

Jeremiad is not a frequently used word – there are about **0.2** occurrences per million words in modern written English. And it means *A lamentation; a writing or speech in a strain of grief or distress; a doleful complaint; a complaining tirade; a lugubrious effusion.* (says the OED – I think the complaining tirade bit hits the spot for now).

The definition reflects the prophet Jeremiah's book which includes a quantity of gloom and doom on a scale way beyond the reach of the present Chancellor of the Exchequer. Jeremiah is a definitively complaining prophet. The vast majority of his text is negative: judging and warning.

Why? What's Jeremiah got to complain about or warn against? Jeremiah is writing at a time of great political instability, as the Babylonian empire once more rises to ascendancy, wresting power from the Assyrians (the previous top dogs) and demolishing national governments in its way.

Jeremiah (through most of his book) explains that God's people (and especially their leaders, political and religious) are looking for solutions in all the wrong places. He reminds them that their lives have gone off course massively. They have stopped loving God and instead are worshipping local deities like Baal, their leaders are ignoring God's laws, they have abandoned the covenant God made with God's people at the time of Moses. Meanwhile, in the face of the increasing threat from Babylon, the political and religious leadership is busy making alliances with neighbours like Egypt and loudly counselling all is well. Jeremiah calls this out: don't trust in realpolitik, turn back to the God of your ancestors, he says.

The threat to Jerusalem and Judah is Babylon. The temptation for God's people is to forge alliances elsewhere rather than trust God...What are our existential threats today? What are our temptations? I'm sure you can think of plenty, but let's just pick just one: climate change. Too present to ignore... yet too big to work out what to do. And many of the solutions presented are hugely challenging to our way of life in the most developed countries. Are we too addicted to our love for comfort to embrace what's needed? Are we Christians prepared to turn to God and listen to the preference for the poorest and most vulnerable that's threaded through scripture... to listen and to change?

You may have noticed as you heard today's readings that it's the gospel writer Luke who is in Jeremiah mode (lots of end times stuff which is pretty hard to understand). Whereas the snatch of Jeremiah was in a more hopeful tone...

In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

These verses are from a short sequence in the book that describe the good stuff that will happen... that describe God's faithful promise to heal after the hurt of occupation and exile that is coming... Jeremiah speaks God's promise that there is coming from the ancient heritage of King David a *righteous branch*... through right government, the country Judah and its capital city Jerusalem will gain a new tag – *the Lord is our righteousness* – because its population has found its mojo again... they are once more living as God's people.

For Jeremiah's first readers, arguably *the righteous branch* may not be one individual, but a new regime, a fresh branch of the royal line of David, whose rule will usher in a renewed commitment to the covenant and living in God's way. By the time that Jesus lived, this promise was frequently associated with a political leader from that dynasty, often called *the Messiah* – God's anointed one. But the image gained a new perspective as read from the earliest days by Christians... for whom the promise of a new regime and a new leader is focused in one person: Jesus. Before there was Ancestry.com, we have the great genealogies in Luke and Matthew, where it's made clear that Jesus is a descendant of David... *the descendant of David who was promised by prophets like Jeremiah*. They make that bit clear: what unfolds through the rest of the story paints a rather different picture. Jesus is not about power in the usual way. He routinely disappoints both his followers and his enemies on that count. Instead, he's about a far more radical programme, that involves loving one's enemies rather than grinding them into the dust, that is about meekness rather than might, and poverty of spirit rather than populism.

What that looks like for us today...

Advent is a very special time for Christians ... a time of waiting... of hoping ... of turning back to God in penitence... (trying not to make the mistakes that Jeremiah is warning about). It's hard to do in our present culture,

where you might say it's always Christmas but never Advent (to adapt C S Lewis's phrase). But perhaps it's even more important to keep advent today in our anticipatory, same day delivery, I want it now times. Even more important that we look and wait and hope for God's coming to earth... and that we remember that God's coming is not what we'd have expected...

There's a contemporary hymn, called *God's surprise* that I love... Here's the opening verse

*Who would think that what was needed
To transform and save the earth
Might not be a plan or army,
Proud in purpose, proved in worth?
Who would think, despite derision,
That a child should lead the way?
God surprises earth with heaven,
Coming here on Christmas Day.*