

A Restorative Model:

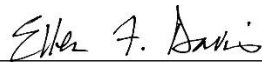
Jeremiah's Prophetic Response to Displacement in Washington, D.C.

by

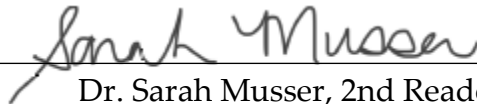
Juliano Abelino Andujo

Date: Monday, April 18, 2022


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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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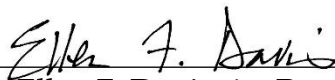
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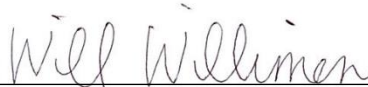
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This thesis is offers exilic texts as the basis for restoration for communities traumatized by displacement. The scriptural focus for the thesis is Jeremiah 30-33, the Book of Restoration. The purpose of the thesis is to provide tools for inner-city pastors to navigate the opportunities and challenges of displacement caused by gentrification. The thesis is fueled by the contrast between numerous studies that report the benefits of gentrification versus its ills experienced as a pastoral witness of the machinery of displacement in the northwest quadrant of Washington, D.C.

In Dr. Ellen Davis' work on Jeremiah, she shows Jeremiah's painful growth into his prophetic role. This growth occurs through laments or "protests addressed to God" thus making it possible to "lay claim to realistic hope." This birth of hope is in the beginning of the book in Jeremiah 1:10, "See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant," with building and planting as themes for Jeremiah 30-33. Dr. Davis further explicates hope's placement. Hope finds a concrete place economically through Jeremiah's land purchase (Chapter 32:6-15) and socially through community building (chapters 30 and 31). Building upon this work, my thesis concludes that Book of Restoration provides a relevant and effective model of restoration for today's church.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mother, Johnnie Louise Jackson; you continue to be a marvel to my soul; to my brother Vincent, and my sisters Leslie, Angela, and Joy. I am blessed to journey in this life with you as my constant companions.

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To Miles Memorial CME Church, Washington, D.C. for supporting the work of justice.

INTRODUCTION

The thesis investigates exilic texts for a model of restoration relevant to today's inner-city ministry. Much work is published on the exodus model of doing justice work yet rich resources exist in exilic texts that assist churches in restoring justice and equality for people and communities. A restorative model emerges from Jeremiah 30-33, the Book of Restoration.¹ In treating Jeremiah 30-33, I do not delve into the consequences of sin, iniquity or the like. Rather, the aim of the thesis to provide tools for inner city pastors to navigate injustices like displacement in gentrification; some evidence exists within the text to suggest that both innocent and guilty suffered from the destruction of Israel. The thesis applies to pastor led local justice efforts; the work of national justice work is beyond the scope of this thesis. Further, a distinction is made between Black Liberation Theology emphasizes on exodus and the work to restore communities based on the exile. Liberation theology is well documented; yet the model of restoration proposed seeks to live, thrive, and improve the quality of life for our people and nation. For this reason, exilic texts can provide a more apt fit for the American context.

¹ The Book of Restoration is used due to the recurring phrase "I will restore" throughout Jeremiah 30-33.

The Old Testament texts stand in need of resurrection in the church especially regarding its prophetic books. Besides a few select verses committed to collective memory, the prophetic texts are virtually unknown by parishioners and untaught by leading pastors. In doing so, the church overlooks much of what might be helpful in today's ministry. My thesis is designed to unearth on such text called The Book of Restoration in Jeremiah 30-33. The book was new to me as a Pastor for over twenty-five years and I was delighted to see God's provision for the church should we heed its direction.

The thesis is not solely research based but based also on my work in the community prior to beginning the thesis. Our church's work in the community was a process that yielded a win for the community when the dread of displacement was experienced by parishioners and community residents. The methods used were gained through training at the University of Southern California Passing The Mantle (PTM) program, a certificate program to equip pastors for social change and civic engagement; through these methods, we gained great success.

While we relish this success, the movement lacked a scriptural justification for the church to engage time and resources in social issues. This purpose of this thesis is to provide tools for inner-city pastors to engage in local justice work, using

prophetic texts for foundation and direction. The community work against displacement of the poor is prophetic in nature. What is shared may be currently irrelevant to one's present situation. However, trends indicate that gentrification is coming to most if not all-American cities and even rural areas. Washington D.C and New York City are the forerunners for other American cities soon to experience the same displacement. In this sense, the thesis is prophetic in nature sounding the alarm for what his coming.

Mounted on the walls in the chambers of the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginzburg, former Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, was a picture framed with these words written at the bottom in Hebrew: Justice, justice, you must pursue!² What a fitting phrase for Justice Ginzburg whose life journey was the embodiment of such pursuits in the highest courts of the land and who left a legacy for us to fulfill like pursuits. Why might this short terse verse speak such volumes to a life fulfilled in fighting for justice? The answer might be found in the double mention of justice. The Deuteronomic double cry for justice is for emphasis, so that we do not gloss over the subject of justice. Perhaps, the double cry of justice could signify a double meaning by distinguishing varying

² "U.S. Capitol Memorial Service for Justice Ruthe Bader Ginsburg," C-Span, <https://youtu.be/pqxHqVVhz4M>.

notions of justice: one for the wealthy and another for the poor. Both forms of justice have merit on their own yet, from time to time, come into conflict with one another. When it comes to housing, justice in the city of Washington, D.C has such tension.

Washington, D.C. benefits substantially from the daring leadership of The Honorable Muriel Bowser, Mayor of Washington, D.C. Mayor Bowser gained national reputation through her antagonistic relationship with former President Donald Trump, changing Lafayette Square to Black Lives Matter Square, and ordering curfews during the storming of the capitol. While relishing her national achievements, native Washingtonians are most proud of her steady guidance through Covid-19. Mayor Bowser instituted housing equity on a similar scale. On May 10, 2019, Mayor Bowser signed an order to address low-income housing by the year 2025: The Housing Framework for Equity and Growth orders 36,000 new housing units, 12,000 which are designated for low-income.³ The inclusion of low-income residents makes the mayor's plan just in a rapidly gentrified city that previously displaced low-income residents to Maryland suburbs. City residents

³ <https://planning.dc.gov/page/housing-framework-equity-and-growth>

rejoiced in the plan and can rest knowing that gentrification now benefits both the wealthy and the poor.

Yet, as the Pastor of a Black congregation in the Shaw District of Northwest Washington D.C., I can neither rejoice nor rest. Washington D.C is leading the way in displacement caused by gentrification. As a result, the poor in our community feel hopeless in the prospects of residing in neighborhoods where generations of family have lived. As a pastoral witness, I see long standing residents unwillingly displaced from their neighborhood homes causes traumatic grief likened to that of biblical lament. Many experienced, Black colleagues instructed me, “If you can’t beat them, then join them.” However, the more I see the poor pushed lower by power politics the more my prophetic sense directs me to protest not “join them.”

