

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

“Let’s Buy a Field”

Preached 10/2/2016 at St. Andrew’s UMC

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar. 2 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, 3 where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Zedekiah had said, “Why do you prophesy and say: Thus says the Lord: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it;

6 Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me: 7 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.” 8 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.

9 And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. 10 I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. 11 Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; 12 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. 13 In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, 14 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. 15 For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

Where is the worst place you can think of to buy real estate right now? Aleppo? Afghanistan? How about one of the four African nations where the Boko Haram insurgency is taking place?

2,600 years ago the suburbs of Jerusalem would have made your list. Jerusalem was under a siege that left the city without adequate food or water. What's more, God's own prophet was saying that resisting the siege was useless and that God himself was behind the desolation brought by the Babylonians.

But that was never the end of God's word through Jeremiah. Part of Jeremiah's purpose in God was to pluck up and pull down, to destroy and overthrow. But the end game of God through Jeremiah was to build and to plant. And so in the midst of being under arrest in Jerusalem, a family matter came to Jeremiah. A plot of family land had come up for sale. It was in a town just outside of Jerusalem. This meant that it was in

the worst neighborhood possible. At least Jerusalem still had its walls to protect her. Anathoth was open and controlled by the invaders. Under these circumstances the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah and said, "Buy it!"

As sure as Jeremiah was about the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah was equally as sure about the promise of God to restore that same land. From the start, all of God's actions toward Jerusalem were for the purpose of restoring her, and never punishment alone. Jeremiah reiterated this conviction a few verses earlier in Jeremiah 29:11 (NRSV) *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.* For Jeremiah to purchase this plot of family land was a piece of performance art. The purchase was a witness, a demonstration of trust and belief. It wasn't just prophetic speech, it was a prophetic act. Jeremiah himself might not ever get to move into the land, but he knew the day would come when people would flourish in their own houses and by their own fields under the hand of God.

St. Andrew's is by no means under military siege. We have a host of vibrant ministries taking place here. And yet, we have our challenges. I once plotted the 1969 membership of St. Andrew's on a map. It looked like a grape cluster with membership tightly packed around this neighborhood. But with the prosperity enjoyed by our membership through the decades, the physical location of where we all live has become much more diffuse and spread out, making it more and more difficult to attend and participate.

Changes in society have altered how people view and interact with the church. Attendance is down across all denominations. There are still exceptions in particular congregations. But by and large the church herself is only growing in Africa and Asia. More and more North Americans have no religious preference. Even those still loyal to their home congregations participate differently than we once did. People join Bible studies outside their church. People give time and resources to missions outside their church. Even St. Andrew's engages in non-United Methodist missions before we support our own United Methodist missional apportionments. I'm not saying that's always a bad thing. I'm just saying that we play golf on a lot of different courses these days where a generation ago a golfer played almost exclusively at one club. Moreover, a generation ago an active family might have missed church a half-dozen times a year, now we think a family is active if they come even half the time.

I could list scores of other trends. I could even take some responsibility on the church's behalf for us having lost our theological edge in favor of having good feelings, for having consumerized the church, or for losing our love for the least, the last, and the lost. I could also mention how our very building manifests the stresses of her people. There were a lot of days this summer when we didn't think the A/C was cutting it. But all I really want to say is that it's not 1958 anymore. So St. Andrew's, like most other congregations, not all but most, is dropping in attendance.

In light of this current climate, our church leadership has not become despondent, but rather our church leadership has become motivated. That alone is a

sign of health. The leadership (Ad Council chair, Finance Chair, Trustee Chair, Lay Leader, SPRC chair, delegate to Annual Conference, Stewardship Chair, and others) has suggested that we embark upon a comprehensive stewardship journey for the next 7-8 months. Typically we talk about financial giving in October, turn in pledge cards, and go about our ministries. But your leadership has gotten bold. We think that now is the time to buy a field like Jeremiah.

Now is the time to claim this part of the block between Emerywood and Archdale as a witness to God's promise to save the world through Jesus Christ. That which we will dedicate in the next month, and in the next year, isn't just for our own benefit, it's for the benefit of generations. It's for the benefit of our community. We, like Jeremiah, might not even live long enough to see it's fulfillment. But our faith is larger than our own lives, and larger than our own desires. Our faith is in what God is doing. And God is calling for us to make a token of his promises manifest on this block.

Over the next 7-8 months we will center our efforts around the theme of "Remember and Renew." Our prayers, our mission, our giving, our very building will reflect the theme of "Remember and Renew." We will remember God's promises and God's action in Scripture. We will remember God becoming flesh in Jesus Christ. We will remember our first love. We will remember our forebearers in faith. We will remember our Methodist heritage. We will remember the many blessings of St. Andrew's. We will remember what it means to be called of God into the church.

We will remember so that we might renew: renew our faith, renew our hope, renew our love, renew our relationships, renew our neighborhood, renew our families, renew our giving, renew our commitment, renew our knowledge of Scripture, renew our prayers, renew our building, renew the gifts we've been given for ministry, renew those who need God's blessing and Good News.

Today I've talked about the concept. Particulars will come later. In fact, we're still figuring out the particulars. Your church leadership rightly responded to the Spirit's leading only to get started. It will take all of us to finish this part of our journey. Part of the particulars will be asking you to testify, to remember God's work in your life on video so we can share it. We will be asking you to pray. We will be asking you to give. We will be asking for you to offer your gifts for ministry. We will be asking you to commit. We will be inviting you to renew your faith.

We will Remember and Renew to buy this field between Archdale and Emerywood in the name of the Lord, if not for ourselves, then for the next generation. Jeremiah was right. The Babylonians went away. Jerusalem was restored. You can even visit there today. God was faithful. God is faithful, and now is the time to make our prophetic act, to make our witness, to do something that only makes sense if God is alive, loving, and faithful. Let's buy a field. Remember and Renew.