

## **Sermon " I WARNED YOU"**

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**St. Luke's Church, Wilton**

"I WARNED YOU"!!!! Did you ever say those words? It's rarely helpful or constructive to say them. But like many other things in life that aren't really honorable or good for us, we say those words because they make us feel so good. Aside from the vindictive feelings, we might say them because we hope the person addressed might do something different in the future. Be more thoughtful. Not make what we perceive as their bad choices. Does it ever work? Well that's what coffee hour's for to find out. Lots of personal experience out there I bet.

If we change the tense of that phrase to "I'm warning you" we can sum up the entire 540 pages of four major prophets and twelve minor prophets in the Old Testament. We've been reading them since July 13: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and now Jeremiah whom we have been reading continuously since the end of the August. Except we skipped over poor old Jeremiah because I fell in love with all these wonderful creation readings. But today, on his last Sunday with us, I want to get back to him because both his words and tradition have something instructive for us as we wind down on Creation Season. But a little background first.

Jeremiah continually warned his people of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and exile in Babylon unless they turned their minds and hearts back to God. They did all the temple observances and believed God would never forsake their temple no matter what they did in their lives. Jeremiah did everything possible to get people to turn back to God. He buried his loincloth in the earth and then dug it up and wore it as a sign that the people of Judah were rotten to the core, he took a beautiful earthenware jar and smashed it in a public place as a sign of the impending destruction of the temple. And it happened as Jeremiah predicted. Jeremiah lived through the demise of his civilization when the Babylonians invaded Judah, assaulted Jerusalem, and reduced the temple to rubble, exiling or killing the royal family, priests, prophets, and the majority of the population. In Judah in 586 BCE, broken families would have been ravaged by grief and loss; those left behind would have had to scramble to find surviving relatives and a place to sleep if their homes had been destroyed. Produce and food animals were either destroyed or taken. Every object of value was plundered. Anyone with any authority or skill to help rebuild the society was dead or gone. Jeremiah was left behind in Jerusalem – not a promising prospect.

But after the exile did Jeremiah remain bitter and say “I WARNED YOU!”? Well he, like us, probably couldn’t resist it some but he could do hopeful acts as well. A few weeks ago he bought his family’s ancestral field shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem as a sign of hope for the future. Last week he wrote encouraging words to the Jewish exiles in Babylon – build houses, have children, grow your families, you must continue to live. And today, he writes his most hopeful words yet. He tells them they cannot be punished for the sins of their parents and ancestors; each person is responsible for one’s own actions. As Jesus will do many centuries later, Jeremiah attacks the notion of communal guilt. No one’s destiny is inevitable. Each person’s actions play a role in their salvation. The children should not be blamed for all these things of the past.

And then he promises a new covenant, not one based on observance of the law – which will ultimately always fail – but one that is internal – written on our hearts – and we will all know God personally. Those are some of the most beautiful words of the entire Old Testament, Jeremiah’s New Covenant.

Except, except, except, there are two issues that jump out at me as we look to the future: how will our children know God personally? And while Jeremiah says children aren’t to be held responsible for the sins of their parents, will our children, and grandchildren, and great-grandchildren hold us responsible for the world they will inherit and have to live in, a world of climate and ecological crisis where the web of life is unraveling before our eyes if only we would take the time to see.

*“We’ve changed the planet, changed it in large and fundamental ways. Our old familiar globe is suddenly melting, drying, acidifying, flooding, and burning in ways that no human has ever seen.”* — Bill McKibben

Have we been warned? Is anyone paying attention? More importantly are those who are inheriting our earth warning us? Here is what then sixteen year-old Greta Thunberg said before the United Nations in 2019:

*"This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you!"*

*"You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!"*

*"For more than 30 years, the science has been crystal clear. How dare you continue to look away and come here saying that you're doing enough, when the politics and solutions needed are still nowhere in sight."*

Closer to home 19 year old Yarmouth resident Anna Siegel led a rally on the steps of Portland City Hall when she was 13 years old as a member of Maine Youth for Climate Justice. Greta and Anna, Old Testament prophets to the bones, but is anyone listening?

You know I hear many people say, "I'll do anything for my family; I'll do anything for my children". I don't question the sincerity but perhaps the perspective. Legacy seems to be a popular word today. And perhaps we've thought about our own legacy to those we love: we may have set up a family trust, a college fund for grandchildren and those are certainly good things but are we leaving them a future where they will be able to breathe the air they live in, drink the water, walk on an earth that has some resemblance to today which only has a resemblance to the earth of fifty years ago? Will we leave them a legacy of a world where there is more peace, more justice, more compassion, more mercy?

Jeremiah concluded today by saying, "No longer shall they teach one another or say to one another, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me". Perhaps part of our legacy is worrying about whether our children will know God and have faith. I don't think the answer is hauling them in here and sticking a Prayer Book in their hands. I think the answer is always for us to share what's important to us and how faith may have made a difference in our lives, and perhaps even to take them to our favorite beautiful places and share a love of creation that may inspire them and us to preserve it before it is too late. There are many today living in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets who will say from the future to us in our graves, "I WARNED YOU". To hear it then will be too late. Are we listening now?