Walter Brueggemann, in his sermon series “Justice: From Zion Back to Sinai”, outlines two kinds of justice: one from above, the governments, regimes, and systems versus justice from below for the oppressed, the poor, and the powerless.⁴ The argument is that God works justice from below when the powers that be exercise injustice under the guise of justice from above. This thesis will

⁴ “Walter Brueggemann on Justice From Below,” Fuller Studio, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxJld8cdScw>

search the prophetic writings during exile, specifically Jeremiah 30-33, to provide tools for inner-city pastors to direct their congregations to help the displaced.

Not only are there varying notions of justice, but also varying notions of land possession. During exile, land possessed by tribal families was exchanged through war, redemption, and commerce. These variations of land possession also exist today. Ellen F. Davis notes this variation: “the biblical notion of land as a trust from God...runs contrary to notions of private property dominant in North America, at least.”⁵ This creates a dilemma of how land possession might be viewed. Even though Black people do not own much land in Washington, D.C., hope is created in understanding a right to land that extends beyond wealth and possession. Viewing land possession as God given instead of commodity driven can bring justice and equity to poor residents of Washington, D.C. This is the justice that we are pursuing.

Maybe justice is mentioned twice to indicate the passionate and persistent pursuit of that goal. Why is it necessary that we pursue justice with such a persistent passion? The answer to this question lies in Deuteronomy 16:20, “...so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you. In

⁵ Ellen F. Davis, *Biblical Prophecy: Perspectives for Christian Theology, Discipleship, and Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 164.

this verse, the link between occupying land and a relentless pursuit of justice is made clear. This hot pursuit of justice is what I am calling protest, a protest which begins with a passionate pursuit of God through lament. Lament is defined as a prolonged protest to God amid devastating living conditions; this lament eventually yields hope in the heart of lamenter.⁶ Lament restores hope for poor residents as we pursue justice through occupying the land in Washington, D.C.- the Lord being our helper. Chapter one is a thorough lament of displacement in our community; healing and gathering are offered as solutions.

After beginning in lament, chapter two detail the next step in restoring the displaced, community formation. Community formation begins with a vision: my notion of justice is to maintain a thirty percent Black population in Washington, D.C. as landowners, creating rich, vibrant communities which possess the potential for brotherhood and sisterhood among races. In this vision, poor residents remain in their neighborhood creating a rich diversity among new residents. The local Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) has passed measures to displace the homeless from our neighborhood; while the homeless are beyond the scope of this project, their removal demonstrates continual displacement of the poor. Action against the poor and the homeless contrasts

⁶ Ellen Davis, *Prophecy*, 146.

God's vision of exilic community in Jeremiah 30-33 as the outcasts, the lame, the blind, parents, and pregnant women are included. Daniel Berrigan states, "In the vision of heaven will reside the hope of the Church militant; it will at the same time act as stimulus to action."⁷ Hope and action find their origin in God's vision for community. We, then, act in protest in hopes that God's vision for community will emerge. If this diverse community emerges, God's vision will be fulfilled. Chapter three is based on Jeremiah chapter 32 and other passages from Jeremiah. This details land use and landownership through the lens of Jesus as Redeemer and God as landowner. Chapter four details the birth and maintenance of hope even after worst-case scenarios.

⁷ Gordon V. Oyer, Jim Forest, and John Dear, *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemakers Retreat* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 3982, Kindle.

CHAPTER 1

The Source of the Problem

Nowhere in our nation is disparity between extreme wealth and extreme poverty more apparent than in Washington, D.C. Economic trends indicate that national disparities of mounting wealth in eastern and western coastal regions are leaving interior regions destitute. The economic imbalance manifests distinctly in housing with “blight and abandonment” characterizing the American interior and “affordability and gentrification” its extreme coasts.⁸ Among coastal cities, Washington, D.C. fared the best:

Real estate prices in metro Washington increased more than prices in any other city over the first decade of the century—more than New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles....when much of the country was still struggling to recover from the Great Recession.⁹

Washington, D.C. is become prosperity in the land par excellence signaled by Jeff Bezos’ decision to buy a spacious mansion in the District’s most elite

⁸Alec MacGillis, *Fulfillment: Winning and Losing in One-Click America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux), 7-9. MacGillis notes, “As for the places already wealthy in 1980, they were now off the charts. Income in the Washington area was a quarter higher than in the rest of the country in 1980. By the middle of 2015, that gap was more than twice as large.”

⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

neighborhood of Kalorama and to build his second headquarters in the greater Washington, D.C. area. The tech industry's growth in Washington D.C. adds significantly to rising housing costs. As of October 2021, median housing costs have reached an all-time high in local areas: \$535,000 for the greater Washington, D.C area, \$705,000 in Washington, D.C., and \$1,530,000 for single family housing in Falls Church, Virginia.¹⁰

In this chapter I will argue that displacement caused by gentrification is a unmitigated disaster for the poor. Jeremiah 30 and 31 demonstrate the need for healing for Israelites displaced through exile. It depicts the effects upon those Israelites displaced from land, city, and home. God shows compassion on both people and the places where their homes once stood; this compassion would lead to the restoration of the land, healing of the people, and rebuilding of city and homes. Gentrification has similar effects upon the displaced. Inner city pastors and churches possess the distinct opportunity to extend their fold to displaced residents to bring healing and restoration of homes to the poor. Jeremiah's little Book of Restoration points us in the right direction.

¹⁰ Marisa M. Kashino, "DC-Area Home Prices Hit New Records in October," *Washingtonian*, November 11, 2021, <https://www.washingtonian.com/2021/11/11/dc-area-home-prices-hit-new-records-in-october/>

How might we locate the source of the problem of displacement caused by gentrification? The hopelessness faced by urban pastors is due to the vastness of the problem. Where does one start in addressing the injustices caused by gentrification? Questions about where to begin solving displacement abound: How might city council and communities keep developers accountable? Is the mayor and city council the problem? Or perhaps the wealthy new residents bringing with them multiple changes to the neighborhood? Is the church the problem? If so, is it the White church, the Black church or both? How about the community? What responsibility does the community have in fighting gentrification? The list goes on. If communities can pinpoint the source of the problem, then the problem can be addressed, diagnosed, and, hopefully, solved. I will analyze all notable entities that factor into gentrification in Washington, D.C. in hopes of locating the source of the problem. I will use also my own experience fighting a proposed development project as a part of my analysis of the problem of gentrification. First, a definition of gentrification and displacement will help inform the discussion of gentrification.

