

## Saturday, September 9, 2017 - Day 251 – Jeremiah 28-30, Psalm 56, Hebrews 12

Hope can be a tricky thing as the unfortunate prophet Hananiah found out in the selection from Jeremiah that we have today. It's not that he loses hope—it's just that he places it in the wrong thing—himself. Hananiah was a contemporary prophet of Jeremiah at the time in history when being a prophet was an actual job title. They would normally offer messages from God for the whole of Israel and they were especially important during the time of the Babylonian exile. It was then when so many people were disenfranchised and uprooted from their normal way of life that they felt unsure and worried about the future. More than anything, they needed messages of hope that would sustain them through those awful times. And Hananiah certainly seems to do that by declaring, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the Lord's house, which King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon."

These words would have undoubtedly sounded great to the people who were listening. Only two more years of this painful existence and then God will set it all straight according to Hananiah. But Jeremiah, God's true prophet, was not impressed. He basically said, "sure that sounds great, but we will have to wait and let God make that call. In the meantime, we must live as his people—a people who wait in hope." This ambivalent response from Jeremiah apparently makes Hananiah pretty upset because he breaks Jeremiah's prophetic mantle. Jeremiah takes this as his cue to leave and goes away for some time. God eventually comes back to Jeremiah and tells him to return and tell everyone that Hananiah is a liar which he promptly does. Not to long after their encounter, Hananiah dies which, in the Hebrew Testament, would have been all the evidence needed to prove that he was indeed giving people false hope.

Now, this story may feel a little foreign to us since it differs from our modern world view, but one only needs to turn on the television to see examples of false prophets peddling false hope all over the place. Television preachers tell people that if they send in money, they will instantly be cured of any woe or ailment they have. Health and fitness companies, pharmaceutical brands, and the beauty industry tell us that if we buy their product we will look younger or feel better than we ever have. And even the news can be reported in such a way to keep people in a state of fear hoping that they will report all the answers to life's biggest terrors.

Living in uncertain and scary times as we do means that we need messages of hope every bit as much as Jeremiah's crowd—but false hope will do us no good. Thankfully, as Christians, we build our hope on the strongest foundation there can be—the promise of everlasting life in the love of Jesus. We are a people living in hope as Jeremiah called us to be. A hope that can never be taken away, can never be shaken, and can never be false. And that is the best and most hopeful news any true prophet could ever report. In a world full of false prophets who are only trying to make a profit on hopes that will never stand the test of time, remember that true hope—the thing we need more than anything else—rest in the promise of Jesus alone.

By The Rev. Dr. Hillary Raining