

Why Does God Love Us?
United Church of Broomfield
October 23, 2022

Jer 14: 7-10, 19-22 (The Message)

⁷⁻⁹ We know we're guilty. We've lived bad lives—
but do something, God. Do it for *your* sake!
Time and time again we've betrayed you.
No doubt about it—we've sinned against you.
Hope of Israel! Our only hope!
Israel's last chance in this trouble!
Why are you acting like a tourist,
taking in the sights, here today and gone tomorrow?
Why do you just stand there and stare,
like someone who doesn't know what to do in a crisis?
But God, you are, in fact, *here*, here *with us*!
You know who we are—you named us!
Don't leave us without a leg to stand on.

¹⁰ Then God said of these people:
"Since they loved to wander this way and that,
never giving a thought to where they were going,
I will now have nothing more to do with them—
except to note their guilt and punish their sins."

¹⁹⁻²² God, have you said your final No to Judah?
Can you simply not stand Zion any longer?
If not, why have you treated us like this,
beaten us nearly to death?
We hoped for peace—
nothing good came from it;
We looked for healing—
and got kicked in the stomach.
We admit, O God, how badly we've lived,
and our ancestors, how bad they were.
We've sinned, they've sinned,
we've all sinned against you!
Your reputation is at stake! Don't quit on us!
Don't walk out and abandon your glorious Temple!
Remember your covenant.
Don't break faith with us!
Can the no-gods of the godless nations cause rain?
Can the sky water the earth by itself?
You're the one, O God, who does this.
So you're the one for whom we wait.

You made it all,
you do it all.

Psalm 84:1-7 (NRSVue)

1 How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!
2 My soul longs, indeed it faints,
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
3 Even the sparrow finds a home
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God.
4 Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise. Selah
5 Happy are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.[a]
6 As they go through the valley of Baca,
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.
7 They go from strength to strength;
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

How do you feel when you hear Jeremiah's prophecies?

Upset? Bad? Distraught? Angry? Afraid? Hopeless?

Jeremiah is one of the greatest prophets of his time. Highly regarded in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic faiths, Jeremiah was called to his prophetic work by God to proclaim Jerusalem's impending destruction. Jeremiah's oracles were a warning of a horrible future of death and enslavement for the Israelites, and it was all because of their continual sinning. They had sinned and continued to sin by **turning away from God**. They did this through the great injustices that they committed and that they allowed to happen, conveniently turning a blind eye.

God doesn't like injustice. Never has and never will.

And that was Jeremiah's job – to cry out the injustices that were happening and heed warnings... God doesn't like injustice and God will not stand for it. There will be a reckoning.

During Jeremiah's time there was deep national travail, not unlike for us today. There were great shifts occurring in political power, both nationally and internationally. During good times Jeremiah's people pay God no mind – we're certainly like that. The Israelites chased after other gods; literal gods as well as the gods of greed, lust, pride – wealth, power, influence... you know – all the gods that we similarly pursue today. These

gods always lead us away from our Creator and our one true God. This remains true since the beginning of time.

Jeremiah's prophecies were a warning for the Israelites ... but they are a warning for us as well. It can be hard to hear such words, especially when they ring of truth. When it comes to caring for the poor, instead of just DOING IT, we want to analyze, interrogate and blame the poor and vulnerable as responsible for their own problems.

"If they had been wiser or worked harder, then they'd most certainly be housed, employed and better off."

There is an arrogant attitude we sometimes have that it is our job to vet the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed to **validate and prove** whether they TRULY deserve help, support and love. That arrogant and haughty attitude is the injustice that polarizes, dehumanizes and marginalizes – that's what God doesn't like.

We don't like hearing Jeremiah's prognostications because "we are less inclined as a society to link **our** actions to God's punishments and less inclined to admit **our** iniquities - but there is no doubt that our abuses of self, others, and God's creation have far reaching ramifications. In response to the consequences of our actions, some of us rail at God, alleging divine injustice rather than acknowledging our complicity. Some sink into the depths of despair convinced that our dire straits are deserved because of something we have done or left undone. Some turn bewildered to God and raise issues of theodicy while displaying no compunction to approach God before a personal situation becomes desperate. Others use traumatic events as reason to claim that a loving God does not exist and to assert that there is nothing to be gained in appealing to God.

Through Jeremiah, God said to the Israelites, "Since they loved to wander this way and that, never giving a thought to where they were going, I will now have nothing more to do with them—except to note their guilt and punish their sins," We hear these words and may feel their divine power and dreadful weight upon OURSELVES because of our recognition that we are equally sinners and screw-ups, just like the Israelites. In the time that has passed since Jeremiah's oracles, have we learned to sin less – to acknowledge and honor the reality that abundant life comes from living in right relationship with God and with one another? Have we done anything?

