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Jeremiah 2:4-13

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be reflections of your word to us in Christ Jesus.

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We live in a place where it is important to be water-conscious all year long . . . but at this time of year, we pay special attention to our water source. At the end of the summer, before the autumn rains fall, one might take notice the clarity of the water coming out of the well, or check the pressure on the pump. One might bang on the side of a cistern to discover the water level. It's just part of our way of life. We dig wells, we put in cisterns to capture water either springing up from the ground or rained down from above; we have water delivered in trucks, all to have continual access to water . . . this resource that we can't live without.

Water is universally important for sustaining life, however, scripture makes this distinction between living water and not. Can you guess the difference? Living water moves and is connected with a larger source of water. Ocean – living water; river – living water; lake – not living water. I like to use the rule of thumb, living water is where mosquitos can't breed.

This image of Living Water is used in Biblical literature because water is the source of life, and people know how water that flows in a river or makes up the ocean, has a different energy because it is connected to something universal. "Living water" is thus suitable for purification and on a symbolic level, indicates our need for a constant connection to that which unites us all. Parabola Magazine, Summer 2009, p. 85.

The community to which Jeremiah was speaking, forgot this fundamental truth that God is the source of Living Water, as they chase after things that "don't

profit." Through the mouth of Jeremiah, God accuses all of Israel of turning from God. "I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination. My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water."

Jeremiah's words are pretty sharp and difficult to hear. Before we take them too personally, let's have a look at to whom he is saying them and why.

Jeremiah lived just prior to and during the fall of Judah to the Babylonian empire around 600 BCE – Judah is the name of the larger geographical area at that time that included Jerusalem. Israelites were exiled from Judah, the land God gave them, in what we have come to know as the Diaspora.

Jeremiah's public ministry took place in Jerusalem before the Diaspora, but the account of his ministry, the text that would become the book of Jeremiah, was read the descendants of those original exiles, still living in Diaspora.

The text from this morning's reading is included to help the people make sense of their suffering. Why were they living under Babylonian rule, away from their homeland? Generations before, Israelites settled into the land God gave them . . . and indeed let their devotion to God go by the wayside. As a result, they lost their spiritual identity, which caused them also to lose their political identity-and-power. Instead of addressing the root of their decline, Israel began looking to strong neighbouring nations for alliances, but rather than providing genuine security, they brought further tension and decline to Israel. Clements, Interpretation: Jeremiah, 28-29

The years of political weakness opened the door for the Babylonian takeover. Now living for generations in exile, under the empire's rule, in a constant state of suffering, people are trying to understand why . . . why are they suffering in this way?

They wonder, is it because God doesn't exist after all? Jeremiah is responding directly to this question . . . no, it's not that God doesn't exist . . . it's that you abandoned God, you forgot who you are . . . God is angry, and is punishing you for turning from God.

This is what Jeremiah hears from God in his 6th Century BCE context. Here in the 21st Century, I might offer another interpretation. Coming back to the living water. God says through Jeremiah, "my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water." We all know cisterns are super useful and we all know they are finite – they have to be filled up again and again because they are not a source of living water.

Remember, Jesus says to the woman at the well, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' 15The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.' John 4:13-15 NRSV

The Israelites are so thirsty; their thirst is the root of their suffering, and they are thirsty because they stopped drinking from the spring of Living Water. They stopped their practice of worship; they stopped teaching their children; they stopped telling their stories. Those practices give the Israelites their identity in God and they forgot who they are. Whether or not God was angry . . . I think losing their identity is a natural consequence of abandoning the practice of their faith and being cut off from God is punishment enough. Without God, we can work hard at life, but we ultimately cannot make our lives secure. The other side of this is like we say at the end of our worship services, "Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine." We can't manufacture security, but we can open ourselves to the fountain of Living Water that is our God and receive.

You've heard me say numerous times in the past few months about our visioning process, we want to lift up who we are, we want to paint a portrait of who we are . . . and this is essentially why. Because identity is important. We tap into our Christian identity through communal worship, study, prayer, service, having a heart for Christ out in the world, but if that was the only thing that shaped Christian community, there would be cookie-cutter communities around the world. It is our context and our identity in Christ together, in synthesis that shapes

who we are in this place. The Diaspora hugely shaped the Israelites; without a temple and a central community with whom to gather, the weekly Sabbath became the Easter Sunday of Judaism, as it is today. We are shaped by our relationship with God in our context.

What is our context? We live on a small island, which is a powerful influence on the culture that continues to develop here. We're mostly retired, we're formed Christians, as a congregation we look to the Anglican and United traditions for guidance, we worship regularly. I think when we sift through all of the givens of our context when we dig deep down, we know who we are and when we put our finger on it, we'll know.

We aren't in danger of being taken over by foreign powers, we haven't even lost our way. We are too new to have lost our way, but we also know the church in North America is in decline and any church that does not live authentically with God will follow the trend.

Besides, we are ready to name who we are, to have clarity, to continue to seek God and live our identity in Christ with boldness in this place, that God may bless us and our ministry with the source of life that does not run out. Thanks be to God.