

SERMON – “Invest In Hope” – September 30, 2007`
Text: Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

In Ethiopia, there was once a depleted land in ruin from over cropping deforestation, termite infestation, and erosion. The Synod , a geographical area of the church, was asked if they invest their time, energy, and money, to see if they could turn this worn out worthless land into a land of plenty. If you had seen the land most people would say, it is too late. The land is lost. A wise investor would of advised “Don’t waste your time, resources, and energy on it.” It will not yield a significant return. But the Synod was not made up of ordinary investors. They are people of faith that had their hope not in people but in God, the creator. If God could create this beautiful earth out of chaos, then there was hope for this land and it’s people. They were right. The Synod did invest their time, energy, talents, and resources to give God the chance to work miracles restoring the worn-out land back into a land that yields variety of crops, provides rich grazing land for animals, and rich tropical forests.

Jeremiah story is a similar land investment story. It can seem rather boring with all the details and names of places and people but in the midst of that there is a story of hope. The hope was not what people were doing but what God was doing and going to do when it looked impossible. Kind of like the land in western Ethiopia. Let explore more this story of hope we find in Jeremiah so that we may find hope to invest in our own lives.

There are two pieces of data that must stand in the background of any successful understanding of this scripture lesson. The first is historical. In 588 B.C. the army of Nebuchanezzar, (or Nebucharezzar in our text this morning),

surrounded the city of Jerusalem for the purpose of starving the inhabitants and its government to its knees. This is the second time that the kings of Judah had revolted against the Babylonian authority. The first time the Babylonian empire was lenient, but not now. Judah's monarchy had their chance to get in line. When they didn't the name of the game was destruction. Judah had to be taught a lesson!

The second bit of data is cultural and theological. It has to do with the "Law of redemption" that we find spelled out in Leviticus 25:25-55. In its simplest form it is something like this: "Should anything or any person that belongs to a family fall into jeopardy of being lost, it is the duty of the most senior male family member to do what is necessary to claim for the family that person or thing. This was to ensure that a family will have means to survive. The law spells out the basics of solidarity to nation, clan, and family, but it also is an example of God's activity in the life of Israel.

So we find this situation in today's scripture story. As Jerusalem is surrounded by the Babylonian army, Jeremiah was prophesying his typical judgment message, which sounded like he was prophesying a victory for Babylonia. He was seen as a traitor and jailed.

While in jail Jeremiah's cousin Hanamel visits. We don't know how Hanamel got into the city in the first place, but somehow he makes it. Because the "field of Anathoth", Jeremiah's ancestral home, is in the hands of the Babylonian control, Hanamel can't go and work the land. Hanamel is destitute and is invoking the law of redemption, asking Jeremiah to buy the land. This

investment is not one to look on as getting rich quickly. It was totally worthless land. Even if Jeremiah weren't in prison, he couldn't go work the land. Hanamel just wanted someone else to take the land off his hands – only a fool would buy this worthless land. But what we find is that Jeremiah does just that.

But what happens next is just as amazing. Jeremiah acts as if this is very valuable land, and brings in his secretary and companion Baruch to go about an elaborate ceremony in transferring the ownership of this property. Jeremiah takes real money and invests in worthless land. The seal is real. The correct steps in transfer of ownership had taken place. The money weighed out, two deeds made one that was signed and witnessed. Then they were to be put in a safe place, in earthen jars, this was how legal documents were preserved in safekeeping. The last verse speaks powerful words of hope. “ For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. “

It wouldn't be immediate, but this land will be productive once again. God was not abandoning the beloved children, the Israelites, by letting the Babylonian's defeat and demolish them. The Israelites in Judah would go to exile but not all would be lost forever. God some day would come in and save the lost nation.

In human wisdom, it did not make sense for Jeremiah to invest in worthless land, for no one may survive this siege to even work the land, and the land no longer belonged to them anyway, it was in Babylonia's hands. But God sees things differently. God looks at what was lost and worthless and redeems

it's value. God takes what the world would see as worthless and invests energy and love to transform them into a valuable person, land, or nation.