The term gentrification has experienced a transformation in meaning over time. Historically, gentrification describes middle-class residential mass movements into lower class neighborhoods causing disruptions of community,

escalating home values, and changes in the neighborhood landscapes which often result in the expulsion of poor residents. Ruth Glass first used this term in the 1960's to describe London's housing changes :

One by one, many of the working-class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes-upper and lower...The current social status and value of such dwellings are frequently in inverse relation to their size, and in any case enormously inflated by comparison with previous levels in their neighborhoods. Once this process of 'gentrification' starts in a district, it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced, and the whole social character of the district is changed.¹¹

From the beginning, gentrification disrupts a sense of place for the poor. Fifty years after Glass, most view gentrification as a form of rescue mission rather than an invasion. Studies published by NYU, Furman, Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank, and Columbia University all show that gentrification in New York City is beneficial to all residents inasmuch as "residents of public housing in wealthier and gentrifying neighborhoods make more money, live with less violence, and have better educational options for their children, despite also facing some challenges."¹² Based on greater better credit scores and higher incomes, gentrification is now reported as a positive influence on neighborhoods. Of course,

¹¹ Ruth Glass, "Aspects of Change" in *The Gentrification Debates*, ed. Japonica Brown Saracino. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 22-23.

¹² Chris Bodenner, "Why Is Gentrification Such a Bad Word?", *The Atlantic*, June 27, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/06/gentrification-bad-word/396908/>.

these positive influences are only for pre-gentrification residents who manage to remain in the neighborhood. Though these studies focus on New York City, Washington, D.C., along with other cities around the nation, evidence the same features.

Lost in the positive rhetoric is gentrification's most damaging critique-displacement. Generally, there are three ways to describe displacement caused by gentrification: 1. Direct displacement occurs when displacement is legislated, and residents must relocate due to the new laws, 2. Secondary displacement is the displacement due to rising housing costs and influx of the middle class (much of what we see today), and 3. Exclusionary displacement is found when low-income persons cannot move into urban neighborhoods due to escalating housing costs. A fourth form of displacement should be added to the three mentioned above: I coin it as inclusionary displacement. Inclusionary displacement is when residents remain in the neighborhood, but the neighborhood is displaced through overhauls in aesthetics, nomenclature, and building composition. Secondary and inclusionary displacement are experienced most by Black residents in Washington, D.C.¹³ Our church, Miles Memorial Christian Methodist Episcopal

¹³ I use the term 'Black' to designate Black people born in the United States and sharing ancestors who have suffered through slavery in the United States. I distinguish this from the term African

(CME) Church, is located in the historically Black neighborhood of Shaw on D.C.'s northwest side where rapid displacement was noticed almost fifteen years ago when government officials took up residence.¹⁴ Developers propose new buildings suiting the size and income levels of wealthy residents displacing poor residents to the Maryland suburb of Prince George's County.

The influx of wealthy residents has created a divided community in which neighbors rarely interact. Gentrified residents walk dogs, ride bikes, and wear earplugs through the neighborhood and rarely initiate interaction. Name changes of neighborhoods and local schools are proposed, local restaurants change to high-end chain restaurants, and cultural murals are substituted by paintings that reflect the new residents.¹⁵ The city approved the redevelopment of a historic, local market into an oversized Giant grocery store. Fast food but healthy Cava and pricey Thai restaurants along with high-end coffee houses litter the Shaw neighborhood along 7th Street where small, local businesses once thrived. A towering apartment building displays an androgynous White person dressed in colonial wig and garb soliciting residents to purchase condos over \$500,000; the

American which includes Africans, West Indian, and others. Long-term residents will be referred to as poor or low income understanding that most of these residents are Black.

¹⁴ MacGillis, *Fulfillment*, 69.

¹⁵ "When Gentrification's Neighborhood Name Game Runs Into ...," Nextcity.org, May 17, 2015, <https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/new-neighborhood-name-gentrification>.

image does not ease the sense of being invaded. The latest census indicates that two person households with no children are the majority in Northwest Washington. These and many other changes cause inclusionary displacement.

Gentrification is quiet and subtle while displacement is the exact opposite. The Shaw neighborhood now houses wealthy, mostly White residents in renovated row-houses, and Black people reside in apartments. Witnessed from a pastoral perspective, I judge that gentrification feels like a hidden hand waving a magic wand of change; one observes the change yet cannot detect how it happens or who is behind it. In contrast, displacement sounds like long-standing residents crying out for help to remain in their neighborhood or crying out as they unwillingly leave their community. Community cries do not equate to tears and wailing but register as cries in the ears of a pastor, echoing biblical lament during exile. Like exile, gentrification creates an initial and seemingly insurmountable sense of hopelessness for both pastors and residents. Initially, I too felt hopeless against gentrification as I lamented and accepted the changes. Miles Memorial CME church has served the Shaw neighborhood for 140 years and I sensed that its future was in jeopardy. How could I stop displacement as pastor with average membership and limited resources? Locating the source of the problem was not evident and would require effort. However, as I have journeyed through the fight

against displacement, my hope is renewed in two ways. First, the formerly unseen forces are now visible to me and are recognizable in flesh and blood, as people whom I know as neighbors, even if relations are not always easy. Second, I have found scriptural and theological resources to frame and address the problem. If I can get to the root of the problem and address it in those terms, then I can act for our church and residents.

GOD'S COMPASSION

An explanation of what kind of healing Israel needed may be helpful from the beginning. The kind of pain that Israel experienced can be categorized as trauma and disaster. Trauma is defined as follows:

To receive a blow, to become the victim of sudden and perhaps repeated assaults in one form or another whether physical or emotional. To 'be traumatized' is, by necessity, expressed in the passive voice because trauma reduces victims to a passive state...for most people, trauma inflicts wounds without words.¹⁶

For Israel, the healing needed was not physical but emotional;¹⁷ they had internal wounds yet no words to describe the pain. While trauma is inflicted upon

¹⁶ Kathleen M. O' Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 2.

¹⁷ The popular hymn in the Black Church affirms God as healer of interior wounds, "There is a Balm in Gilead that makes the wounded whole...that heals the sin-sick soul."

individuals, disaster describes trauma inflicted on a community of people. Israel was traumatized as a nation suffering the lingering effects of the disaster, the destruction of its city and home life. Kathleen O'Connor in her book, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* identifies three areas experienced by traumatized victims based on psychological research: 1. Shattered memories, 2. Inability to articulate trauma (muteness), and 3. Emotional numbness.¹⁸ As a whole, the book of Jeremiah can be viewed as a book of shattered memories that come to Jeremiah in pieces thus the reason for the fragmented sequence of events throughout the book. With this understanding, Jeremiah, along with Israel, is a traumatized survivor wounded by the effects of Judah's destruction; healing happens as these memories are recollected.

