

“Home Away From Home”
Jeremiah 29:1-7; 2 Timothy 2:8-15
Rev. David Hutchinson
Sunday, October 13, 2019

Years ago I heard a shocking story.

It was shocking because of the ending. / That is - - it didn't end well.

And I think Paul's letter to Timothy - - helps us understand why it's so shocking.

The New Testament reading for today - - is about words. / Words and how we use them: Are our words intended to - - shock? / Or are our words intended to explain - - or to pacify - - or to help - - or to hurt?

Our words - - and the words we hear all around us - - matter.

And so - - if YOU have ever think about these things, maybe you'll be interested.

The shocking STORY I heard - - told by Tom Long - - goes like this:

“Once upon a time there was a man with a clock. / He lived in a small village – and his home was humble - - and his life was simple - - and yet - - he was a collector of very FINE clocks. / He would travel for miles away from home to collect them - - and people would come from miles around to look at these clocks.”

No clock was more magnificent - - than his “Angel Clock”.

“It was a very old clock - - and no one knew how it was created. / Its base was fine silver - - and the face had precious jewels - - and the ANGEL on the top - - was made of pure gold!

Each hour on the hour it played music - - so sweet and so lovely - - that people believed that it was actually - - the very music of heaven.”

One night while the man was sleeping - - a THIEF entered his home - - and when the thief left - - he was carrying with him - - only ONE thing...

It was - - - - the ANGEL CLOCK!

The end.

Shocking right? / What's shocking is to hear: "the end"

We expect this story to behave - - like a proper story - - and resolve.

We expect a fairy tale - - BECAUSE - - the nature of the SPEECH - - and the way it is TOLD - - are that of a fairy tale. / It is told like a story - - so we expect a story.

And it is a bit of a shock - - when there is no happy ending.

No ending at all - - really...

But now - - try listening to the same series of events - - told another way:

"St. Helens police reported yesterday that one William Archer, a local resident and collector of antique clocks, was the victim of a burglary on Tuesday night..."

The thief apparently entered the home while Archer was sleeping.

Only one item was reported missing, a valuable clock.

Other clocks and valuables were not disturbed.

"I'm particularly sad to lose that one", Archer said, when he was reached by telephone. / "It was what I call my "angel clock" - - referring to the gold figure of an angel - - which was a feature of the stolen clock.

Investigator Bowman of the St. Helens police department, who is in charge of the case, expressed optimism that it could be recovered. "It should be easy to trace" he said.

Anyone with information about this chiming clock is asked to contact Bowman.

However, police sources report that there are no suspects, and no leads, and the clock remains missing at the present time.

This second time through - - it's not shocking at all.

You could almost DOZE off - - while listening to poor Mr. Archer's misfortune.

Which we probably all have done - - while listening to yet another robbery or car accident report on the evening news.

The news - - no matter how shocking - - has stopped shocking us.

We are used to it.

Newspapers don't have plots - - and resolution - - they have life.

And life is just - - like that.

Or is it?

Is it possible to - - reengage with our lives?

Is it possible to regain some of our sense of shock - - for what is shocking.

Is it possible - - that our faith - - could help?

As we kick off our annual Stewardship campaign - -

can we re-engage for the year ahead?

As Nancy and I prepare to make our pledge, we are excited about Plymouth!

We have great things happening - - and great people here.

One thing that can help with our reengagement - - and to strengthen our conviction - - is the words of faith from our scripture readings for today.

For example - - the second letter to Timothy - - our New Testament reading for today - - draws a distinction between - - everyday words - - and words of faith.

And THAT distinction - - I believe - - DOES help.

Timothy says there is one kind of speech which he calls “chatter”.

This kind of speech involves disputing and arguing.

And then - - there is another kind of speech - - faith speech.

Or the word of God.

Or to put it another way, there is the NEWS - - and there is “the old old STORY”.

There is gossip - - and there is the Gospel.

There is reality - - and there is hope.

Paul describes this distinction in the letter to Timothy.

But I think it’s very difficult for us to make it some times....

Because - - there is so much bad news all around us - - and so many voices that are constantly TRYING to shock us. / There are reports of tragedies and violence.

Bad weather and bad politics.

There are advertisements and arguments.

That’s what they should call the cable news shows:

Arguments and advertisements.

All this wrangling with words.

And it is possible to get - - depressed - - or apathetic - - or to want to escape.

But Timothy holds out the hope - - that the distinction is still possible to make.

We can still discern - - between what he calls “chatter” - - and God’s Word.

And that distinction - - strengthens our own faith convictions.