Jeremiah was willing to invest in the unknown insecure future in the midst of a national disaster because he can depend on God's promise or covenant. Jeremiah knew that it wasn't the Babylonians who controlled the future it was God. If GOD controls the future the covenant that God made with his people of this earth would never be put aside. God would remember them and ensure the land would be productive for them once again. That is why Jeremiah could invest in this worthless land. It wasn't a risky investment at all. It was an insured one. Humans and human institutions can go to the wayside, but God's future is one we can depend on to last.

What is God's future? Well it looks like this. Humanity's sins and flaws are covered up with God's grace and love through Jesus Christ. There are no more tears. All are comforted because God through Jesus Christ has come through with solutions that make a difference in life. All are accepted because all are made by God. All are loved for Christ died for all on the Cross. Because of Christ's resurrection there is always the promise of new life out of despairing times.

This is the Good News for each of us. God doesn't create us and then go to the end zone (the end of life on earth) and waits there to give us forgiveness and the possibility of new life. No God is with us in our lives now breaking loose the bonds of old hurts, and making it possible for new life to sprout from our lives. God is welcoming us in loving arms to forgive and heal and make from our

limitations and imperfections the ground from which new ways of living are made possible. God is with us even in the darkest points of our lives, when it looks hopeless working out a good future.

Mainline churches are in the decline and can feel like failures. Mainline churches like ours have fewer numbers of people and not as much money, but we are a people of hope. We are the church of Jesus Christ and that is about new life.

On Saturday, Oct. 6, we are having an event called 20/20 Vision. In this day we will concentrate of the life God is calling us as a faith community to be and do. We have spent a great deal of time to look at the reality of our faith community and the people in our surrounding communities. Now is the time to look at the possibilities! To say thanks be to God for the time, people, and resources we do have! It is a time to invest with all of our being's into God' future here at Kent First Presbyterian Church. So come, register today before you leave to go home, to explore and discern together God's future for our faith community.

Many say we don't have enough money or people to do what needs to be done. I say to you, hogwash! We do have what we need. That is my belief. We have what the Good Lord has given us, and we are to invest in God's future not our human future and that is what gives us hope. We are to use our time and our money, and use the talents that God gave us for God's future where all people are valued. Where we bring the word of hope to the desperate. Where we bring the word of love to those who feel unloved. Where we bring the word of

forgiveness and peace where hatred runs uncontrolled. Where we bring food for the soul to many who are starving for it. Where we bring hope for new life when all the signs point to death. This future, God's future is what we, Christ's church, are to invest in.

If our lives look like the fruitless land that I've described in Ethiopia and your not sure what to do. Turn your faith to God and follow God's way and you will be restored to something new and productive. If you are facing uncertain times, or painful times and it feels that God has abandoned you, wait upon God and we will wait with you to see the future of hope unfold before your eyes.

As a community of faith we are finishing up a discernment time. We have been actively praying and sharing in community seeking God's guidance in this process. There have been times when it felt rather stagnant and scary. For we have payroll to still pay, and programs still to carry out and fewer monies and people to draw from. However, in the midst of all the anxiety, wondering, and waiting through this process there has been and there is the hope of God that we can all cling to. The hope is that God does not abandon God's people. There is a future of God's hope for us that will mean new life and productivity, not devastation. God promises a future of hope, as stated in Jeremiah. Will this easy, probably not, will this mean change, probably yes, will it mean investing of our time and energy, and money, most defiantly. Will it mean our dreams will come true, maybe not, but it will mean that Gods' will.

The fruitless land in Ethiopia didn't look like much to invest in its restoration, well never did Jerusalem at the siege of Babylonia, or even our lives

as they currently stand. But God does see the value and always makes good on his covenant. Come let us be faithful in investing in God's future so that God's promise of abundant life will take place.