Jeremiah initiates healing Israel's wounds by causing Israel to ponder its unhealed condition. Jeremiah achieves clarification through the literary tool of the double question (and sometimes triple question): "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been

¹⁸ O'Connor, *Pain*, 22-24. O'Connor brilliantly correlates Israel's trauma with victims of domestic violence, Daniel Smith Christopher correlates Israel's trauma with post-traumatic stress disorder. While these correlations are strikingly identical with Israel's trauma, it may prove problematic for such victims to correlate God as both wounder and healer, as O'Connor suggests. While this dual portrayal of God works for Israel, the implications of the wounder being the healer creates an inconsistency for actual domestic violence victims who face leave or stay, be healed or stay wounded, and life or death scenarios.

restored?" (Jer 8:22, New Revised Standard Version).¹⁹ The first question is to gain consensus with Israel: all would agree that there is a balm in Gilead. The second question further strengthens that consensus. There is both a balm and a physician in Gilead. The third question contrast the consensus gained with the first two questions causing Israel to ponder its current unhealed condition with knowledge that healing is available from God:²⁰ if there is both a balm and a physician in Gilead, then why do we remain unhealed? The final answer is found in the following verses: they are not healed because they do not know me (Jer 9:1,2);²¹ it is a lack of intimacy, or knowing God, which kept Israel unhealed. God never ceased to be a Healer; Israel lived as though they never knew or forgot that God was a Healer or anything else. Intimacy, then, becomes a leading cause for the introduction of God's new covenant,

"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. (Jer 31:33,34a)

¹⁹ All Biblical references are New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

²⁰ Walter A. Brueggemann, "Jeremiah's use of Rhetorical Question", *Journal of Biblical Literature* volume 93, number 3 (1973): 362.

²¹ Brueggemann, *Rhetorical*, 363.

Intimacy gained through unrestricted access to God is essential for Israel's healing. Healing, then, is not a given yet it is available through intimacy with God and necessary to experience God's new covenant. By pondering its unhealed condition, Israel seeks meaning to its suffering; this moves Israel from "passive victims into agents."²² With this newfound knowledge, Israel is one step closer to God and their healing, which He is both able and willing to perform.

Israel is healed through God's articulation of its sickness. In the book of restoration, God becomes physician by diagnosing Israel's wounds. Jeremiah utilizes the double question again, "Ask now, and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor? Why has every face turned pale?" (Jer 30:6). In this case, the first question provides sufficient consensus: no, a man cannot give birth to a child. The following two questions deepen the experience of extreme pain as diagnosed in verses 12-14: the wounds are "incurable" (v. 12a) "grievous"²³ (v. 12b), "a blow from the enemy" (v. 14) and having "no medicine for your wound and no healing for you" (v. 13). Moreover, this trauma is worsened by a lack of advocacy "having no one to plead their cause" (30:13), abandoned love from international allegiance "all your lovers

²² O'Connor, 128.

²³ Or Fatal.

have forgotten you" (30:14a), and constant attack "the punishment of a merciless foe" (30:14c). As physician, God diagnoses Israel with a terminal illness that it suffers in isolation from others; there is no one who can heal them. Brueggemann talks of the "language of grief, the rhetorical that engages the community in mourning for a funeral they do not want to admit. It is indeed their own funeral."²⁴ Yet, God can heal them, "'But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,' declares the Lord, 'because you are called an outcast, Zion for whom no one cares'" (Jer 30:17). God, the good physician, thoroughly articulates Israel's wounded condition, then promises to heal them; these words provide healing for Israel who could not articulate its own sickness. Then, God proclaims that He alone will heal Israel from its traumatic and social wounds. Israel will once again know God as healer.

Jeremiah assuaged Israel's numbness by showing God as co-sufferer. The double question is used once more: "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in? As often as I speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore, I am deeply moved for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord." The double question is used to deepen Israel's sense of God's own pain; using words like

²⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 40th Anniversary Edition, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018), 46

“dear” and “delight” reveal the underlying depth of God’s compassion, especially when used in relation to Ephraim. The mention of God’s grief for Ephraim echoes the same empathetic suffering stated earlier in the context of healing, “For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me” (Jer 8:21); in both cases, when Israel hurts, God hurts deeply. When God is moved deeply, the Hebrew word for “bowels” is used to indicate suffering at the deepest level possible. God’s grief accomplishes many things. First, God’s grief validates Jeremiah’s grief as legitimate and not to be perceived as a disgruntled, personal outcry. Second, God’s grief addresses the confusion of God’s position in Israel’s sufferings: He is present with Israel on a deep emotional level. Third, God joining Israel in the grieving process brings comfort from God as co-sufferer. Fourth, the joining of God’s grief with his people’s signals a turn in the fortunes of Israel. Brueggemann states, “that grief and mourning, that crying in pathos is the ultimate form of criticism, for it announces the sure end of the whole royal arrangement.”²⁵ If God does not grieve with us, our grief may be personal; knowledge of God’s grief assures the griever to an ending of the current arrangements. Though God has spoken against Ephraim, God has not forgotten him. This is a form of compassion and love (Jer 30:14; 31:3).

²⁵Brueggemann, *Imagination*, 46.

God's grief signals Israel's change from mourning to joy. Why continue in writhing labor when you cannot produce a child? Israel was told "again you will take up your timbrels" (Jer 30:4b), Samaria and Judah will come together to worship (31:6b), "Sing with joy for Jacob...Make your praises heard" (31:7), and "They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion" (30:12). The following verse sums up the healing from grief, "Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord" (30:13). The reason for joy is caused by the assurance of God's restoration, "Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord: they shall come back from the land of the enemy" (31:16). God hears Rachel, an ancestral figure of extreme grief, when she has "lamentation and bitter weeping"; God tells her to stop crying (v. 16). Then, He heard Ephraim lamenting; he was "ashamed", "dismayed", and "disgraced" (31:19). Through these two iconic figures, God heals both bitter, sorrowful weeping and the effects of emotional self-flagellation. He heals them both through his compassion (31:20b).

These Scriptures validate the cries of residents traumatized through displacement. The double questions line up with our hopeless grief in thinking we

could produce some answer to such vast displacement. When residents express feelings of despair when faced with the loss of their homes as demonstrated in a recurring summary statement: "I don't know what I am going to do, Pastor!" I operated as prophetic interpreter by thoroughly diagnosing the problem and offering the solution of protest at the zoning commission. Reassurance of God's presence and activity was articulated through two means of which God informed me in my private devotional time: 1.) Do not allow doubt to dwell in my heart (believe), and 2.) Give voice to your victory in advance. These elements of claiming faith and victory gave confidence to our people that God was with us. In my heart, I know that I was not misleading my people. The Book of Restoration back up these assurances.

