

Have Hope Even in Hopeless Situations

Jeremiah 32:1-15

August 29, 2021

An American journalist Gail Sheehy is a prolific writer. She is the author of seventeen books. One of the books she wrote in the 70s is called *Passages*. It was on *The New York Times* Best Seller List for three years. She begins this book with a story that happened to her in Northern Ireland. It was one of the most horrific days in her life. She was in Northern Ireland to cover a story about how Irish women were coping with war.

One day she interviewed a young boy about what was happening there and what he had seen. While this boy was telling her what he saw and experienced, a bullet hit his face. His face was blown off right in front of her. He died instantly. British troops sprayed the crowd with gunfire. It went on for about an hour. People screamed and ran; bodies tumbled. The living crawled behind rocks and fences and the corners of the buildings. They even covered themselves under the dead.

It was an incredible, merciless, almost indescribable massacre. Then the British troops conducted a house-to-house search for members of the Irish Republican Army. It was the most fearful time in her life. Gail tried to pray but she couldn't collect the words or thoughts to pray.

She needed comfort and assurance that things will be okay. One thing she wanted to do was to talk to her boyfriend who was in New York. She thought he could comfort her and make her feel safe. When she found a telephone and called him, instead of finding comfort, she felt he really did not understand what she was going through. He simply said, "You are there to do a story about the Irish women. Focus on that. Don't think about anything else. Stay out of trouble, okay honey?" He didn't hear the loneliness in her voice. She felt that he couldn't be bothered with her fears and needs.

After hanging up the phone she felt abandoned, deserted, confused, and so lonely. She said to herself, "No one is with me! No one can keep me safe! There isn't anyone who would never leave me!"

And then, Gail said something much unexpected happened. In that horrible and traumatic moment, she said, she had a powerful urge to have a baby!¹ She did not know why she had that urge but it was the most powerful desire she had ever felt. Can

¹ Wayne Brouwer, "For Future Generations," a sermon on Psalm 22.

you imagine? In that horrific situation she wanted to have a baby? Why would she want to have a baby? Where is that feeling coming from?

Children give us a feeling of immortality! They somehow make us feel that even if we die, there's a part of us that still lives on. As long as human history continues, we will continue to exist in our children's genes, and in their memories. Hope is an amazing strength. It empowers us to endure almost all kinds of sufferings and pains.

A Christian apologist and poet, Gilbert K. Chesterton, once said, "Hope means hoping when everything seems to be hopeless." Hope gives us heart, desire and strength to plan for the future when there seems to be no future.

The story of the Prophet Jeremiah in our text this morning reminds us of that. Jeremiah has been prophesying the doom of Judah, the Southern Kingdom of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem. That angered Zedekiah the king of Judah. He was so angry that he arrested Jeremiah and put him in jail; he put him under house arrest in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace.

At that time, the nation of Judah was surrounded by the Babylonians. It was at the verge of destruction. The Babylonians were so powerful that Judah's military force was no match for them. Complete destruction of Judah and Jerusalem was just a matter of time.

In that situation the Lord spoke to Jeremiah to purchase a land in Anathoth from his cousin, Hanamel. Can you imagine? Would you invest in real-estate when the country is on the brink of disintegration? When things looked the worst, God commanded Jeremiah to purchase a land. He told him to invest in the future, and Jeremiah did. He actually bought land in Anathoth.

God told Jeremiah to buy the land as a symbolic message that God would bring his people back to their land. It was a symbolic message of hope.

Even when things go bad and everything looks hopeless, God still says to us, "Buy land in Anathoth." Invest in the future. Don't lose hope.

I am sure many of us, if not all, have experienced the moments when everything went wrong, and everything seemed so hopeless. Can you think of those times? Perhaps the times when you lost loved ones, the times when your dreams and hopes were shattered, the times when your doctor revealed your health condition and there was a real possibility that you might not live very long, the times when you had a

bankruptcy or failure, the times when your relationships with your loved ones were irreparably damaged. None of us is immune from crisis, despair, or disaster.

And when crisis and disaster happen, the Lord says to us: “Buy a land in Anathoth!” Be hopeful!

Do you know that the land Jeremiah purchased was never redeemed by Jeremiah? After 70 years of exile, the Israelites came back home but by that time Jeremiah was already dead.

According to Jeremiah 16:1 and 2, the Lord prevented Jeremiah from having a family. The Lord said to him, “You shall not take wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters.” So, his land was passed on to others. For Jeremiah, the bad situation did not get any better. He never enjoyed the land that he purchased. He only thought about it, talked about it, and dreamed about it; but he never really possessed it. Yet this story is the story of hope. The Lord commanded the prophet to purchase the land as a sign of hope for his people.

The message is “Trust God even when you face of the greatest disaster.” Even if what we hope for, work for, and pray for don’t work out, we should never lose hope. For God still remains faithful. That is the message.

Pastor Thomas G. Rogers once told a story about a woman named Pamela. Pamela was a very successful CPA, but she had a very rare eye disease. In her mid-30s Pamela was going blind. She tried everything. She went from a doctor to doctor and went through all kinds of treatments but nothing really worked.

Finally, an eye specialist told Pamela that her only option was to have a very complicated surgery. If it were successful, she would be able to stop the progression. If not, she would go blind immediately. Without the surgery, she would go blind gradually as the disease continued to progress. Pamela chose to have the surgery. Unfortunately, that surgery was not successful, and she became blind.

When Pamela’s pastor visited her in the hospital, he took her hand and said, “I’m so sorry. Is there anything I can do for you?”

Pamela said, “Yes, there is. I would like to have a candle.”

The pastor was little surprised by the request, but said, “Sure, I’ll bring you one when I come next time.”

Pamela said, “No. Can you bring me one now?”

The pastor sensed that it was very important for Pamela to have the candle right away for whatever reason. So, he said, “I’ll be right back.”

After about 30 minutes, the pastor came back with a candle. Approaching her bed the pastor asked, “Do you want me to light it for you?”

Pamela said, “Oh, no. Just hand it to me, please.” She took the candle in her hands gripping it tightly. She then clutched the candle against her and said, “During these last few months I have often thought of myself as a candlelight about to go out. I thought that everything that I am is tied to being able to see. I expected that when blackness came then there would be nothingness. I’m blind now and it’s dark.”

She held the candle with one hand and traced it with the fingers of the other. Then she said, “But now I realize I am the candle, not the flame. The candle is still here. I’m still here. I’m still me. God is still God. I feel it’s going to be okay somehow.”

In her blindness Pamela was able to see something we sighted people don’t see. When we light the candle in darkness, the flame removes the darkness. The flame can be seen as a symbol of hope, like God helping us out of difficult situations. Candlelight can be a powerful symbol for people who have passed through darkness on to better days.

To Pamela who couldn’t see the flame, the candle meant something different. She discovered that a candle is more than a fragile light. Flames come and go on candles but Pamela discovered that a flame is not the symbol of hope; but the candle is. The flame doesn’t make a candle. It’s the candle that brings the flame.

For her, the candle itself was a symbol of hope; because regardless of whether there is a flame or not, the hope of the flame lies in the candle. Pamela came to realize that hope is not grounded in what will happen to her, but in who she is and whose she is.²

I believe, with such faith, with such hope, our souls can be at ease, no matter what we encounter in life. So, as you live another week, remember, the Lord says, “Buy a land in Anathoth.” Be hopeful no matter what you face.

² From Thomas G. Rogers’ sermon entitled, “Invest In the Future.” www.esermons.com