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Jeremiah 31: 27-34; Psalm 119: 97-104; Hebrews 4:4; Matthew 4:4

Living Within Culture: Written on Our Hearts

by Roland G Kuhl © 2013

When God called Jeremiah, God gave him a six-fold task, to "pluck up and pull down," to "destroy and overthrow," and "to build and to plant."

He has spent the bulk of his prophetic career announcing the former four demands, but now he is able to turn to the last two.

In Jeremiah 4: 19-28, we are reminded of the utter desolation that comes upon the people, but now God is declaring something completely different

– in this wasted land, as the people of Israel return, God will now plant the houses of Israel and Judah with humans and animals (v. 27) (cf. cf. John C. Lohbert; <http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Weeping-Prophet-Reflections-on-Jeremiah.html>)

Many commentators state that this is a promise of God bringing about restoration, and I agree, but the language seems to depict more than the mere restoration of Israel and Judah to their former glory.

Note, that in Jeremiah saying “to plant with ‘humans and animals’” that he is not saying that he will restore or replant Israel and Judah with the chosen ones of God and their animals

– rather, it sounds more generic

– “humans and animals,” rather than chosen ones and their possessions.

What is the significance of this?

Previously as chosen people, as covenant people, the people of Israel saw themselves as planted apart from the rest of the world, as a people set-apart to God

– even though the Abrahamic covenant was for them to be a sign for all nations.

But now having lived through exile, and in being restored, they are not being restored to their former situation

– they are being restored to a new reality.

In being planted with “humans and animals” might this not be God revealing that they are now to live in the fullness of the Abrahamic covenant, living as the people of God

– **planted among the nations**

– **among the people of the world**

– **among the day to day life of those in the world around them.**

God’s vision of restoration is one of re-creation in which God’s people live out a new reality of being human among the people of the world

Their separateness is no longer to be geographically apart, but to be a sign and witness of a new reality among the nations.

There is a similarity for us as Anabaptists.

We have a theology of separateness as Anabaptists – most notably evident among the Amish and Hutterites and some forms of Mennonites
– separated to God, separated apart from world.

But we as North Suburban, MC USA, we are Mennonite communities planted among the offspring of people and animals
– we are in the world and also within the world, though called to be different in the world.

It is a vision of how we are scattered in the world
– in a way different from Jesus' parable of the weeds.

In Jesus' parable, the enemy came and sowed weeds among the crops, but in God's act of restoration, God is scattering good seed, good plants among the weeds
– God scatters his people among those who are in need of healing, wholeness, and life – we are scattered as God's people amidst the brokenness of our world!

The critical question is how we go about living as good seed scattered about in the world.

The clue to this is to be found in v. 34:

A new covenant is being made – “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people.”

We all have something written on our hearts
– it shapes who we are as people
– it shapes our passions, our purposes
– it shapes how we make meaning in life.

Jack Mezirow, an adult educator, talks about the importance of meaning making in our lives.

He states:

“Our need to understand our experiences is perhaps our most distinctively human attribute. *We have to understand them in order to know how to act effectively. . . . Learning means using a meaning that we have already made to guide the way we think, act, or feel about what we are currently experiencing. Meaning is making sense of or giving coherence to our experiences*” (Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 10-11).

What is written on our hearts shapes how we give meaning to what we experience.

We live amidst a world in which people have so many life-inhibiting things written on their hearts,

And their search for fullness leads them to something that is less than abundant.

Each one of us have such stories in our own lives
– I know I do, and perhaps some of us are even experiencing them now.

But what does it mean for us to be the people of God living amongst a world full of people, so that v. 35 becomes a reality: “No longer will they teach their neighbors, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me.”?

I believe it is by living as a people who have something radically new and life-giving placed in our minds and written on our hearts.

It is more than knowing Scripture and being able to recite Scripture by memory (though these are vital aspects of having the life of God in our minds and written on our hearts).

It is more than having a Scripture verse for every situation
– responding to someone in need with a Bible verse.

Such use of God’s Word can often be life-inhibiting rather than life-giving.

But when we understand “God’s law/Word – in all its ways
– Spoken by God
– embodied in Jesus
– written in Scripture
– declared through proclamation in the power of the Spirit
– as being in our minds and written on our hearts”

We are declaring that we are “infected with Life,” “the breath of the Spirit coursing through us,”
– something dynamic, something living has taken hold of us and transformed us from the inside out
– our lives our being shaped by this new reality
– renewing our minds (Romans 12:1), and shaping our passions, our way of making meaning out of life and in life.

This transformation of our lives, by the life of God, by the Life that is God
– among and within the context of the world, leads us to be salt and light, to be yeast in the world
– in which we demonstrate the presence of Life, the Life that is God in the world
– enabling everyone with whom we come in contact to be touched by the Life that comes from God and is God.

This Life of God, this Word of God is living and dynamic.

Hebrews 4: 12 presents this living, meaning making characteristic of what comes forth from the mouth of God:

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow (i.e., gets deep down inside of us); it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (gives us new ways of making meaning out of life experiences).”

And so we are called to dwell in this living reality of God, this Word of God, to reflect, mull over, meditate on it
– because in doing so we eat of it and it nourishes us
– as Jesus expressed when he was tempted,

“People do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

Psalm 119: 97 ff – meditate on it, mull it over, eat it, digest it, may it become the source of our meaning making, making sense of life, and sense of our experiences
– giving shape to the way we live, the way we respond when situations threaten to be life-inhibiting.

In this way life and the words of life become written on our hearts and minds.

One such way may be through a regular practice of daily meditation, exercising a daily examen, engaging in spiritual conversation:

Through *Lectio divina*

Praying for the Spirit to open you to the life-giving word of God

Reading a scripture text

Reading it again

Note what the Spirit brings to your attention

Mull it over, bring your life situations, experiences into your time of reflection.
What do you hear, what do you sense?

Through a daily *Examen*

Reflect on your day in light of what was brought to your attention through *lectio divina*

Where did your reflection help you to experience life in your day?

Where did you not experience life today?

How can you lift this up in prayer for God's life giving word to bring life into that situation/experience?

Through *Spiritual Conversation*

As you mediate and reflect through experiences of practices of *lectio divina* and the daily examen, what are you noticing about God's action in you, around you, as you engage others
– talk about them with others.

Share them with us on Sunday mornings

– so that we can learn from you how to grow in opening our lives to God's life-giving word being written on our hearts and minds.

I invite each one of us

– to be such a people

– a people sown among the world

– in being ones who sow life, who sow the new reality of God's shalom by revealing the presence of God Spirit because the Life of God is on our minds and written upon our hearts!