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**Unplanned Futures – Jeremiah 32:1-15**

Jeremiah, judging by what we know from Scripture, lived a typical Old Testament prophet's life, which is to say, a hard and thankless one. He is particularly well-known to us, though, for his discernment, by which I mean his ability to pay attention to and understand what God was doing in and around him.

That ability is really on display in the way his message changes. Not the core message, that God loves his people and wants them to be closer to him than a child to its mother – that never changes. But his ministry has two distinct phases: the first, trying to tell God's people to change their ways so that God can continue to bless them. That part, sadly, did not bear fruit, and so the occupation and exile he predicted would be the result of their unfaithfulness came to pass.

But once it became clear to Jeremiah that the people would not repent, but would have to go into exile as a part of God's loving plan for them, he starts preaching to the people that they will return, that God does not, will not, cannot abandon his covenant with his people.

This is the background of today's story. Jeremiah performs a prophetic act. He demonstrates in his own life with his own money the truth God has revealed to him: even though the faithless children of the covenant will have to be punished with exile, they will return. Once again land will be bought in Judah.

Now, would *you* buy land in a country at war? Would you buy land in Syria right now? Iraq? Not an attractive deal, is it?

Jeremiah's taking the long view, God's view. He's perfectly aware that it may not be a future he enjoys, a future he will live to see, a future that includes the land he's bought: but that doesn't matter. He has done his part, showing in a symbolic act people can see, talk about, learn from – not words, but deeds - what God has promised to do.

We, ourselves, are the products of those who came before us, planting what they would not harvest, trusting instead in God's faithfulness to his promises to them.

Those promises are still in place. And while those who keep repeating them may sound a bit like Jeremiah – a voice crying in the wilderness, shouting that “Today is not all there is! Live it for all it's worth, but know that there is more to come!” – the message still has to be said, and so I say it again to you. In fact, when we tell you these things again and again, we pastors are trying to show in our lives how important, how true and how real God's promises are.

We are planters, striving to sow the seeds of the Gospel. But being a planter is not just a task for preachers and teachers of the Word. It's a job that falls to everyone who takes the name “Christian.” Each of us has a bag of seeds, given us by God to sow so that God can grow his Kingdom.

Which leads to a story about seeds.

We're new people, here in the United States. Our independent nation has only been around for less than two hundred and fifty years. By British standards, that's still infancy.

Anyone heard of New College, Oxford? That's its name, New College. Anyone know what year it was founded? 1379, by William Wyckham. That's the *new* college.

Anyway, it's ancient by our standards. And, like any institution that has physical buildings, things need fixing. They call it “fabric upkeep” in England. Even our building, only thirty-two years old, needs maintenance, repair, and replacement of things that wear out.

So, it should be no surprise that the roof of one of the New College buildings once needed work. It's now a dining hall. Imagine this magnificent room, stone walls, with this great high roof: well, the timbers that hold up the ceiling, running the length of the building, had deteriorated over the past five or six hundred years, and needed to be replaced.

There lies a problem. They were each single tree trunks, worked into shape to fit. Trees like that are hard to come by. Especially in England, where the great oak forests that once covered the land were long ago cut down to build the great fleets that made the British Empire possible.

So, modern technology came to the rescue. Today, we can take smaller pieces of wood and laminate them, stick ‘em together, and create single big beams like the old ones – just not the solid wood of a single tree.

But, doing due diligence, the archivists found deep in some files an ancient paper. Not just any paper, either, but a grant of land and an endowment for people to live on that land and care for it – and for the oak trees that grew there. Oak trees to be cared for and protected – so they would be ready if ever the roof of one of those ancient halls needed new beams.

Now, since this paper was hundreds of years old, they couldn’t be sure what was there, so they went over for a look. And, sure enough, there were acres of huge oak trees, uncut, but very well tended. And when they met the people on the property, they found that they were the descendants of those first foresters, keepers of those trees, who had been living on the money in that grant for dozens of generations.

When the people from the college introduced themselves and told the foresters why they were there, that they needed some of these great oaks for repairs, the reply was, “We’ve been waiting for you.”

We’ve been waiting for you. God, too, is waiting for you, and you, and me. Each of the many seeds God has given us to plant will do something for God, and for those who follow us.

What will you plant? What will be the unplanned result of some small (or large) thing that you do today?