

Sermon Starter: July 2017

Restoration is Coming

Scripture Passages: Jeremiah 33:14-16, John 1: 1-14, Colossians 1:15-20, Revelation 21:1-5

Jeremiah 33:14-16 has me thinking about creation. The passage is set within Jeremiah's larger project of making some sort of sense out of the destruction of the kingdom of Judah and its subsequent deportation to Babylon. What message of hope and comfort can he possibly offer to a community whose suffering and trauma gave rise to the pathos-filled opening line of Psalm 137: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion?"

"God had finally done what he had for so long been threatening to do", they must have thought. "He abandoned the covenant and has left us forever."

It is into this despair that Jeremiah—who had, until now, made a career out of fiery oracles of destruction and judgement—speaks the words of 33:14-16. Words not of bitterness or even satisfied vindication (though he deserved to gloat a little had he wanted to), but of comfort and restoration. Jeremiah reminds the people that God's anger will not burn forever, for he is a God who cannot help but desperately seek the reconciliation and restoration of his people—even when that reconciliation comes at an unspeakable cost.

And what is the gospel if not the definitive revelation that this reckless, divine love extends beyond Israel and encompasses the whole of the created cosmos? The Apostle Paul reminds us in Colossians 1:15-20 that in Jesus, we see firsthand the truth that matter has always mattered to God. God creates the world—sun, rocks, birds, bacteria—and rejoices in its goodness. God creates humans, both male and female, and calls us to be caretakers of his beloved world. God shows us his power in water, delivers his healing in leaves, promises grace through rainbows, sustains life through soil, holds out the mystery of grace in bread and wine. God is praised by the trees, and worship breaks forth from the mountains. God lavishly displays his love in the world around us and is always using the stuff of the world—be it flesh, water, bread, or wine—to reveal himself. Nowhere is this more powerfully on display than in the incarnation, when as John 1 so powerfully reminds us, the Word that created matter assumes it in order to redeem it.

In the incarnation, we see that God is so concerned with the created world that he freely chose to enter into it and die on its behalf rather than see it succumb to the consequences of sin and death. But do we share that concern? Do our lives display a similar love and appreciation for the created world? Do we allow the power and magnitude of the incarnation to transform our relationship with the creation? Or do we evacuate the physicality and earthliness of the paradoxical God-man and reduce Christ to a spiritualized religious dogma? If God views the stuff of earth as worthy of participating in the work of redemption and as worthy of redemption itself (Col. 1:15-20), what keeps us from celebrating creation and engaging in the sacred work of "serving and protecting" it (Gen. 2:15)?

Through the words of Jeremiah, and in the person of Jesus, we see that God has big plans for his creation—plans to redeem and renew; plans to comfort and restore; plans to once and for all join heaven and earth for all eternity (Rev. 21:1-5). How will this good future shape the way that we, as followers of Christ, live here and now? Will we be joyful witnesses to it, orienting our lives to live in deeper harmony with the created world here and now in anticipation for what we know is to come? Or

will we disembodied the incarnate Christ, evacuate the material consequences of salvation, and shirk our call to share in God's love for his creation?

Because make no mistake, restoration is coming. The only question is: will we live like we believe it?

Sample Discussion Questions

- What are the first words, thoughts, or images that come to mind when you hear the words "environment" and "climate change"? Why might that be?
- What might it mean *practically* to live like we believe that God intends to restore the entire creation?
- Is caring for creation a central component of our response to the gospel? Why or why not?
- Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God with everything we've got and to love our neighbor as ourselves. How might caring for creation and responding to climate change be an opportunity to deepen in our faithfulness to this command?

Resources for Further Study

- [Bouma-Prediger, Steven. *For the Beauty of the Earth*](#)
- [Bruggemann, Walter. *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*](#)
- [Bruner, Frederick Dale. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*](#)
- [Gorman, Michael J. *Reading Revelation Responsibly*](#)
- [Walsh, Brian J. & Keesmaat, Sylvia C. *Colossians Remixed*](#)
- [Wright, N.T. *Surprised by Hope*](#)