December 2nd – 10:30am

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Awaiting Restoration

1. Setting the Scene

 The people who heard this message from Jeremiah from our text this morning might have thought Jeremiah was a little over-confident. You see, the folks he addressed are a people of exile, a people who are experiencing a true sense of human despair. They see the threat of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, they saw no hope of return. Jeremiah is offering an alternative future, an idea that God will come and reign and that there is hope, but the reality of these people puts them in a space where they cannot imagine a hopeful outcome.

 The message that Jeremiah is sending to the people today isn’t really a commissioning or a call to action, but rather it is a statement of comfort and hope to a people who desperately need to hear it. It is also a statement to encourage his listeners to remember – to remember the covenant promises God has made in the past to God’s people. From the rainbow over the ark, to Sarah’s birthing a child while barren and God lighting up the night sky in stars and telling Abraham that his ancestors will be as many and more. Jeremiah wants the people to find their hope in their past, in the promises made, that God will provide a promise of hope for the future.

 And as people who know the story, we know that Jeremiah’s prophecy is true. A branch will shoot up from David, who is both divine and human, who will execute justice and righteousness in the land. We are people who get to not only look back on the promises that Jeremiah tells the people to recall, but we are people are blessed to have an even larger story to look back at as we recall the promises that God has kept to God’s beloved.

II. Awaiting Hope

 Perhaps though, despite all the promises we can look back on, perhaps we do not feel hopeful this season. This future that Jeremiah talks about and the reality that we see Jesus proclaim of justice and righteousness can feel incredibly removed from the experience that we see everyday.

 We live in a world where, to the date of this sermon, 281 individuals have been murdered in Baltimore – 246 of them by handguns. We live in a world where discrimination is a real and tangible thing – from the Hispanic, to the Black, to the LGBT, to anyone who under any realm could be considered ‘other’. We live in a world where parents are separated from children, where preventable disease kills the most vulnerable, and natural disasters ravage people away from their homes and the warmth of safety and protection. And the list goes on, and on, and on.

 So who am I, what standing do I have, tell you, in all these circumstances to tell you that this Sunday, we stand by hope? Who does Jeremiah think he is to tell these people that they need to look toward a future of hope? Are we out of our minds, disconnected to reality, completely void of seeing the world around us? Maybe, but maybe not.

III. Relentless Hope

 I firmly believe you have three options in this life, in thinking about hope. First, you could be so swept up in all the bad things that happen in this world, say that God isn’t God, and become bitter and angry. The second option is that you are numb, at least on the outside, pushing away any knowledge of good or bad, but still, it’s not a very fulfilling life to live. I choose the third option, to recognize that there is pain and sorrow and many situations that I can’t explain and seem contrary to any semblance of hope – but I still say, I believe in a better future.

 Why have I chosen the third option? Why has Jeremiah? Well, again, we know the promises, we’ve seen the miracles, and we’ve seen things happen that we cannot otherwise explain in our human consciousness. We are also willing to keep a future mind-set, to advocate for change, to promote wellness and equality, and to be active participants with God in a renewed future. We use our imaginations, not naively, but according to the Scriptures, to imagine a world that is better than it is right now. We see a hope when everything else tells us not to see it.

IV. Choosing an Option

 This season of Advent, despite the pain, human struggle, and difficult circumstances we see or live in, I welcome you to invite hope and imagination into your life. I hope, you will choose option three with me – an option not to become bitter or numb, but to see relentlessly hold onto hope, for you and for those who cannot see hope around them.

 On this first Sunday of Advent, we celebrate hope, a hope that Jeremiah sees and we long to grasp onto. We say and claim that the day is coming, where justice and righteousness are restored. We grasp onto the promises we’ve read of in Scripture and the promises fulfilled in our own lives and experience. In this time of Advent, where we await restoration, and believe in that restoration being fulfilled, perhaps not in our lifetime, but for our children, and our children’s children.

V. Hope for the Future

 As the first purple candle burns this Sunday, let that light of hope also be lit within you. Partner with God in making that hope a reality. And people often think that they need to do something extreme to partner with God, but I tell you, every small step that we make towards igniting hope in people’s lives is worthwhile. Whether you visit someone home bound or in the nursing home, whether you serve at the local food shelter, whether you listen to a co-worker who is troubled, or whether you help a classmate who needs some extra help. There’s opportunities around every corner, keep awake, keep your eyes open, for rekindling hope and restoration is something we all can do, something we all can participate in this season and beyond.

 As we gather around the table on this Sunday of Hope, we tangibly show that we are remembering Jesus and promises that he kept and fulfilled. In hope, we do this act in remembrance of Him, the one who chose hope, though it was contrary to his social climate too. I invite you to this table, this table of hope, where we participate in the real and active hope and coming of God’s new and brighter future, born in Jesus Christ. Amen.