

14 March 2007
Lent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Hope for Today . . . and Tomorrow”

Text: Jeremiah 32:6-15; Luke 23:32-43

Hope.

Its what you have when you have nothing else.

Its what you hang on to when you have nothing to hang on to.

Hope is not simply optimism, which looks at the glass as half full. Optimists consider the odds and build on past successes. They run full steam ahead *because of* what they know.

Hope (on the other hand) starts with an empty glass, a dark road, an uncertain future, and reaches for what is ahead *in spite of* what seems to be or has been. Hope is a struggle *against* the odds, even against deteriorating circumstances.

And so hope is not what its been made out to be in our day and age – a kind of wishful thinking; greed clothed with feigned humility before getting what I wanted all along.

No, hope is much deeper than that.

Hope is living faith. A clinging to the Word of God.

A believing when no one else believes. When its foolish to believe.

It is the foolishness of God.

And so it was for the prophet Jeremiah, when we heard earlier that he bought a piece of land.

Now, that in itself is nothing extraordinary or spectacular.

Except for one, small – *no large* – fact: the Babylonian army was at the gates of Jerusalem. And no one in his right mind would buy real estate *now!*

Defeat was certain.

Even the most determined optimist could already smell the carnage that would soon fill the city. Death or exile awaited most.

The smart money was selling, not buying!

Making matters even more absurd, is that Jeremiah himself was sitting in prison, with no promise of release in the near future. (For King Zedekiah had gotten fed up and had enough of this gloomy prophet!)

And then add to *that* that Jeremiah had already prophesied the upcoming victory of the Babylonian army – and this no mere prediction, but the sure and true Word of God . . .

and what you have here is beyond mere gullibility,
or a bad real estate investment.

It is foolishness.

But Jeremiah, in faith, follows the Word of the Lord.

Even though it seems foolish to do so.

The price is negotiated, the deal made, witnesses verify, and then the deeds stored
that “*they may last for a long time!*”

Why? Do you think the Babylonians are going to care who holds the deed to these
lands?

But Jeremiah has something more sure and true than the Babylonians.

*For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again
be bought in this land.*

Jeremiah has something more sure and true than the Babylonians – he has the
promise of God.

The promise of return.

And to that He clings. No matter what He sees or what seems to be.

Which was also the faith of the criminal on the cross.

For like a dying city, who puts their faith in a dying man?

Who asks a dying man to save them?

It is foolishness.

And so the other criminal mocked, and the crowds laughed.

But God’s Word and promise bring forth hope.

And so clinging to the Word, and believing when no one else believes, and when it
is foolish to believe . . . the criminal believes.

No matter what he sees or what seems to be.

Not in desperation – it is more than that. It is faith.

And it is *the theology of the cross.*

To believe that God's victory is hidden in what appears to be its opposite.
That there is grace in hardship.
That the Word and promise of God germinates in darkness and trouble.
That God often hides His love and power in suffering, that He might reveal it to us.
So that the faith-destroying glory and success of this world not blind us, or
overshadow the work of God.
But that stripped of all *earthly* hope we put our hope – and faith – where it belongs.
In Christ crucified . . . the power and wisdom and foolishness of God. (1 Cor 1:22-25)

For such faith and hope see not narrowly, focusing only on a pinpoint in time called
my life; but sees as God's sees – with a wide-angle lens,
working for the end from the beginning,
strengthening, not solving,
and knowing that hardship and judgment *now* may be grace for the future.
Knowing that if we find ourselves in this life between a rock and a hard place, Christ
is there with us, for Christ was there first – on the cross.
Crushed between the hardness of our sin and the rock of God's justice.
That dying *with* us, He rise to life again *for us*.
And bring us with Him.
That we have hope, both for today *and* for tomorrow.

For optimism can only take you so far, and desperation is the abandonment of hope.
But the promises of God give faith its object to cling to in the midst of the storms
and struggles.
The promises of God, which are more sure and true than all the "Babylonians"
coming upon us.
No matter how grim things look or seem to be.
Whether you are a Jeremiah, a criminal on a cross, or a 21st century Christian.

Which is good!
For the truth is, we live in a pretty hopeless world.
A world of self-trust, self-absorption, self-preservation.
But when your "self" fails you, the world then has no answer.
No hope.

But there is hope.

Life from the dead.

Forgiveness of sins.

And salvation for failures.

In Christ.

For if on the cross God accomplished His mightiest act of deliverance in apparent defeat . . . so too for us today.

In the crosses He places on us.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.