

One night a wife found her husband standing over their infant's crib. As she watched him looking down at their very first baby, she saw on his face a mixture of emotions: disbelief, doubt, delight, amazement, enchantment, skepticism. Touched by this unusual display and deep emotions, with eyes glistening she slipped her arm around her husband.

"A penny for your thoughts," she said.

"It's amazing" he replied. "I just can't see how anybody can make a crib like that for only \$46.50."

A mother asks calls to her son from the top of the basement stairs. "I'll be back in a couple of hours. I want the grass cut by the time I get back." "Uh huh" came the reply over the noise of video games. A minute later a thought flashed through his head ... what'd she say?

A woman gets in her car, backs out of the driveway, drives through her neighbourhood, looks and pulls out onto the main road, only to be slammed into by an oncoming car. "He came out of nowhere" she tells the police. "She looked right at me" says the other driver.

Three stories that (I hope) help us understand the challenge facing Jeremiah.

For what must have felt like an eternity, Jeremiah had been fighting an uphill battle. Marched into exile, he was tasked with telling people who felt abandoned by God that God had not abandoned them. Faced with despair in a country they didn't know, he was to tell them to acclimate to their surroundings, to build houses and live life. And when the people thought they had that figured out, it was his job to tell them that Yahweh was still their be-all and end-all.

None of this had garnered Jeremiah much popularity among his compatriots. He prophesied as an outsider, and the messages he brought weren't always the most positive or uplifting. He garnered a reputation as the weeping prophet.

But his message was almost singular in its focus.

Two truths guided everything Jeremiah said and did in Babylon.

This exile was temporary.

God was in exile too.

It was Jeremiah's hope that those two truths held together in a kind of unity would remind the people of whose they were to begin with. Instead, Jeremiah ends up writing again and again about the danger of looking without seeing; of listening without hearing; of living without being alive.

He watched as the faith community started listening to prophets who didn't speak for God.

He watched in bewilderment as God's character was dragged through the mud.

And he watched as God told him that it would be his job to tell call the wandering people back.

To denounce false prophets who were just saying the same things that had been said before, but calling it something new.

To denounce false prophets who were manipulating people by saying God said things he never said.

And to denounce false prophets who were straight up promoting evil.

But prophets are in short supply today, at least depending on who you ask. So, what does this have to do with us?

Jeremiah's message should still resonate with the church today because it is, at its most basic, a call to listen for God in the cacophony of voices around us. How do we tune out what isn't God in order to focus on what is? How do we find the trees when we're looking at the forest?

We, the church, are the prophets of the twenty-first century. We are the ones who call people to real repentance, to what the Greeks called metanoia, a UTurn of the mind. We are the ones who speak for God in a world filled with a million options. We are the ones who are called to account for the way things are in our world.

Jeremiah's story is our story because we look at the church today and see a kind of exile. Most of us are here because we love the people here and because we know that this is a faith family we can draw closer to God with. But we feel disconnected from our world, from our communities, from our families because we feel like we can't let other people in on it – or they've turned away from it.

It's what at least one commentator calls the Laodicean Exile of the church. An age where the ease and the abundance and the excess of life has made being part of the church optional.

We live in an age of so many options, that unless there is something that is true, something that is real, and something that is Good about being part of this faith community that we call the church, we're never going to recover our prophetic voice as a church.

So this morning I want to call us to focus on the things that Jeremiah calls his people to focus on.