THE TRAUMA OF LOSING HOME

Displacement caused by gentrification has transformed pastoring a Black church in D.C. into a ministry of survival. This is due not only to churches' limited opportunities for growth but also to factors contributing to their demise. Is this an overstatement? Perhaps, yet in 2018, eighty-two D.C. churches closed their doors. In that same year and in the Shaw neighborhood, Lincoln Congregational Temple

United Church of Christ (UCC), once a flourishing congregation boasting thousands in past membership, reluctantly closed after 149 years in the community.²⁶ Lincoln Temple spearheaded the organization efforts of the March on Washington with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In some sense, these church closings are not simply an exchange of deeds but an experience of death. Also in the Shaw neighborhood, Metropolitan Baptist Church, the most prominent Black church in D.C., now worships with less than 1,000 people in a rented facility in Maryland.²⁷ In terms of survival, Black church leaders have anticipated this trend for years. Over the past 20 years, many Black churches both small and large have migrated to Prince George's County (PG county) in Maryland. In response to this mass church exodus, PG County has restricted the construction of new church buildings and passed laws creating difficulty for new churches entering the County. From 2016 to 2018, our church implemented a relocation project to PG County that fell short due to County laws. Other relocation options are not much better. Church relocations south to nearby Virginia and North to Montgomery

²⁶ "The end of our journey': A historic Black church closes its doors in a changing D.C". WashingtonPost.com, September 30, 2018.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/the-end-of-our-journey-a-historic-Black-church-closes-its-doors-in-a-changing-dc>

²⁷ "Metropolitan Baptist Church elects new pastor." WashingtonPost.com, November 4, 2014.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/local/wp/2014/11/04/metropolitan-baptist-church-elects-new-pastor>

County prove too costly. Unless churches relocate without a church building, Black churches in D.C are stuck in D.C. The current transitory nature of Black churches in D.C. indicates that our church, though not currently threatened with survival, is fighting for its future survival. After thriving over the last 138 years in D.C., our church fights for the opportunity to do ministry for another 138 years.

Specifically, church survival in D.C. means solving a most critical variable in ministry: parking. My colleagues in D.C. agree that parking is the most critical factor in ministry. While parking does not affect those with adequate land, most churches in D.C. do not have parking lots and extra land, including our church. Of the five churches within a one block radius of the church, only one has adequate parking yet many of their members also fight for parking spaces on the street. Three other churches have three to ten parking spots, and our church has none. In a recent church survey, nearly forty percent of our members indicated that their physical attendance would decrease significantly if parking worsened on Sundays. In general, Black churches in D. C. have fought for decades to maximize parking with some success; but new bike lanes and parking laws have kept members of all faiths scrambling for parking on Sunday.²⁸ As is, the parking

²⁸ Bike lanes are used by newer residents and decrease the number of parking spaces available to the community.

problem stunts church growth possibilities. One example is when our church added seventy-nine new members in 2015; only a few residents became members mostly due to limited parking. More than any other factor, then, parking dictates the survival or death of a church. Our church leaders opposed the construction of a 363-unit building dominated by efficiencies and one-bedroom condominiums which would replace an existing sixty-three-unit vacant family building across the street from our church. Our efforts began with self-interest for survival: the proposed building only provided fifty parking spaces for 363 units which would crush an already cramped parking situation in the neighborhood, especially on Sundays. While developers claim that public transit is the dominant mode of transportation, they do not account for changes in transportation use over time. For instance, will more people take public transportation since Covid-19 or will more use cars? People's use of public transportation is a variable over time having the potential to create crippling effects on our church.

Survival is not only an issue for the church but one for long standing residents. Losing a home and a community occupied by generations of family members is like a death. Cries of lament came to my ears as members were displaced or threatened to be displaced. Initially motivated by the self-interest of parking, our concerns extended to resident displacement as well. Gentrification

displaced a handful of members from the sixty-three unit building in questions, some feeling they had no choice in the matter. In the end, we lost all those members across the street through displacement, one being a long-standing senior member of the church. In one instance, a local elderly woman paid off her co-op home after forty years of payments; she was diagnosed with dementia. Her daughter, who became a member of ours, relocated to the co-op to care for this mother. As the dementia progressed, she sent her mother to a care facility, but, when the mother died, the co-op board ruled to evict for the daughter and the residence was lost to the family. As a result, the family forfeited forty years of equity and the residence remains vacant years later. The daughter eventually relocated to PG County due to secondary displacement and our church lost a family. Others from the co-op tell of tactics to remove them from property that they are supposed to own. Many co-op residents feel that the ousting of residents is to make way for more lucrative opportunities from new, wealthier residents. This is one of many stories that occur in the neighborhood. Displacement caused by gentrification involves real people and causes real problems that the cold data of statistical reports, neighborhood improvements, and new grocery stores overlook.

Compassion is needed to heal people who experience the trauma of losing a home. Israel's dire need for healing is caused by being called "outcast": "For I

will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, says the Lord, because they have called you an outcast: 'It is Zion; no one cares for her!'" (30:17) The Hebrew word for outcast is *Nadach* which means to push off, to expel or banish, to drive away, or to force. From what was Israel driven away? Surely, Israel was driven from its land (30:3) yet also from its city and houses. The mention of "outcast" falls in the immediate context of restoring the fortunes of the latter: "Thus says the Lord: I am going to restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob, and have compassion on his dwellings; the city shall be rebuilt upon its mound, and the citadel set on its rightful site." (Jer 30:18) The 'mound' was comprised of demolished homes attached to city walls mounted up for soldiers to fight the enemy at the walls height. These same places would be restored for those displaced by exile. God demonstrates restoration through compassion not only for healing wounds but also in restoring homes.

In fact, one of the three prophetic invectives in the book of Jeremiah can apply with modern day displacement in gentrification. Trauma through dread of future lamentation is placed upon those who build spacious houses without considering righteous acts and justice for other residents in the city.

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages; who says, "I will build myself a spacious house with

large upper rooms," and who cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar, and painting it with vermilion. Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him, He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the Lord. But your eyes and heart are only on your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence. (Jer 22:13-17)

God assures Israel constantly that He will return to the oppressors the same punishment they inflicted on Israel (30:11, 16, 20, 23-24).

SEEKING FURTHER SOLUTIONS

According to the Mayor's plan, the developer fulfilled the twelve percent low-income housing requirement by providing forty-four new units. Yet, these units fall nineteen units short of the sixty-three existing family units. Not only that, but family units are also being replaced by efficiency and one-bedroom units that are not suitable for disabled residents. Add to that, the low-income threshold for the new building is \$60,000 while the median income in our community is \$30,000. In other words, through the difference in pricing and space, the residents who left the building will not be eligible to live in the new building. Systems like these may not spell death to the community. It seems that developers and city officials deal with numbers that do not account for the serious problems with gentrification that churches and community groups face. The prophet Isaiah confirms the need for

prophetic voice on behalf of the displaced, “Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land!”(Is 5:8).

