

**“God’s Promise” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
April 12, 2020 Resurrection of the Lord
Jeremiah 31:1-6**

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Some of you may be thinking, “Lee, why in the world are you reading and preaching on Jeremiah on this day. It’s Easter Sunday! A day to celebrate!” My reply to you is, “Yes, it is Easter and, yes, we are going to celebrate. We are going to celebrate what Jesus’ resurrection really means to you and me. Jesus’ resurrection brings hope – and many of us need hope today!”

What did God say through the prophet Jeremiah: **I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. I will build you up again. Again you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful. Again you will plant vineyards and enjoy their fruit.** God’s promises in these verses are bursting with hope, the promise that all will be well.

What do you think of when you hear these promises from God? Are you bursting with hope? Do you believe that all will be well on this Resurrection Sunday? Probably the Israelites who heard these verses were not feeling very hopeful. They were not dealing with a pandemic like we are but were about to be conquered by a foreign power and taken into captivity a long way from their home. Jeremiah spent his career warning the Israelites what would be the results of their behavior. But here in these verses he offers a word of hope. A word we need today. God brings hope. God brought hope to the Israelites and God brings hope today. Hope expressed through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which we celebrate today.

I ask again. Are you bursting with hope? Are you hoping the economy will magically be resurrected? Are you hoping sports will to be played and telecast again? Are you hoping you’ll soon be coming to the church building to worship in person?

I said earlier that Jesus’ resurrection brings hope. So this Sunday, this Resurrection Sunday, in these days of pandemic and fear, let’s take a moment to consider a new perspective for our lives and the hope that Jesus brings to us.

Kenny Moore was working for the Brooklyn Gas Company when it faced an enormous challenge. Deregulation meant that the end was near for old monopolies like Brooklyn Gas, and so the company had to change into a new company, one that could survive in a fiercely competitive marketplace. Kenny

Moore knew that this transformation was going to be a shock to the people in the organization, and so he suggested that the company hold an event to help people with this transition.

Kenny recommended that they hold a funeral.

It wasn't the gas fumes that put this idea into Kenny's head — it was his training as a monk. For 15 years, he had been part of a strict monastic order in New Jersey, where he ministered to the sick and the poor. Then, at age 34, Kenny left the order and began to work in human resources at the gas company.

So when the time came for Brooklyn Gas to transform itself into a new company, Kenny was ready to roll. He booked a conference room for the funeral service and set it up by putting a funeral urn and two fake tombstones in one corner. According to the magazine *Fast Company* (February 2004), he wore his priestly stole and played a tape of Gregorian chants.

“Dearly beloved,” he said to the 60 or 70 people in attendance, “we are gathered here today to bid a fond farewell to the Brooklyn Union Gas of old.” Then he asked people to write, on index cards, what was over for the company — what was now dead. People wrote things like “lifetime employment” and “monopoly,” and stuffed them in the urn. What would you write on a blank index card if I gave you one today? What is ‘over’ for you.

Kenny got out some holy water and blessed the urn. He knew that the company would have to die before it could live.

Then Kenny focused the attendees' attention on another corner, one that contained a steamer trunk for the things they needed to carry with them on their journey into new life. This time, Kenny asked them to write on a second index card what they would need for this new journey. They wrote things like “great people” and “dedication to the community,” and threw the cards in the trunk. What would you write on your card if I gave you one today?

Finally, Kenny had a stork cutout on the table that stood as a symbol of their birth as a new company. He invited everyone to draw what the future of the company might look like, using crayons and poster paper. By that point, he reports, everyone was participating.

Do you have something you need to grieve today; something you need to bury so you can be resurrected to a new life on this Resurrection Sunday.

I believe the pandemic provides us with an opportunity to gain a new perspective on our lives. Perhaps this is the time for you and me to have our own

resurrection, our new life in Christ. It's time to discard old ways and adopt a new way of living, serving our risen Savior, Jesus the Christ.

Following Jesus invites us to live as though the Eternal were today, in the present time, because God is here. Following Jesus invites us to live as though death has no power over our days. Live as though you belong, in life and death, to God, remembering that neither death nor life, things present nor things to come, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

When you base your life on this truth then you can bury the past and resurrect your life to a new life in Jesus Christ. You can live in hope.

On our recent trip to Death Valley National Park, we hiked a couple of trails in that barren land. It was dry and dusty. Our shoes were covered in a film of white dust. As we hiked we came upon a flower, a delicate, colorful blossom growing and blooming in the rocky terrain. I wondered how such a delicate, beautiful flower could even grow there. But there it was, in living color standing out against the gray, rocky ground. When I saw that flower I realized what hope was.

Just as the Israelites may have felt there was no hope, many of us may feel we are living in a hopeless world today. However, just when we think we should give up; we find that flower. We hear God's positive word, as I read in our verses from Jeremiah: **I have loved you with an everlasting love.**

This Resurrection Sunday, God gives us more than a positive word. God reveals how much God loves you and me - through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We realize that Jesus returned from the dead to reveal that we can become that flower. We can live in hope. We can bloom in the rocky soil in which many of us are now living.

If one were pressed to come up with one phrase that best expresses the gospel, one could hardly do better than "Do not be afraid." You heard those words in the scripture I read at the beginning of the service. The angels said to the women, "Do not be afraid." Do not be afraid. The gospel is the banishment of fear, not in the sense of some temporal announcement that things are not as bleak as they seem or that tomorrow is a new day. The Gospel is the revealing of the secret, that all that is, rests upon the deep eternal peace of God. In the words of Julian of Norwich's famous declaration of confident hope, "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." (Thomas Long, "What is the Gospel?" Homiletic: The Journal of the Academy of Homiletics, 2005.)

Yes, all will be well – today and forever! Christ has risen! And your response? He is risen indeed!