

Sermon for November 8, 2020
Stewardship Sunday (Year A)
Sermon Text: Jeremiah 32: 1-15
Sermon Title: *In Gratitude for All God's Blessings*

PRAYER OF INVOCATION: Lord, the events of this year swirl around us. We are in the throes of a pandemic, the fires of racism are flamed in our cities, and our economic future is uncertain. Come near us this morning Lord that we might feel your presence; remind us once more of your covenant with us that stretches back thousands of years. Let us feel the gift of your son Jesus in our hearts that we might go forward into the future where we will once again work with you to pass on a better world to the generations which follow. Amen.

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION: Holy Spirit, come. Come as Holy Wind, and cleanse us from within; come as Holy Truth, and dispel our ignorance; come as Holy Light, and illumine us; come as Holy Fire, and burn in us; come as Holy Life, and dwell in us.

This situation is dire. Judah and its capital of Jerusalem are being besieged by king Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian armies. The future of the people is bleak. Blood is flowing through the streets, and there is nothing the people can do about it. Many of them will be killed or captured and sent into exile in a foreign country. And yet it is at this time of pain and doubt and violence that the Word of the Lord comes to the prophet Jeremiah, prophet of Judah. It is a word of hope. The Lord tells Jeremiah to buy a field during the siege. *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.*

There's a saying attributed to Baron Rothschild, an 18th-century British nobleman and member of the Rothschild banking family, "the time to **buy** is when **there's blood in the streets.**" Rothschild subsequently made a fortune buying in the panic that followed the Battle of Waterloo against Napoleon. Not much has really changed. This practice of buying up property during social or economic unrest has made people very rich in contemporary times; profiteers made loads of money when people lost their homes in the 2008 recession, and currently are still doing so because of

the pandemic. *When there is blood in the streets, buy property* is a pretty cynical statement, but it's interesting that the idea of investing in the future during difficult times comes from the prophet Jeremiah and from God.

The difference is that it's not cynicism behind the Word of the Lord that comes to Jeremiah; it's hope. It's not about making a few people rich, it's about the people who are in exile returning to reclaim the land and to flourish in it. When Jeremiah buys the field he is trusting in God's word; it's a financial risk to be sure, but he is certain that God is investing in God's people.

The prophet makes clear that God's richest blessing is not just spiritual; it has a material or economic side as well. That's why it is so important for us to trust God with our fields and with our money. And that brings us to today, a day which the church recognizes as stewardship Sunday.

In the last few weeks you have heard reports from Don, Ed, Mary, and Nick outlining how this congregation has given money, time, and talents in the past year. This is a strong church in so many ways, and generous beyond measure. So perhaps I should just say thank you and say Amen.

The theme that was chosen for our stewardship season is *In Gratitude for All God's Blessings*. I love the way the "A" in the theme is capitalized.

When I was working on this sermon this week, we still didn't know who would be the President of the United States for the next four years. It has been a nail-biting time, around the world. However, the more I more I thought. I realized that God's Kingdom goes on regardless of what happens in the kingdoms of the world. Now, more than ever, it is important that we say clearly the Kingdom which gets our first loyalty.

A pastor once visited with a church member who had just come out of surgery. The church member was still in recovery when the pastor arrived and was a little groggy. When the member opened his eyes, he said: *"Where am I, and who are you?"* The minister took the member's hand and replied: *"I'm the pastor, and you're going to be just fine."* *"Oh, yes,"* the member replied, *"Just put me down for the same thing as last year."*

This is a humorous example, but there is a serious point being made. Your giving should never be linked to the pastor, or even to the church. Your giving is your response to God's love and the costly gift of salvation that God made to us in the life of God's son – Jesus Christ. Your money is a gift of gratitude because God has invested in you. Heavily. And with blood.

Stewardship is a spiritual discipline. It's all about *our need* to give, and the faith and the joy that comes from that giving. I've seen churches where people have withheld their pledges because they didn't like the pastor or disagreed with the color being chosen for new pew cushions. Those individuals are spiritually immature, only willing to give on their own terms. They're not willing to trust that God will take their money and their commitment and turn them into something they cannot yet see. God tells Jeremiah to invest in the plan that God has for this world. It's God's message to us as well. Trust God. Fear not.

I know several people who have been through bankruptcy and foreclosure. It's horrible, no doubt about it. A woman who had gone through the process told another couple who were waiting for foreclosure: *"You're still alive, you're not in jail, and you have your health. Put money in perspective."* Those who have lost everything know firsthand that money is fluid – it passes through and it passes on. And you know the old Irish saying: *"A shroud has no pockets."*

God is a demanding God who has given us everything; God doesn't want competing loyalties. It's all or nothing. In the gift of Jesus, God invested in us, believing that we could thrive. Jesus coming to us was God's way of buying property when there was blood running in the streets. God gave us light to shine in the darkness. God bought into the future. Jeremiah's buying of the field and God sending Jesus to be with us were interventions into a world that looked pretty bleak. This intervention is the example of how we should live in this world. Invest as Jeremiah invested. Invest as God invested. Where there is darkness shine light by your hospitality, generosity, and faith.

Jesus talked a lot about money when he was here in the flesh; in fact, he talked more about money than faith, sexuality, or even prayer. Perhaps that's because God recognizes how vulnerable we are before material possessions and wealth.....how easy it is to let them determine our value and purpose. God asks us to invest in things that we many not live to see. We don't know how God will

use this church and our gifts, including benevolences, to awaken and nurture faith and to reach out to those in our community and to future generations through ministries that have been started right here at South Plains. It's our turn now. To buy into the promise. Despite all the turmoil that is swirling around us.

As Christians we have a distinct identity. Even our hard-earned money belongs to God. We don't wait to see how much we can spare. We give first fruits to God. Pray about your giving this next year. Set your mind with the decision to grow in spiritual discipline and place more of your treasure at the door of God's Kingdom. And your heart will follow. Amen.