Where do we locate the original problem of displacement? My first observation is that there are real problems in the governmental system. In standing with Black residents to remain in the neighborhood, a journey began in city government with trips to the local ANC meetings, and the D.C. Zoning Board, and the City Council. The first level of resistance was from the ANC, which voted for the approval of the project; the problem with this approval is that while other adjacent churches were notified, adjacent Black churches were not. The second level of resistance was from City Hall. After attending an open forum sponsored by the D.C Housing Authority (DCHA), Councilwoman Elissa Silverman stated that the city had “abandoned its most vulnerable citizens,” but the city council did nothing to help. The third level of resistance was from the Zoning Council. After a zoning meeting, the commission agreed that the developer would make concessions to the Black churches: provide more parking for members of churches and address our low-income housing concerns. The meeting was fruitless due to a minimal, temporary parking offer. This led to a more significant protest at the next zoning commission when over 120 community residents and leaders

attended. As a result, the council stalled the project and required the developer to make a reasonable compromise. This led to a better, yet insufficient, offer from the developers. We requested 40 more parking spaces in the structure which would solve the parking issue for our churches; the developer offered only more temporary parking in remote locations for a limited time with cash consideration for a van. Unfortunately, Covid-19 shut down the operations of the city and the project was put on hold, or so we thought. The Zoning Commission was authorized to meet a month later and passed the application for the building of the structure; no effort was made to notify the Black churches of the meeting and letters of opposition submitted to the Zoning Commission were never read at the hearing. Added to all of this, Black people lead the ANC, the Zoning Commission, City Housing, and the mayor's office. Despite this, the oppressive systems continue to roll. What is a pastor to do in addressing these systems? Sometimes, they seem beyond your call to preach and teach. As Pastor/Theologian Dennis R. Edwards, who worked in ministry in Washington, D.C aptly states, "God wants to fix broken people and broken systems."²⁹ Obviously, much is broken in the city systems of Washington, D.C. The idea is not to view city systems as enemies but

²⁹ Dennis R. Edwards, *Might from the Margins: The Gospels Power to Turn the Tables on Injustice*, (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2020), 89.

an extension of ministry where pastors seek to save the soul of the city as much as the soul of the individual.

After observing the city, the Black community must look at itself as a potential problem and further, as having a necessary role in finding a solution. As a Black church, we have done all we know to do. At this point, building community alliances is most critical in the work against gentrification. Two ministerial alliances, the Wednesday Clergy Fellowship (WCF) and the Committee of Clergy for Wealth Preservation (CCWP), have supported us. Denominational support from the local chapter of the National Baptist Convention and the Washington-Virginia District supports us as well. Two lawyers are working on the legal side of the project: one a local lawyer familiar with our community needs, and another lawyer who is experienced in development cases. We have working relationships with NAACP and One DC, who provide support in organizing politically and Empower DC, focusing on the displaced and housing in Shaw. We have received invaluable counsel from the local leader of the local Poor People's Campaign and signed a memorandum of understanding with our sister church in the struggle, First Rising Mount Zion Baptist Church, who has been in the community for 85 years and is situated on the west side of the proposed edifice. In the spirit and theology of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we named the alliance the

Beloved Community Alliance (BCA). The purpose of the alliance is to protect the names of the churches and create a rubric that garners support from multi-ethnic support in protesting injustice. Possessing the world platform, Dr. Martin Luther King promoted the idea of the Beloved Community though he was not the originator of the term: "He felt that justice could not be parceled out to individuals or groups, but was the birthright of every human being in the Beloved Community....Justice is indivisible."³⁰ While Jesus is apparently not enough reason to unify Christians of all races in America, justice has emerged as the unifier of all races in our Beloved Community.

Could the problem of fighting gentrification can be located with Black churches in our neighborhood? Three out of the five churches adjacent to the project have already approved the new edifice through the ANC and the Zoning Commission. Instead of supporting our fight against gentrification, other religious leaders within a five-block radius of the church suggested alternatives to fighting gentrification. While these Black leaders see the injustice of displacement, they deem the investment of church time and resources too large with no guarantee of success. These leaders resign in fighting gentrification or other issues of justice

³⁰ "The King Philosophy - Nonviolence365," The King Center, January 5, 2021, <https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/>.

unless it benefits their local church. The task would call for too much time and resources diverted from their congregation; they focus on pastoring their flock and that is all. They counter by saying, "I would join you, but you are too late," or, "It may be naïve to think you can stop gentrification," and the most frequent response, "If you can't beat them, join them." Certainly, instances exist where churches have had success with developers in mutually beneficial collaborative work by joining them. For instance, in Harlem, New York, a sister CME church joined with developers resulting in a newly built, two-level church with plenty of space for worship, classrooms, fellowship, and, most importantly, parking; the developer even gifted a condominium to the church in addition to shared parking. A Baptist church in the suburbs of Maryland has joined with developers to help churches rebuild their current locations and includes housing. Such joining with developers makes sense for future collaborations in building inner city, low-income housing. Even for our church, joining developers makes sense if parking and space increase as a result. As a strategy, joining them bestows practical benefits for churches especially in brick-and-mortar improvements. Among those of us fighting gentrification, there is tacit agreement that there are benefits to be accrued. Joining them is not out of the question, but have we ever tried to beat them before joining them?

If joining them means ensures church structures without ensuring the Black community, this union will disintegrate after developers complete the building process. While churches can partner with developers to erect new buildings, those same developers build housing that the Black community cannot afford. This dynamic leaves some unanswered questions regarding the future survival of the church. How long will our church survive with cramped parking while the Black community dwindles by decades and suffers through accelerated housing developments by 2025? Our church has existed for 138 years-within the Black community. Multicultural ministry notwithstanding, Black churches seem destined to suffer the same fate as the eighty-two churches that closed in 2018; most of those churches were in the Black community. Granted, other factors contribute to attendance and membership loss like aging, lack of interest, and apathy; in fact, the only growing category in church attendance surveys is “never” attending.³¹ Despite these negative numbers, I have pastored flourishing churches in Los Angeles, Hartford, Connecticut, and as an Assistant Pastor in Chicago, yet

³¹ Lovett H. Weems, Jr., “No Shows: The Decline in Worship Attendance,” *Christian Century*, October 2010, 11. Although Weems’ study is for mainline White denominations, its’ appropriation to Black denominations is evident. Weems notes that membership concerns challenge twenty first century church more than frontier churches of the nineteenth century. Denominations are reaching their tipping point.

D.C. presents the most imposing challenges to church growth, indeed, to church survival.

While most U.S cities have only recently experienced the effects of gentrification, gentrification in D.C is past full swing, exacerbated by land-locked property, cramped parking, and the inability for churches to relocate. Another unanswered question is will generations of church members continue to drive from Maryland? While our current congregation is committed to the drive, much doubt remains to the sustainability of that commitment from generation to generation. If the landscape of the neighborhood changes wholesale, might a Black church in a White community be changed eventually? Joining developers in building new church structures without securing a Black community spells doom for the Black church. Is the church to care only for its own sheep without regard for those experiencing injustice outside its membership? Is the church to evangelize the spiritual saving of the soul and disregard the deliverance of the body of those souls from oppressive conditions?³² In discussing displacement with pastors, the talk is of the church's self-interest, the injustices perpetrated against the Black community are rarely discussed and attempts to fight the system are dismissed. This abandonment of one's own neighborhood is puzzling and

³² Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, (New York: Bold Type, 2016), 49.

thinking the Black church can survive long-term while allowing mass displacement is confounding. If local churches evangelized, it might create hope for long lasting relationships between community and church; yet our church is the only church, along with Jehovah's Witness, that is seen in the neighborhood; as one longtime resident put it, "You are the only pastor that I have ever seen out here in all my years." In these discussions, pastors neither offer plans for multicultural ministry nor have their buildings been upgraded by developers; there are only talks of plans to join developers for new church construction and renovation. Not only is displacement disintegrating our neighborhood, but it is doing the same to our Christian fellowship as well. Should Black pastors continue to ignore the injustices of housing and displacement of its own community, not only does it spell doom for the future, but it also creates a dilemma with God who called pastors to prophetic work and to pursue justice with a passion.

