

# “A Case for Radical Hope”

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## Scriptures:

- The Old Story — Jeremiah 4:19-29
- The New Story — Romans 8:18-25

## Sermon

Given my several years on the planet, one might think I have seen everything. But not so.

Every day I wake up, turn on my little laptop, read the latest world news, and find myself in total amazement. The degree of angst and rage and turmoil is appalling. I don't know if it is actually getting worse or our media is just getting better at reporting it. But I do sense a climate of major worry about the condition of culture and social community.

I chose the text from Jeremiah as it resembles much of what it must be like right now in the Middle East. The alarm of war, land laid waste, cities in ruins, desolation, people climbing the rocks to get away from the violence, it's as if the mountains and hills themselves are quaking. The imagery of the chaos of that biblical time is strikingly familiar.

In addition to processing all the mess and chaos, I have been reading a lot lately as well. I pulled a book off my shelf the other day: *Hopeful Imagination*, by theologian and OT professor, Walter Brueggemann. It is a study of the prophets of the exile. His take on Jeremiah is fascinating. He presents Jeremiah as a prophetic voice unashamed to speak truth to power. And it doesn't matter which king or tribe he offends. If he is a witness to injustice or violence or evil against humanity, he calls it out. He didn't have many friends.

He was called to speak against the degrading organization of social power of his day.

When I observe the hostile rhetoric today, I am confused. Why are we angry with each other because we have complicated truth about the source of our racism, our history, our hurt, our culture? Brueggemann suggests that a prerequisite of hope may just be the chaos which Jeremiah prophesied about. Or at least, that chaos could only finally be reconciled with the imaginative hope of a God of deliverance. A God of love and restoration.

Brueggemann breaks down the ministry, poetry, and oracles of Jeremiah to understand the brokenness of the social order of his day. Ultimately the people of God live through exile and chaos out of pure hope — hope in a new social order characterized by freedom, courage, and surprise.

My personal approach is to step back from the violence and look more holistically at a larger picture. The pro-Israel posturing today has its value. And the violence of Hamas needs to be checked. But the impoverished citizens of Palestine surely need an advocate.

There are literally millions of both Russians and Ukrainians suffering innocently at the hands of the aggression in their area of the world. In the violence of political conflict and war, there are always more victims than perpetrators. It is sad. We grieve. We hurt. And challenges need to be made to the money and ego and power behind the violence.

Social order is a state of strength. Chaos is a state of weakness. *But it is only in a state of weakness that we can be open and available for change, for redemption, for renewal, for transcendence.* Chaos and disruption of order and predictability actually create the condition for new life. Old patterns have permission to die. New avenues for love and compassion emerge.

Disruption of social and economic order feels very unsafe. But let's look at the alternative. If we are going down a path of destruction, social order has lost its way. It just keeps getting worse. As time goes on, the evil becomes more dehumanizing, more violent and more costly. So, what is the risk of chaos? According to those who promote chaos theory, there is no risk. Or put another way, the only risk is newer and better order.

The talk today around the world is hostile and violent. Every subject: race, voting rights, abortion, gender, sexuality, education, economy, homelessness, you name it! We are in the throws of social chaos. Nearly every element of social order that I grew up with is being challenged, questioned, often attacked with violence. How do I stand up as a person of faith?

I was originally going to name my title today "The Audacity of Hope." But the title was already taken by a guy named Barack Obama. I will give you a quote from his book, *The Audacity of Hope*, which he says was actually taken from a sermon by his pastor.

"The audacity of hope. That was the best of the American spirit I thought — having the audacity to believe, despite all evidence to the contrary, that we could restore a sense of community to a nation torn by conflict; the gall to believe that despite personal setbacks, the loss of a job or an illness in the family or a childhood mired in poverty, we had some control and therefore responsibility over our own fate. It was that audacity, I thought, that joined us as one people. It was that pervasive spirit of hope that I seek to represent."

Well, from my so-called holistic, stepped-back view of the chaos in the news, I took another look. Let me share some observations: There are some judges, not all, but some, strongly upholding the voting rights act; I found 28 medical groups lobbying against sexual identity conversion therapy as ineffective, causing harm and risk, and without scientific support; in 2021 there was a huge wildfire in California called the Windy Fire, covering 100 thousand acres, which ended up creating the perfect habitat for the return of the Gray Wolf, extinct for over 100 years; the founders of the famous Thanksgiving Day Macy's parade stood strong against

public outcry in their featuring of LGBTQ performers; there is a recent Medicaid study showing that health care for Migrants is more cost effective than care for the rest of us; China and the US are at least talking; the sight of the nuclear disaster Chernobyl may soon be safely converted to a massive wind generating station; a study called the Trevor Project released new findings in support of gender affirming care for trans and non-binary youth supporting their strong mental health development; and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recently issued a positive report on progress in mitigating climate change. The city of Fort Collins does have a long range plan to address homelessness here.

Wow! There is hope all over the place. And lastly, there is Susan Porter, a grandmother in California who got a ticket for honking her horn. You know how we all honk our horns when we see a sign? Honk for Jesus; honk for the Broncos; honk in support, honk in protest? She got a ticket for honking in political support for her congressman outside his office. She was pulled over and given a ticket. Her reaction: There's a law for that? Actually 41 states have anti-honking laws except for traffic warning use. She sued California and it's law. That case is currently before the United States Supreme Court as a violation of free speech. If a grandma can get a horn honking case to the supreme court, maybe there IS hope.

On my reading list this winter was a fascinating write: *Suicide and the Soul*. The author was once a leading studies director at the Carl Jung Institute in Zurich. Dr James Hillman presents a thesis that existential suffering is internalized in the very soul of our being. It can be so intense as to dictate that a person is prepared to initiate their own death. He explains that most of what we know about suicide is sociological in nature such as numbers, types, categories, etc. But that does not explain why some die and many survive. His arguments extend further to suggest that the only profound prevention of suicide is Hope. And hope is the task of the soul.

Hope is a phenomenon that only the soul can know and thus make the choice to live rather than die.

Hillman actually quotes Romans 8 in developing his thesis that only the soul knows hope. And it is not anything we have seen or know existentially. That is an illusion. *Soul hope is hope that gives life as we wait for the surprise, that which we do not know.*

The order that may come out of our current chaos is unknown. But we have hope because we choose to have hope in a community of compassion which we do not yet know. Tomorrow is always a surprise. Give thanks to a God who knows how to destroy our human construction and bring us new life.

I'll leave you with a final story:

There were four candles in a room. The candles started talking with each other. The first candle was Peace. Peace said, "there is too much anger and conflict. Nobody wants peace anymore. I'll leave." And the peace candle went out.

The second candle was Faith. Faith said, "there is no longer any need. Everything valued is secular. There is no real trust." And the candle of Faith went out.

The third candle was Love. Love says, "it is too overwhelming. There is no love left anymore." And the candle of Love went out.

Just then a little boy entered the room. He looks around and says, why are all the candles out? The fourth candle, still burning, says: "Do not be afraid. I am the candle of Hope. I am still burning. Together we can light the other candles. The flame of hope never goes out."

*Romans 8. "For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not even hope. For who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."*

May your candle of hope light your path today.

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