

Jeremiah 31:7-14 (15-17)

For thus says the Lord: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel." See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock." For the Lord has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the Lord.

Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more. Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord: they shall come back from the land of the enemy; there is hope for your future, says the Lord: your children shall come back to their own country.

John 1:1-18

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being **4** in him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of all people. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. **8** He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. **9** The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.^[b]

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. **11** He came to what was his own,^[c] and his own people did not accept him. **12** But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, **13** who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,^[d] full of grace and truth. **15** (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") **16** From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. **17** The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son,^[e] who is close to the Father's heart,^[f] who has made him known.

January 5, 2020
Jeremiah 37:7-14; John 1:1-18
I Will Turn Their Mourning into Joy
Kerra Becker English

As we begin a new year, I want to introduce you to a saying from the Hebrew scriptures, *l'dor v'dor*. In English, it means from generation to generation. You can say a lot of things about what passes from generation to generation. It may be as simple as a favorite family cookie recipe, or as crucial as the biblical stories that remind us to be hopeful even in times of great stress and turmoil - knowing that God keeps on promising light in the darkness. In scripture we are reminded that sin and abuse can pass along family lines - and that God has the power to break that generational chain. In verse 29 of this same chapter of Jeremiah, we read, "In those days, it will no longer be said, the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."

To me, both of today's scripture readings have a *l'dor v'dor* quality to them. They both speak of a much longer story, one that we may have trouble seeing in our day to day lives. Do we really believe that God will turn our mourning into joy? Do we believe we have the power to become children of God? Is there hope for the future? Is there light in the darkness? Can we trust the good news to be genuinely good?

I don't think I'm the only one struggling to answer "yes" to those really important questions right now. A nagging pessimism can get a hold of me pretty quickly. So I have to remember, the biblical time frame is not our typical time frame. Jeremiah thinks generationally. Scripture is content to capture the slow movement of God's time. But we live in a 24 hour news cycle. If there's not something new and horrifying happening in the world, then what will the talking heads have to talk about? I'm not sure if we are blessed or cursed to live in an era where we have

access to so much information - with so little we seem to be able to do about it. When I allow it, my heart is breaking on the daily from every crisis, from every natural disaster, from every human rights violation, and from every greedy corporate grab from every country around the world. We can accumulate a thousand different anxieties about climate change, children being detained at the border, increasing gaps between the rich and the poor, and a growing hawkishness that threatens the stability of peace between nations. In other words, we, as individuals may feel increasingly frustrated, helpless, and potentially damned to this hell we are living in - as if there was *nothing* we could do about it.

Recently, political activist and comedian Hasan Minhaj, who hosts the Netflix show “Patriot Act” dealt with just this feeling in his episode titled, “How to Survive 2020.” I think his insight is helpful, so I’ll share with you what he said - it’s this - he says:

*We’re exposed to all the news all the time, which makes us think we need to care about everything all the time.... This is why we are all going crazy and a lot of people are talking about this feeling. Don’t you feel this? Look - all these issues matter, but we can’t possibly care about all of them all the time. There’s even a word for it: **compassion fatigue**. It’s like we have 50 tabs open in our mental browsers and we’re about to crash. It’s got to change...*

I have experienced exactly what Minhaj is talking about for myself, and as much as I would like for you and I to be part of a compassionate church that cares about everything all the time - I too recognize that we just don’t have the bandwidth for that. If we do that, we will crash, or if not crash, we will be so debilitated by worrying about everything, that we will end up doing nothing. So he also has some advice for his audience that tunes in to hear him go deep about all these pressing issues. Speaking directly into the camera - he goes on:

For 2020, give yourselves a break Just pick a couple things to not care about for your sanity. I'm not saying shut down your browser, just close down a couple tabs. - Hasan Minhaj, Patriot Act, How to Survive 2020

Perhaps this is the same sort of advice that would come to us across the ages and continents from biblical times as well. You think it's going bad in the world? No matter how awesome or smart or faithful you are, you, alone, won't be able to solve it all. It just doesn't happen that way. And living in fear and worry is even worse, it prevents us from doing our part. Remember God trusts us to do our part, and promises the long game toward doing God's part. God is trustworthy, reliable, and continues to be steadfastly in love with the created world and the people who inhabit it. Even when we cannot see it, God is working l'dor v'dor, from generation to generation. Therefore, we can be hopeful even in the midst of homeless wandering, even as nations cannot seem to cease their endless fighting. The bad news may be absolutely horrible. There's no denying that. I don't mean to make little of it. I don't want to dismiss the things that trouble us because there's plenty going on in the world that is likely to trouble us. However, it can be a good idea sometimes to take a step back, to turn off the 24 hour cycle and think longer term.

What would it mean for us to hear the Bible's message and start thinking truly generationally? It's not only the biblical message either. Multiple spiritualities encourage us to think not only of ourselves, but how our actions will affect the generations who will come after us. Native Americans have taught this way about the care of the planet, and Confucius is attributed as saying: *If your plan is for one year, plant rice; if your plan is for 10 years, plant trees; if your*

plan is for 100 years, educate children. I do get the urgency of what's on the news, I really do, but there comes a time when we need to drop the anxiety and put feet on the ground to do something right where God has planted us.

Whenever I get worked up at home about something I've read online, I try to stop and remember my circles of influence. I want to be able to do what I CAN do, not fret so much about the things over which I have little influence. My human energy has limits. God knows this about us. God trusts us to be human, but in the same way, we are called upon to trust God to be God.

Thinking generationally gives us the courage to believe if we are listening to our hearts and following the still small voice that speaks to them, God will use that to do more than we can even imagine. God can turn our mourning into joy. "How?" you might ask. Well, when our grief leads us to action, when our hearts are moved to make a difference, then joy ultimately bubbles up from our pain. Tad's Kids is certainly an example of that mourning turned into an incredible influence. The life of Rob and Barclay's son, Tad DuPriest, was cut way too short by a tragic accident, and yet, his friends and family have made it their goal to continue his love for kids by raising money to help serve children as his legacy. The love it takes to move through such grief is made possible through God. We've seen and known that here.

Thinking generationally also brings us into focus about the tabs we will keep open. We remain open to those things that are most important to us when we can shut out some of the other noise. We don't have to panic about it all. That's what faith is - trusting. I'm not saying it's going to be easy to trust God when it looks in all likelihood that God has gone on vacation and left us a hellacious mess here on earth. But I have to trust that if I'm caring about the Sunday morning sermon, Susan has done her job and has bulletins ready for us, and Karla and Austin have the

choir ready, and those who keep track of the heat, and the paraments and everything about this church and it's worship are doing their pieces. The same is true about our world although on a scale we admit we don't really want to acknowledge or imagine most days. And of course it's true that not everyone may be focused on making their own contributions, or may fall down or fall short on some days. But God is working in us and through us to build this world. I believe that God is still looking at creation and calling it good - not perfect, not flawless - but GOOD. When we focus on a few things, rather than try to take in all things, perhaps we will be able to see the good in the world as God sees it - in the lives that are loved and cherished from generation to generation. Amen.

A Monastic Benediction

"May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that you will live deeply and from the heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you will work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war, so that you will reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their mourning into joy.

And may God bless you with just enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this old world, so that you will do those things others say cannot be done."