Could White churches be the problem? How might inner city White churches respond to Black people being negatively affected by displacement? Surprisingly, there are positive signs of support by White pastors. A representative from the Downtown Cluster of Churches, mostly White congregations, attended our Community Housing Forum at our church although he requested that he not speak at the meeting. My appeal to all inner-city churches is to care for the stranger

and the oppressed as instructed in the Scriptures. In describing the new community after exile in Jeremiah, Ellen Davis points to God being “radically inclusive” by including outcasts, single mothers, and the disabled.³³ As pastors inheriting the prophetic tradition, we must fight for this radical inclusivity in our communities today. Many White pastors have joined the fight for Black Lives Matter and Juneteenth demonstrations and have demonstrated willingness and action to join Black people in the struggle against oppression. This is a sign of hope for Christian pastors to unify for justice and inclusivity in the future. The problem is that all Christians are more inclined to fight the national problems of injustice while remaining silent on and inactive in local matters of injustice.

So how do we locate the source of the problem? A common way to locate the source of the problem is to blame the victim. The undercurrent justifying gentrification is the idea that Black people have destroyed the city. Black people have resided in the city for over 200 years and partially reduced it to rubble in the 1968 riots. With subsequent decades riddled with the ills of guns, drugs, and crime, some hold that Black communities have perpetuated communities of poverty that later become ripe for gentrification. While we take a hard look at our Black community, we must be careful not to blame the victim. At this point,

³³ Ellen F. Davis, *Biblical Prophecy: Perspectives for Christian Theology, Discipleship, and Ministry* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 2014), 157.

oppression and systematic oppression must enter the equation. Centuries of oppression must be acknowledged as creators of displacement conditions. This is to be kept in mind even as the Black community looks in the mirror and does not excuse itself from the responsibility to change it. This self-evaluation of the Black community must be done with much caution. In making a parallel with modern day refugees, theologian Daniel Smith Christopher notes that most studies of displaced people usually end up “implicitly blaming the victims.”³⁴ Before we blame victims of oppression, we need to make a thorough assessment of the oppressive “conditions and processes”³⁵ that lead to displacement. What we are witnessing is a product of systemic problems and injustices; these systems must be assessed as well.

On the surface, city government systems seem supportive of equal housing, yet a closer look at housing procedures indicate measures causing oppressive housing conditions for Black residents. From the ANC to the City Hall, the city acknowledges the injustices in housing yet do not act to change the conditions. In one City Council meeting on housing in February of 2020, community stakeholders documented the mass displacement in public housing, the

³⁴ Daniel Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 54.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 54.

impossibility of finding alternate housing in the district, oppressive measures by D.C. property owners, and how public housing is being turned over to private developers. Yet, the council still allowed these oppressive practices to remain. As for the Zoning Commission, even though they stalled the project, they disregarded community efforts of protest and approved the building of the 363-unit structure. We are now engaged in a legal battle against the developer; now, the developer offers more money to BCA but less parking. Meanwhile, the mayor has a plan to create 36,000 new units in the district by 2025 with 12,000 of those units being affordable housing. This creates the rhetoric for city officials, developers, and even new residents to acknowledge the problem of low-income housing yet produce outcomes that keep the status quo. For example, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) set the Area Median Income (AMI) over \$120,000 based on incomes not only in Washington, D.C. but also the wealthier areas of Virginia and Maryland.³⁶ Through the mayor's plan, those who benefit from gentrification are justified because low-income housing is addressed; in reality, those in the neighborhood must move anyway, despite the plan. The city acknowledges the injustice, addresses the injustice, but that injustice continues to

³⁶ HUD Office of Economic Affairs, "FY 2021 Income Limits Documentation System," FY 2021 Income Limits Documentation System - Median Income Calculation for, 2021, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il/il2021/2021MedCalc.odn>.

displace people in our neighborhood. Most recently, the mayor ordered that any person seeking to sue a developer must show cause before the case is heard. This order was made during our lawsuit against the developer making us go through more documentation to justify our case even before it is heard. So, we are also fighting against the decrees of the mayor as well. Moreover, in reviewing the City Planner's twenty-five-year Comprehensive City Plan, there are no churches mentioned or expected in the plan. In facing the systemic problem of oppressive process in the city government, what is a local church to do? Craig G. Bartholomew offers a comprehensive solution that merits our attention:

Zoning laws have inhibited healthy city development all over the Western world, and even healthy neighborhood developments...will require lawyers and city managers to get involved in reforming the legal apparatus of cities to facilitate healthy development....communities and not individuals by themselves will be the mechanism of change; hence the potential of the local church or Christian community.³⁷

According to Bartholomew, church, community, and critical partnerships are the components that will lift the poor against systemic oppression, especially in housing. With the momentum of our current relationship, it is imperative to create partnerships at higher governmental levels that are

³⁷ Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 266-67.

empowered to affect the change not only in our neighborhood but in the systems of city government.

Finally of locating the source of the problem, displacement is caused an array of factors, including urban pastors' lack of prophetic engagement in their neighborhoods. In this thesis, I will focus, particularly on the latter. The reason for this focus is found in my door-to-door survey of the community conducted in 2019 and 2020. The survey revealed overwhelming support by churches affected by gentrification, the Black community, and even the newly arriving gentrified community; the only support lacking came from inner city pastors. This is no surprise. Studies show that Black churches engage in the community only when such engagement affects economics and youth but not when it involves politics or civic concerns.³⁸ The Old Testament records that prophets always met resistance not only from the authorities but also from fellow prophets, as in Jeremiah's case. Jewish theologian Abraham J. Heschel in noting the prophets' assessment of the morality of the people, states, "Few are guilty, but all are responsible."³⁹ My work is not a guilt trip on pastors, but a call

³⁸ Sandra L. Barnes, "Priestly and Prophetic Influences on Black Church Social Services," *Social Problems* 51, no. 2 (2004), 202.

³⁹ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 19.

for all to prophetic responsibility, beginning with the pastor. It seems the church does not fear enemies around the corner but the ones in their face. Gentrification will eventually be in the face of the whole Black community. As in Jeremiah's time, repentance may be too late when the enemy is in your face; the time to repent is now. Thus, the focus of this thesis is to direct inner-city pastors to their prophetic calling and to provide tools to act readily, justly, and effectively in fighting the injustice of displacement caused by gentrification.

