man: Still buying green bananas...

It took me a second to understand what he was talking about, but then I got it. Buying green bananas is a testament to hope, like planting a tree, only on a shorter time scale. You are stating your hope that you will be around to eat the one and to weed eat around the other. Children are like that. They are our expression of hope that this crooked old world will be around and inhabitable for them to discover it for themselves, and hopefully to tend it more wisely than we have.

That's the inspiring thing about us naked apes: we just WILL continue buying green bananas, even though we know that, eventually, we're going to get plowed down by a bus and it could be today. We keep planting

trees, even though we won't live to see them grown, and we baptize babies, even though the future looks just awful what with shopping malls being blown up and crazy people with guns shooting at random people and actual governments using poison gas, POISON GAS, to kill children. It's enough to lead you to buy your bananas ripe and one at a time!

But we don't. We are people of senseless hope, animals of boundless optimism. I was listening to a physicist on NPR this week. (I do that for you so you won't have to.) He said that the universe LOVES chaos. Physicists call it "the law of increasing entropy". Entropy means disorder, and the universe LOVES disorder. If you organize a bit of the universe over here, it is a law of nature that somewhere else things get disorganized. If you build a sand castle on the beach, organizing the sand into a structure, even though nobody kicks

it down and the waves don't overtop it, it will eventually fall down and rejoin the random chaos of the beach. It's a law of the universe like the law of gravity, or the law that says "No matter where you sit on the couch, the TV remote is on the other side". It's inescapable. This is the reason, the physicist said, that no matter how often you clean off that clutter from your desk, it all comes back. The universe LOVES chaos, but we, poor sheep, keep cleaning off our desks anyway because that is what we bring to an empty, lifeless universe. We bring optimism! We bring creativity! We buy green bananas!

Which, oddly enough, brings us to Jeremiah and the troubles in Jerusalem some six hundred years before Christ. Jeremiah was not a happy camper, and he is sometimes called the "weeping prophet", but all three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Islam and Christianity,

count him a prophet of God. He wept because the message he was given by God to deliver to his people was so impossibly sad. In summary, it was this: give up.

He began to prophesy as King Josiah began to turn the country back to the worship of God. Under Josiah's grandfather and father, that had not been the case. The country had adopted Assyrian ways and gods and the whole thing was a mess and stayed that way for more than half a century. Josiah came to the throne at the ripe old age of 8! and, while still less than 30 he began to return the country to the worship of God. Then, a bad thing happened. Pharaoh Necho of Egypt killed Josiah at Meggido which is also, alarmingly, where we get the word "Armageddon".

Judah then went through a series of kings, sons of Josiah, and the reforms of Josiah got more and more removed while the worship of other gods became more

and more prevalent. That's when Jeremiah began to weep, for Jerusalem was threatened by Babylon and the message he was given to speak was this: "Give up. The Babylonians are the agents of God, sent to punish Jerusalem for turning away from the reforms of Josiah."

Let's imagine a contemporary prophet who announced that the western countries should give up and surrender to Al-Qaida, who had been appointed by God as His agent to punish us for our turning from God. Let's imagine what might happen to such a prophet. Now imagine what might happen to such a prophet in 7th century Judah where there was no Bill of Rights. Yeah, all of that happened to Jeremiah, but that is not why we call him the weeping prophet. Jeremiah did not weep for himself. He wept for his poor city and his poor people. Jeremiah's tears were not tears of self-pity. They were the tears of one who loves, one who sees his

beloved city doing very wrong, one who has been given the task of telling them so, and also telling them of the correction that would come.

Weeping Jeremiah was not hopeless Jeremiah, though. The message he was given was one of correction, but not destruction. There was light at the end of the tunnel, and Jeremiah was given that message as well. In the shadow of calamity, Jeremiah bought green bananas.

The Lord spoke to me in the tenth year that Zedekiah was king of Judah, At that time, the Babylonian army had surrounded Jerusalem, and I was in the prison at the courtyard of the palace guards. Zedekiah had ordered me to be held there because I told everyone that the Lord had said:

“I am the Lord, and I am about to let the king of Babylonia conquer Jerusalem.”

Later, when I was in prison, the Lord said: Jeremiah, your cousin Hanamel ... will visit

you. He must sell his field near the town of Anathoth, and because you are his nearest relative, you have the right and the responsibility to buy it and keep it in the family.

Hanamel came, just as the Lord had promised. And he said, “Please buy my field near Anathoth in the territory of the Benjamin tribe. You have the right to buy it, and if you do, it will stay in our family.”

The Lord had told me to buy it from Hanamel, and so I did.¹

He’s sitting in jail, his city is being besieged, the Lord has told him the Babylonians are acting with His permission to punish his city, and he buys green bananas! He invests his money in a future that he trusts will be there. We, poor sheep, bring optimism to an empty, lifeless universe. We bring creativity! We baptize children!

Why do we do such crazy things? Why did

¹ Contemporary English Version

Jeremiah involve himself in land speculation while he was in prison in a doomed city? Even though the entire universe is in love with chaos, why do we build houses and start families and plant trees for other people to sit beneath? Is it not God-within-us crying out joyously that though the powers of darkness fill the universe, we are the light of optimism, we bring the light of hope, we are the loving brightness which casts out all darkness? We and our children are God's green bananas buyers!

And so, this Sunday, we once again call forth the light of our hope in a future we cannot see and will not live to experience. We undertake to baptize a child. The Book of Order explains infant baptism in this way:

In Jesus Christ, God calls people to faith and to membership in the Church, the body of Christ. Baptism is the visible sign of that call and claim on a human life and of entrance into the membership of the church. The baptism of children

witnesses to the truth that God's love claims people before they are able to respond in faith.

Think about that! God's love claims people before they are able to respond in faith. God told Jeremiah to buy the land to keep it in the family, knowing that there would still BE a family when they returned from exile. The law of increasing entropy may be a law of nature, but God's will is that we continue, and we can do that, if we'll listen to Him, for did he also not instruct Jeremiah in these words?

“For surely I know the plans I have for you”, says the Lord, “plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”²

AMEN

² Jeremiah 29:11

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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