

“Unraveled: When Dreams Unravel”
Jeremiah 29:1-7

I saw this recent social media tweet about teaching in 2020: “Admin in 2020: please be prepared to teach online, in person, both simultaneously, on a moving train, while juggling, in a burning building, under the sea, during a wrestling match with a T-Rex, as a hologram, riding a unicorn. Also be safe and we value you.” That pretty much sums up the challenges of 2020 with the coronavirus. Flexibility and adaptation are the norms of our time. And so here we are worshipping in a parking lot. We never even imagined such a thing just a few months ago!

When our visions and dreams unravel, we are guided by the Spirit of God to adapt and to change so that new dreams and visions continue to emerge. This is the message the prophet Jeremiah gave to his people when their dreams unraveled. Throughout the Bible, we hear God's messengers saying the same thing: "Do not be afraid!" No matter what the circumstances of your life might be, stay focused on love instead of fear. That seemed to be the message which Jeremiah gave the people of Israel at a time of great fear. Jeremiah was a prophet in the southern part of ancient Israel. His time of prophesy was one of the most difficult periods of the history of the people of Israel. This was their coronavirus-type moment: A time of great fear and unraveling. The Northern Kingdom was taken by the Assyrians and then the Babylonians. In the year 597 BCE the Southern Kingdom of Israel fell also to the Babylonians. They did not pay their taxes, so the Babylonians decided to send their troops to Jerusalem and they took the elite of Israel into Babylon: the priests, the prophets, the artists, the learned, and the leaders. Ten years later, the whole city of Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed and the rest of the people were exiled into different countries. During the first wave of exile (597 BCE) Jeremiah was not among this group of elites. Jeremiah was from a small town and from the tribe of Benjamin which produced King Saul. Jeremiah had tried to make it as a prophet in Jerusalem, but he was not well received by the leadership in Jerusalem. He was in fact seen as a traitor. He was rejected, beaten, imprisoned, and tortured by the leaders. He was once thrown in a muddy cistern. They did not like his words of judgment on them for their infidelity to God's justice. When the exile took place, he had a message of hope for them. Some prophets were trying to get them to think that they were going back to Jerusalem very quickly. But Jeremiah was their Doctor Fauci. He did not want them to live with that illusion. Life was not going to go back to normal any time soon. What they had to do was embrace their current situation by focusing on love. He told them this:

“5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

He invited them to love their neighbors and their new country. This was the last thing they would have wanted to do. These people were their enemies and the situation they found themselves in was the last thing they would have wanted to happen. And yet, that was

exactly why they needed to learn to love their neighbors and to adapt to their new life. The choice they had left was that of hope and of love instead of anger and hate. Even though the exile was a bitter experience for them, they needed to continue to grow and to be a witness to God's love in their new reality. In fact, the new reality was to them the wakeup call they needed to remember and refocus on their original mission as the people of God. They were not chosen so that they could live as a separate people isolated from others. They were chosen to be a blessing to others. They were blessed to be a blessing. Their wellbeing depended on the wellbeing of all the other people around them. They could choose to be bitter, angry, and hateful of the Babylonians or they could choose to be the people of God who show and live love no matter where they are. They could choose to let fear and anger define them, or they could choose to let God's love define them.

The same message is here for us today. We are learning to navigate the new normal. We are continuing to love, worship, connect, and serve in new ways. We are not always comfortable doing this, but we are finding our way. I give thanks today that our community is not defined by a building, a style of worship, a slick production, or an attachment to what is comfortable. We are waking up once more to focusing on our deep connection to God, to others, to the earth, and to ourselves. I think there is a great example here for us personally and as a community. When our dreams unravel, we need to stay focused on our relationships with God, with self, with others, and with the earth.

One book that came to my mind about this kind of adaptation is *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. There is a chapter in it about becoming indigenous to the land. Kimmerer who is Native American, has a lot of wisdom to offer us about inhabiting this moment and becoming comfortable with where we find ourselves. She offers the wisdom of Native American elders who see the problem of those new to this land as this, "The problem with these new people is that they don't have both feet on the shore. One is still on the boat. They don't seem to know whether they're staying or not." And so the invitation is to have both feet on the ground and to accept the new realities for what they are and to stay focused on what is life giving. Kimmerer writes about learning to become indigenous to the land by learning to, "to throw off the mind-set of the immigrant. Being naturalized to place means to live as if this is the land that feeds you, as if these are streams from which you drink, that build your body and fill your spirit. To become naturalized is to know that your ancestors lie in this ground. Here you will give your gifts and meet your responsibilities. To become naturalized is to live as if your children's future matters, to take care of the land as if our lives and the lives of all our relatives depend on it. Because they do."

The key is focusing on our relationships with God, self, the land, and others around us in this moment as it is and not as we wish it to be: Living each day inhabiting each moment instead of trying to kill time or to get past this experience. There is so much that could happen for our dreams if we learn to connect more deeply to God, to ourselves, to the earth, and to our neighbors. Our invitation is to grow new roots in this new time in which we find ourselves.

Look around you! Let the sky, the trees, or your neighbors inspire you today to know that even as our dreams and plans have unraveled, new dreams and visions are possible. Take a moment to pray for the people to your right and then another moment to listen to the sounds or of nature around us and hear what they are telling us about God in this moment. Pray and work for the fulfilment of new dreams that are born of the Spirit of God in each one of us. Amen.