It is a reason for our stewardship.

But - - to be lost in it all - - and depressed or apathetic - - is understandable.

AND - - THAT - - is where I think the people of Israel are - - in this morning's Old Testament reading from the prophet Jeremiah. / They have become lost in the chaos. / And they are either depressed or apathetic or hopeless.

They are surrounded by bad news. / They are lost in tragedy. / They are in exile in a foreign land - - housed in internment camps. / And there is a lot to be afraid of for them.

And similar to Timothy - - Jeremiah ALSO reminds them to beware.

Beware of FALSE WORDS.

So - - is there any similarity between their situations - - and ours?

We are not in chains like Paul - - nor in exile like the people in Jeremiah's time.

But - - - there are challenges in our lives too.

The church faces an uphill struggle in this culture.

People of good will - - who want the best for everyone - - can feel isolated.

And the shocking nature of public speech - - can make us feel HOMELESS.

Not - - physically homeless - - like people in exile.

But spiritually homeless - - like people who don't know where - - or if - - they fit in anymore - - in this crazy world.

Do you remember where you were when you heard about 911?

Or that the space shuttle blew up?

Or that hurricane Katrina had hit?

How about the most recent mass shooting?

Does anyone even remember which one was the most recent?

Or the most recent hurricane?

The chaos seems to be - - increasing. / Right?

It used to be that in times of tragedy - - we came together.

There was a sense of - - being at home - - together.

Lately - - I'm not so sure.

Does the - - proliferation of shocking speech - -

- - make us feel LESS at home in the world?

Well - - what did the people of Israel do?

What did Jeremiah tell them to do?

Answer: to build homes.

Surrounded by chaos and bad news - - homeless in exile - - Jeremiah says it:

Build homes NOW - - while you are homeless.

This might be a long haul ahead.

Things are not going to change over night.

YOU might not even see the end of it. / But do it for your children.

Have hope in the future - - for the generations yet to come.

In Psalm 137 it says that - - by the rivers of Babylon - - the people sat down - -
and they wept - - when they remembered Zion.

They remembered their home land - - and wept.

How long would it be - - before they would really feel at home again?

How long will it be before WE feel at home?

In our country - - our church - - our family?

Have you ever felt this way - - or wondered this?

Jeremiah says - - have faith for the long haul.

Jeremiah said: build homes - - while in exile.

Some people said he was - - unfaithful - - for being realistic.

But if God is really God - - the end is NOT in doubt.

The only thing that is in doubt - - is the TIMING.

And we do NOT know God's timing.

But we DO know - - God's heart.

And we know we are TRULY at home - - with God.

I am reminded of a story by Garrison Keillor called "Storm Home".

Keillor begins by asking what we are afraid of.

Childhood fears - - can linger - - maybe to this very day.

Keillor says that when he gets scared about his life and the world - - he thinks back to something that happened to him in 7th grade. / Winters were harsh in Minnesota, and at the beginning of the school year - - each of the kids who lived in the country - - and rode the bus into town - - were assigned a home in town - - called their "storm home". Your "storm home" was the place in TOWN where you could go if there was a blizzard and the busses could not run - - and take you to your home in the country.

Each kid got a slip of paper: "your storm home is..."

Mine was the Kruegers - - he remembers.

It was a beautiful place. / I used to walk by it, and look it over. / A little garden. / It was the kind of house - - that would be in a story - - with a happy ending.

Looking at the "storm home" I knew I was lucky to be in THIS story.

And to have the Kruegers waiting for me.

I dreamed of going to see them - - whenever things got tough.

A blizzard wasn't the only storm a kid had to face growing up.

And so I dreamed of going there...

She would come to the door and say, "Oh it's you - - our storm child".

We would sit and talk and eat cookies.

"Looks like this storm might last a while..."

Yes.

They say it will get worse - - before it gets better.

But - - we're glad you're here!

Look our storm child is here - - in the flesh!

Keillor says he never did actually go there.

But his troubles were more bearable - - because of his storm home.

Jeremiah urges us to find our storm home too.

Don't wait.! Live your life now! That's Jeremiah's advice.

Build for the future now!

You can support the church, you can volunteer for work on the Habitat for humanity house, you can send a card or pray and care for someone else. Now!

And all of it - - we do as an act of hope!

Don't wait until you are ready to die - - to be born again.

Don't wait until - - whatever - - to try to make a home in this world.

Plymouth Church IS our "storm home" our faith home - - in a world of storms.

Nothing - - no matter how shocking - - stops God from loving you.

Nothing else - - no matter how seemingly endless - - has the last word.