

Where Goes the Neighborhood?

Jeremiah 32:6-15

We've been talking about the idea of the 'active ingredient.' The active ingredient is the substance in medicine that makes the drug work—that makes us feel better. Whatever else makes up the rest of the pill or liquid, it's the active ingredient that makes it work—the part of a drug that actually heals us, that makes us feel better, the part of the medicine that's designed to restore our health.

To be an active ingredient is to live our faith in a way that make our communities better, healthier, more shalom-filled places. Active ingredients bring the message of the gospel—the message that heals us and restores health in authentic ways to the places where we live and work and study and shop.

This is a journey through what it means to be missional people in a missional church. We find our missional habits and practices at the intersection of what we believe about God, and what we do about that belief. Last week Jim Belcher talked about being resident aliens—people who participate and contribute to the culture, but who aren't products of the culture.

Jeremiah said, "The word of the LORD came to me: Hanamel son of Shallum your uncle is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field at Anathoth, because as nearest relative it is your right and duty to buy it.' "Then, just as the LORD had said, my cousin Hanamel came to me in the courtyard of the guard and said, 'Buy my field at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. Since it is your right to redeem it and possess it, buy it for yourself.'

"I knew that this was the word of the LORD; so I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out for him seventeen shekels of silver. I signed and sealed the deed, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver on the scales. I took the deed of purchase—the sealed copy containing the terms and conditions, as well as the unsealed copy, and I gave this deed to Baruch son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel and of the witnesses who had signed the deed and of all the Jews sitting in the courtyard of the guard.

"In their presence I gave Baruch these instructions: 'This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Take these documents, both the sealed and unsealed copies of the deed of purchase, and put them in a clay jar so they will last a long time. For this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.'

Some background on Jeremiah: He served under five kings: one good one, Josiah, who found the Torah and renewed Judah's faithfulness, and four more who were increasingly corrupt or cynical. Jeremiah preached a message of God's judgment, including the threat of being taken away in exile, which was meant to turn Judah's behavior back to God. Other prophets, more concerned with keeping their clientele happy than with preaching the word of God, minimized the threat of punishment for sin.

Through all of that, Jeremiah stood firm.

His life was threatened, he was beaten by the kings who were supposed to listen to him, he was ostracized by the people he was sent to serve, and at one point he was imprisoned in a sewer. In the end Jeremiah has to deliver the bad news that God was going to send his people into exile because of their disobedience. That's where we pick up our story about Jeremiah and the field. The enemy army at the gates, the king was in denial, the other prophets were trying to make it seem like it wouldn't be that bad, and the people responded by ignoring the whole thing. The culture of Jeremiah's day was completely against him.

Through all of that, Jeremiah stood firm. Who was this guy?

From the Scriptures we can identify five character traits of Jeremiah:

First, Jeremiah had a deep sense of integrity—he was honest and, as far as we can tell, impossible to bribe or corrupt. Second, and related to that, Jeremiah's ministry was built on a foundation of courage in carrying out his convictions, even when he complained (remember that it's Jeremiah who wrote an entire book called Lamentations.)

Third, Jeremiah was passionate in his opposition both to personal immorality and

social injustice. (Both of those are priorities of God's, too.) Fourth, as harsh as his message could sometimes be, Jeremiah showed a deep sensitivity to people's sufferings.

Finally, and this is where our text finds us today, Jeremiah had hope for the future. He could complain with the best of them and his message was loaded with the promise of God's judgment, but that didn't take away his sense of hope that God would redeem his people just as he had promised.

How do we see that? Jeremiah buys a field in the path of an invading army.

Not exactly a wise investment, right? Jeremiah had the right to buy this plot of land, but no one would have blamed him if he'd passed on the opportunity. On the surface it was a disastrous use of funds—there was no apparent potential for any return on Jeremiah's investment. And yet through it all, notice how public this transaction was. He paid the money and signed the deeds in the center of the city, where everyone could see. Why? Because God called Jeremiah to buy this field as an act of hope—a demonstration of God's faithfulness.

Jeremiah stood firm, and bought a piece of property in the path of an invading army. What do we learn from that?

Being a Christian in London...or anywhere else, means keeping the faith—keeping our eyes on the essential truths of our faith—no matter what the culture tells us or how they might threaten us. Sometimes—and let's be honest here: what I mean is in every waking moment—sometimes we have to stand firm in the path of all kinds of opposition to our faith in Jesus Christ, right?

The model for how we can do that faithfully and hopefully can be found in the life of Jeremiah the prophet.

We're called to live with the same deep sense of integrity that Jeremiah had.

We're called to have courage in living by our convictions, even if we don't like doing it.

Our lives of discipleship should be driven by passionate opposition to both personal immorality and social injustice. I know that makes us uncomfortable, but, well, I just wanted to say that I know that makes us uncomfortable.

But through all of this—in the many ways we can stand in faith against anything the culture can throw our way—through all of this we have to demonstrate a sincere sensitivity to people’s sufferings and feelings. We’re not here to club anyone over the head. We’re here to speak and live the truth as we reach out with the love of Jesus Christ.

Finally, and this may be the hardest one of all, we’re called to have hope for the future—to believe that God will bring his process of redemption to completion just as he promised.

What this mean for how we’re called to live as Christians here in London or anywhere else?

What does this passage teach us about being the active ingredients—in our homes and jobs and schools and neighborhoods—people who live out what we believe not just here in church, but everywhere we go?

First, Jeremiah’s investment strategy teaches us that the culture can’t prevent us from living lives of faith. On the surface it might seem like a bad investment, but if God is who he says he is, then the call on our lives is to live and love and spend and invest as if it’s true.

Second, we’re meant to live our faith publicly—where the culture can see us. This is about getting out in our neighborhoods and living our lives according to the values of the Kingdom. This is not about standing in front of our houses and preaching on a soap box.

This is meant to be much louder than that.

It’s not just words, but how we live our lives—lives of integrity and conviction, lives that model personal morality and a commitment to social justice, lives that our aware and concerned about the sufferings of people less fortunate than we

are.

Finally, God calls us to live faithful lives as an act of hope—a demonstration of God’s own faithfulness to his promises. God calls us to this life, even when it feels uncomfortable to us.

I’ve been reading a book called *The Monkey and the Fish*, about what it means to be faithful Christians in a culture that doesn’t know what to make of us anymore. The author talks about how uncomfortable it can be—and how important that discomfort is as we learn to live as Christ’s disciples. He writes:

‘Living a life of [faithful] discomfort means venturing into places we don’t feel like going, doing things we don’t wish to do, being with people we don’t feel comfortable being with, serving them, loving them, helping them—all of which demonstrates a not-of-this-world brand of love that is irresistible to all people in all places.’

Being active ingredients in our communities isn’t always going to be comfortable, but it’s an effective way to sharing the love and mercy we’ve received from Christ with other people. It’s the best way to share that ‘not-of-this-world brand of love that is irresistible to all people in all places.’

My prayer for us, as we move through this season of learning what it means to be missional people in a missional church—my prayer for us is that we’ll embrace the discomfort of being Jesus followers in a culture that doesn’t always understand what that means—that we’ll invest in our communities wherever we are—however long we’ll be there—as a way of sharing the blessings God has already shared with us. Amen?