It leads me to ask, "Why does God love us?"

Jeremiah prays hard and laments to God for the Israelites, "Have you really given up? Yes, we're horrible, *but we try. Our attempts may be pitiful*, but we still try to be better. We try not to sin. Forgive us, have mercy on us, be gracious with us and love us, if for no other reason than you made a covenant with us and you are love."

Of the many reasons that God does love us, first and foremost is because of covenant. We don't speak of covenant much now-a-days, but we really ought to. Covenants are formal partnerships – relationships between two parties. Unlike a contract, a covenant is relational and personal.

God is relational and covenantal. God has been creating covenants with humanity since the beginning of time....

- God entered a covenantal partnership with Adam and Eve to representatives and care-ers of the Garden.
- God entered a covenantal partnership with Noah and all living creatures to never again flood the earth.
- God entered a covenantal partnership with Abraham, promising him a huge family that will bring a universal blessing to all of humanity.

- God entered a covenantal partnership with Moses and Israel that it will be a holy kingdom that will spread God’s blessings and glory to all the nations.
- God entered a covenantal partnership with David to make him great and through him, raise up a descendant whose throne and kingdom will last forever.
- God entered a covenantal partnership with all of humanity through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, writing God’s law of Love on the hearts of everyone, bringing complete forgiveness of sin and help to live lives of self-giving love.

Despite our sinful ways, God CHOOSES to be in relationship with us and to love us. It is a binding covenant that God has never broken, even though we have. It’s a kind of love that we can never fully comprehend, yet we can fully experience it.

“In the birth of Jesus, a relationship between God and humankind was made possible. It can never be earned, since it is a result of grace; it can only be received. In fact, grace cannot really be described as it can be experienced. It is more "caught" than "taught." It is defined in the scriptures as "steadfast love." Therefore, as "steadfast love," it is reliable and constant and trustworthy -- the very thing that is needed in our lives today.

Grace has been defined as love in action. That is a good definition of the grace of God. It is love in action -- love in human action. The Bible clearly points out that God's relationship with humanity is not based on the fact that we offer something to God, but on the fact that God offers everything to us. God offers love to us not because we are good or great, but simply because God is love. That is the kind of God that God is.

The Advent is the supreme example of grace. The incarnation focuses in on a single point, a moment in history, on what God through grace has been doing always and everywhere. The incarnation becomes the essential clue to the interpretation of the whole mission of God to the world. What surprises us about God's grace in regard to the Advent is the notion that God should take on flesh and dwell among us. What a surprise that the Son of God was born into a lower-class Jewish family living on the fringe of poverty and obscurity and was permitted to die in disgrace as a common criminal! That is the surprising way that God, through grace, chose to be in relationship with us.

The fact is we are always surprised by grace. Because it is God's grace, it comes to us on God's terms. Grace is the unmerited, unearned, undeserved goodness of God that is showered upon our lives. In the Old Testament, God loves and chooses Israel to reveal God's purpose and will. Not because Israel is good or great, [as we see through Jeremiah’s writings]. God does not need Israel or depend on her. [God gets angry with Israel and is satisfied with Israel receiving a righteous punishment]. Yet, God loves Israel. Why? Because it is God's nature to love. Because God CHOSE to enter into a binding covenant and honors it, unconditionally. What can be said of Israel can be said of us. Why does God love us? Simply because God is love. There is no other reason to explain why God should take the risk. This is the surprising nature of God's grace.”¹

In Jeremiah’s text from today, he acknowledges that the Israelites HOPED for peace and LOOKED for healing. They ADMITTED their sins. What Jeremiah doesn’t speak of is any action taken by the Israelites. What ACTION did the Israelites take that wasn’t self-serving?

Hoping, praying and confessing our sins are important, but to be in relationship with God, to keep our covenant and be truly faithful, we need to take active steps to honor it. We must be in relationship – with God

¹ Stoman, John. “Have you heard the good news?”

and with one another - those who are seated beside you, but most importantly those beyond our sanctuary doors who are poor, marginalized, and oppressed. Those whose lives, dignity and rights are threatened daily.

God loves us – the imperfect, beautiful sinners that we are.

Let us love God by being in relationship with those who NEED support, help and encouragement. Let us fulfill our part of this covenant by taking radical and unconditional actions to empower, lift-up, protect and promote our siblings and all of God's creation.

AMEN