

We had a break from our “The Story” Sermon Series during Lent. Now, we are resuming this sermon series. We had the stories in the Bible up to the time of polarization when idolatry had spread throughout this divided nation. We’ve heard the story from that time through the voices of Prophet Elijah from the Northern Kingdom of Israel, called “Israel,” and Prophet Isaiah from the Southern Kingdom of Israel, called “Judah.”

Today, we come to the time when Israel was not just divided but ended as a nation and being ready to be carted off to Babylon. This is a moment of a great catastrophe in Hebrew history. The Northern Kingdom of Israel has already been conquered and assimilated into Assyria. The Southern Kingdom, Judah, is about to experience defeat and be sent into exile in Babylon.

This story of Kingdoms’ Fall can be found in the Bible but in many different places, such as 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Ezekiel. This story starts with the King of Judah, Manasseh. He was only twelve years old when he became king. He did all sorts of evil things. Among things he is remembered for is desecrating the temple, sacrificing his sons to pagan gods in the fire, and shedding so much innocent blood that it ran through the streets of Jerusalem. He was not doing evil things alone by the way. He led all people astray. The nation profaned God’s holy name wherever they went and did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites (2 Kings 21:9; Ezekiel 36:20-21).

Thankfully, God did not give up on God’s people. But it would take drastic means to set them back on the right path. The chilling word that comes to them during Manasseh’s reign is found in 2 Kings 21:13-14. It says that God will wipe out their nation. Reset the whole nation to restart everything over.

So, that’s the setting. Everything that could go wrong went wrong. Terrible times and disastrous days! Maybe today we know people who are experiencing difficult days, or maybe we are personally facing unexpected trials. Maybe we feel the church has lost its way or the nation, or even the whole world. So, we return to today’s story in seeking some surviving strategies in the midst of calamities. Three individuals in today’s story have the capacity to stay on track when everyone else is derailed. And they each have a lesson to teach us.

The first person is **King Josiah**. He was only eight years old when he became king. Not like his grandfather, King Manasseh, however, he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord (2 Kings 22:2). The particular thing that happened during the reign of Josiah is that the “Book of the Law” is rediscovered. When high priest Hilkiah read the Book to him, he tore his clothes as he mourned and repented (2 Kings 22:11). He reformed the whole nation according to the Book. He discovered that when we take the words of the Holy Scripture with our seriousness, everything changes.

For many people today, the 66 books that make up the Bible are closed books. Unread. Unstudied. Unacted upon. The Bible has been described as “The least read best seller in all of history.” That is one of the reasons we are doing this “The Story” sermon series. Biblical illiteracy is at epidemic proportions, even among church-going folks. How is our Bible on our bookshelves or on the phone? How often do we open it up and read it?

I am not talking about Bible study or Bible reading as an intellectual discipline. I am talking about reading Scripture prayerfully, in conversation with and in the presence of God, and seeking the illumination of God’s Holy Spirit. The Word of the Holy Scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). It is very useful for all times in all circumstances, especially when we are in the midst of calamities. King Josiah points us to this importance of Scripture. Are we using what we have in our daily lives?

The second person in today’s story is **Prophet Jeremiah**. If King Josiah speaks to us about the discipline of Scripture reading, then Prophet Jeremiah’s life points us to the value of transparent prayer. Prophet Jeremiah told it as he saw it. Jeremiah accepted His call to be God’s Prophet, but he was not at all happy about it. His transparent prayers recorded in the Book of Jeremiah (12:1-4, 15:15-18, 20:7-18) are mixed with many emotions about the situation and how an unpleasant message he had to deliver to people. He is known as a weeping or crying prophet because his heart was so tender to deliver God’s hard message to God’s people. He even wrote the Book of Lamentations about it.

What Prophet Jeremiah says to those of us who are in the midst of calamities is this: “Do not suppress your emotions.” Whether it is anger, sadness, grief, or frustration, just let God know honestly how we feel and what we are going through. The scripture says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything,

by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). That’s the promise of God we have. In the midst of calamities, have an honest conversation with God.

Prophet Ezekiel is the last person in today’s story who guides us when we are in the midst of calamities. His story is like something out of a Sci-Fi movie. If you read the Book of Ezekiel, you know what I am talking about here. Due to the limited time, I will not spend time right now to explain what it’s all about. You can read it for yourself.

However, what I’m bringing from the life of **Prophet Ezekiel** today is this: Never, ever underestimate the power of God’s revival Spirit. Despite the example of Josiah, who called people to get back to God’s word, despite Jeremiah’s call for people to get on their knees and pray, they still went their own way, and it looked like the nation would never recover. Then, Ezekiel comes with his vision of skeletons, his vision of dry bones, that, by the might Spirit of God, come back to life (Ezekiel 37:4-5).

The church in our days, especially The United Methodist Church, is going through a time of transformation. You may see dry bones, but I hear God’s call. I believe that it’s not about what we can do, but it’s about what God can do. Sometimes things get worse before they can get better. In God’s time, dry bones take flesh and live. That is the work of God’s revival Spirit. Our God is still at work and has not lost control, even during the mess we see and experience in life.

So, in the midst of calamities, let us read the Holy Scripture prayerfully, have an honest conversation with God, and fully rely on the power of God’s revival Spirit. Revival is possible. Let it be so to us today. Amen.