

## **Lenten Devotional March 10, 2021**

### **Scripture**

Jeremiah 8:4-7, 18-9:6

*4 You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD: When people fall, do they not get up again? If they go astray, do they not turn back? 5 Why then has this people turned away in perpetual backsliding? They have held fast to deceit, they have refused to return. 6 I have given heed and listened, but they do not speak honestly; no one repents of wickedness, saying, "What have I done!" All of them turn to their own course, like a horse plunging headlong into battle. 7 Even the stork in the heavens knows its times; and the turtle-dove, swallow, and crane observe the time of their coming; but my people do not know the ordinance of the LORD. 18 My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. 19 Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?" ("Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their foreign idols?") 20 "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." 21 For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. 22 Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored? 9:1 O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people! 2 O that I had in the desert a traveler's lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them! For they are all adulterers, a band of traitors. 3 They bend their tongues like bows; they have grown strong in the land for falsehood, and not for truth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, says the LORD. 4 Beware of your neighbors, and put no trust in any of your kin; for all your kin are supplanters, and every neighbor goes around like a slanderer. 5 They all deceive their neighbors, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongues to speak lies; they commit iniquity and are too weary to repent. 6 Oppression upon oppression, deceit upon deceit! They refuse to know me, says the LORD.*

### **Devotional**

#### **The Rev. Dr. Mark Ioset '87/'86**

As I write this devotional there is a jackhammer pounding away outside our apartment, as well as construction trucks with backup beepers going full tilt. I'm thinking this is rather appropriate and perhaps a moment of God-incidence. Jeremiah and his message were, at times, not unlike a jackhammer. He hammered home concussively that the people, his people, God's people, needed to get back to God and what God had to say to them and then to act on God's word.

The verses before leave us shaken and unsettled, which I suspect is their intent. They are hard-hitting. No "warm fuzzies" here. They deliver a scathing critique of a society in shambles, almost as devastatingly bleak as Ezekiel's valley of the dry bones. Jeremiah's soul is raw with the words he delivers, right down to *his* bones. To be a prophet is to find oneself in the "foul rag and bone shop of the heart," with a nod to William Butler Yeats. It is a calling that exacts all. Jeremiah spends himself. He is spent by his allegiance to that call.

Our call leads us into the same endeavor. As I write, society is reeling from two deadly scourges: COVID-19 and racism. God, however, sends us into this society that we might not only speak words of critique but also, as Jeremiah does elsewhere, words of hope grounded in God's yearning that we, in listening to him, in knowing him, might know his peace, his shalom . . . and God's shalom means wholeness. We could sure use some of that. Just now, the jackhammer has gone silent, but the backup beepers are still sounding.

### **Prayer**

Holy and gracious God, knock some sense into us. Give us the courage to take your word seriously. Split us open to receive it and, with it, your purposes for us in this time. May we accept your call as irrevocable and spend ourselves in allegiance to you, your Son, and those to whom you send us. Amen.