

“This Year, Give the Gift of Hope”

Jeremiah 33:14-16

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Communion Devotion

If you are a serious Christmas shopper, you are a list maker. If you are really serious, you have finished shopping.

Even if you have purchased everything on your list, let me encourage you to add one more item for each friend and family member, the gift of hope. Everybody needs it, and all of us can give it.

Giving hope was certainly high on Jeremiah’s gift list. Listen to the words of our text.

The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time, I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he will execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days, Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord is our righteousness. Jeremiah 33:14-16.

Why did Jeremiah feel the need to write these hopeful words? It was a time of despair for his friends and neighbors. In all likelihood, they were at the lowest point in their lives. The Babylonians invaded their land, destroyed their homes and the Temple Solomon built, and led thousands of them into captivity.

Life as they knew it, and their ancestors had known it for over five hundred years, was gone. They lost far more than their homes and possessions, though. They also lost hope. So, like a loving parent or a good friend, Jeremiah was doing his part to lift their spirits.

This had not always been the role Jeremiah played in their lives. For years, he warned the Israelites that change was coming. He was critical of their self-indulgent lifestyles and misplaced priorities, which led to their downfall.

He boldly spoke truth to power by exposing the corruption of Judah's kings, calling them to repent. He condemned corrupt, self-absorbed leaders for abandoning their founding principles and embracing values contrary to them.

Instead of pursuing justice and righteousness, building bridges of goodwill and understanding to all people, the leaders sought power, prestige, privilege, wealth and a life of ease. They neglected to build strong, safe communities through honesty, integrity, reliability, mercy, grace, compassion, forgiveness and generosity, preferring to impose their will upon others.

Because of this, the elaborate worship they orchestrated was hollow, their hearts were callous, their words were deceitful, and their eyes were always on themselves. They no longer reflected the heart and nature of God, so God allowed them to suffer the consequences of their flawed decisions. Tragically, they lost their land and their lives.

Once this happened, though, Jeremiah's message changed. It was no longer time to be critical, but tender, empathetic, supportive and hopeful. By God's grace, he consoled them, life would get better.

Who needs you to be their Jeremiah today? Which of your friends and family members is struggling and needs to hear a word of hope? Who around you is at the lowest point in their life and needs your support?

How do you give hope to someone in despair? How can you be the source of hope for someone who is struggling to put one foot in front of the other, regardless of how they got to this point?

How did Jeremiah do it? He began by **modeling the hope** he offered to his friends and neighbors. Jeremiah's life was turned upside down, too. He did not escape the turmoil and chaos of the Babylonian invasion and captivity.

However, he was faithful, resilient, persistent and hopeful in spite of the challenges facing him and his fellow citizens. He made wise decisions and took charge of those things he had control over instead of becoming angry and bitter over things he did not.

"Stay calm and carry on," Churchill was fond of saying during the darkest days of WW II. Sounds like Jeremiah.

Model the behavior you want to see in others. This is where hope begins.

Jeremiah assured his friends of God's loving presence, even in captivity. Sure the temple they loved was gone, but God did not live in the temple. He lived in their hearts and traveled with them even to the places they did not want to go.

Yes, God was disappointed in them and frustrated with their behavior, but God still loved them and always would. He would never give up on them or break the promises He made to them. He would help them cope with the new normal and rebuild their lives. He would empower them to adjust to their changing circumstances and to make wise decisions as they moved forward.

Sometimes people need to be reminded God still loves them, especially when they have disappointed Him. They need to know God has not given up on them and never will.

Surely, someone did this for you. You know what a difference it made in your life to hear of God's tenacious love, and you know the impact it can have upon those who need to hear it now. Speak these powerful words this week and give someone the gift of hope.

Jeremiah also assured them life would not always be the way it was in captivity. Better days were coming because God would send one who would help them get back on track by living out God's dream for them.

God would send one who would walk among them and teach them how to arrange their values and priorities so they would reflect the heart and nature of God. God would send a leader who would show them how to live responsibly and treat their neighbors fairly, how to resist temptation and do what was right, and how to keep the promises they made to God and those around them.

God would not abandon them in their hour of need but come to them in new and meaningful ways. This was Jeremiah's hopeful message; it should be ours, too.

Who needs you to cast a vision of a better day coming in their life? Who needs you to walk alongside them like Jeremiah did his neighbors when they lost their homeland? Who needs you to be the messenger of hope as Jesus was when he began his public ministry?

Who needs you to call them by name, look them in the eye and remind them of God's everlasting love and presence?

Who needs you to believe in them and encourage them not to give up?

Who needs you to forgive them and help them to pick up the broken pieces of their life?

Who needs your wise counsel to make good decisions as they move forward and chart a new course?

Who needs you to add the gift of hope to your Christmas gift list?

Who can help you do this? The One who sent Jeremiah and Jesus is ready to empower and send you. I hope you will let Him, and in these next few minutes designed for meditation, I encourage you to ask God for the help you need to give the gift of hope to your friends and family members.

On the other hand, if someone is reaching out to help you because you are struggling, I encourage you to respond by opening your life to them. Be grateful they care enough about you to offer the gift of hope and receive it in the same love it is given.

God will help you to do this, too. Talk to Him about it as we take communion.