GOD AS GATHERER

God models the shepherd role primarily through acts of gathering. Jeremiah uses the pastoral language of gathering to depict the restoration of Israel to the land: "I will bring them back" (30:3, 10; 31:8), "they shall come" (30:6-31:9, 16, 17), "scattered" (30:11; 31:10), "gathered" (31:8,10), "congregation" (30:20) and other shepherd language (31:24,32). The act of gathering is illumined by its Hebrew definition, *qavats* which means to grasp by the hand or collect; God gathered Israel in such fashion He "took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt" (31:32b). This gathering is to be distinguished from *qahal*, an

assembly, or a call to gather without necessarily having a purpose.⁴⁰ *Qavats* focuses on the process and purpose of gathering people to a central location; the gathering is intention with an emphasis on the process of gathering and its result.⁴¹

Pastors who neglect the critical act of gathering God's people bring unavoidable consequences upon themselves. Feeding is essential, "I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer 3:23). Yet, much more attention is given to the subject of scattering versus gathering His flock:

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord.

God pinpoints the problem as pastoral neglect of gathering His people.

How bad is the problem of pastoral neglect of gathering? Jeremiah's use of woe here indicates a scathing prophetic invective that forecasts eventual

⁴⁰ Smith-Christopher, *Theology of Exile*, 142. Smith-Christopher further distinguishes general assembly from purposeful congregation, "There is similar shift in vocabulary discernible in the biblical language used for the group. As opposed to speaking of the assembly, or 'all Israel,' a move seems discernible in the late Priestly writing toward the language of Israel as 'the congregation.'" Ibid.

⁴¹An interesting parallel exists in Genesis where Joseph details to Pharaoh the process and purpose of gathering corn (41:33-36); Ephraim is born during the years of plenty and perhaps named accordingly, "'For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes.'"

disaster and not the usual association with lament.⁴² Gathering, then, is not optional for pastors and carries weighty consequences. Perhaps, that consequence was generally forecasted in the previous chapter, “The wind shall shepherd all your shepherds” (Jer 22:22). God models the act of gathering again for the shepherds:

Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord. (Jer 23:3,4)

Gathering, then, is the act of bringing God’s people together which results in true peace,⁴³ hope, and provision for what is needed. Gathering is an essential element that needs to be restored in the pastoral ministry.

The pastoral role of gathering is best seen through the rare use of the word congregation within the prophetic books, where it appears. Only three times, two of them in Jeremiah (6:18; 31:20). The Hebrew word for congregation is *‘edhah* which pertains to the gathering of animals, furthering the pastoral imagery. Most scholars agree that the primary purpose of the congregation is for worship. Yet, the purpose of this congregation was not just for worship (Ps 111:1) but also for

⁴² Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36: A New Translation*, (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 134.

Lundbom describes the prophetic invective as sometimes containing both lament and doom.

⁴³ Opposed to the claims of a false peace when there is no peace (Jer 8:11).

war (Jgs 20:1), crowning Kings, (I Kgs 12:20), and other political matters.⁴⁴ This gathering of the congregation extends beyond worship to concrete matters as evidenced in the following verse, “Their prince shall be one of their own, their ruler shall come from their midst; I will bring him near and he shall approach me, for who would otherwise dare to approach me? Says the Lord.” (Jer 30:21). This gathered group would involve itself in electing officials from among the gathered faithful. The congregation after exile would include community concerns. Even in worship, the temple in Jerusalem would gather the Northern Kingdom, “For there shall be a day when sentinels will call in the hill country of Ephraim: ‘Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God” (Jer 31:6; cf. 33:1). Whether gathered for worship or political concerns, the traditional congregation is expanded to include others.

The act of gathering is a concrete practice that expands the influence and ministry of the church. In response to hurtful cries from the threat of housing displacement, healing began in our neighborhood through gathering. These healing steps occurred through various kinds of gatherings, hearing stories, and ongoing pastoral care for the community. It all begins with the act of gathering.

⁴⁴ John Bright, “Jeremiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes”, *The Anchor Bible*, (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 280.

The act of gathering usually happens on Sunday morning; that is a call to gather, *qahal*, or a call to worship. This gathering, *qavats*, happens by literally grasping people by the hand. Grabbing the community's hand means knocking on doors, canvassing the community, conducting surveys, providing transportation, and following up on contacts. If we gather for worship, then we are evangelizing; when we gather for community concerns, then we are organizing on a grass roots level. The church needs both. When we gathered the community in this way, the church's influence expanded. People connected with the church and viewed the pastor as their own. Relationships formed and care was given to our newly gathered community. New ministry was forming through the act of gathering.

The act of gathering is also a form of healing. Our first gathering of the community was for a community housing meeting sponsored by our church. A panel consisted of a lawyer, a regional elder, a community leader, and a president of a ministerial alliance in the city; many other pastors had comments. Even one of our White brothers who was a leader of a downtown clergy alliance attended. The church was packed with community residents. People gathered in the basement for a free breakfast; one could sense healing amid the sound of laughter, conversation, and fellowship. The two-hour meeting was mixed with concern, anger, tears, and one attendee stormed out in frustration over how she had been

treated. After many questions and much information provided, applause and singing erupted in response to comments rendered by a leading activist and pastor; God could be sensed in the midst. Healing was happening from this upstairs gathering. Afterwards, we all met across the street where the property in question was located. We prayed at the gates surrounding the property. Again, more healing could be sensed, even new hope was forming.

Two weeks later, we gathered to protest displacement at the downtown Zoning Commission meeting. We gathered to get on the bus. Prior to boarding the bus, we held a spiritual riot (like a rally) on the inside of the church. We boarded the buses, headed downtown to zoning, got off the bus, checked in, and took almost every seat in the zoning meeting room with nearly 150 people. We began to sing songs and pray prior to the meeting. The zoning commission sided with us, and we rejoiced. We gathered downstairs in the hallway for prayer, got back on the bus, and prayed before deboarding. I witnessed healing happening at each stage of these gatherings. Finally, I hugged every person and thanked them for gathering. Some thanked me and expressed a joyful hope for our ongoing work together. Others lingered requesting prayer for themselves and for their loved ones. Is not this a congregation also? Though many attend other churches, am I not also a pastor to them? What would distinguish this community congregation

from the one that worships on Sunday? We gathered, prayed together, experienced healing through articulating our pain, and penetrated the numbness by rejoicing together with hope.

Just coming together was healing in itself; the cause of the healing was due mostly to the lack of gathering in the Black community, except for funerals. Even in the funeral setting, little space is given for balanced healing. Just like Sunday worship, funeral attendees are exhorted to rejoice upon entering, upbeat songs are rendered, and programs invariably place the word “funeral” with “homegoing celebration.” With all the celebration, when can one genuinely express grief or lament? The community meeting allowed space for all emotions to be expressed, even tears.

Jeremiah’s little Book of Restoration follows a thorough lamentation of Judah’s destruction. The book announces, among other things, healing, joy, love, reassurance, vision, and hope, which are just as required as lamentation. Answering the question of what relation joy has to our political world, poet Denise Levertov answered,

But we need also the poetry of praise, of love for the world, the vision of the potential for good even in our species which has so messed up the rest of creation, so fouled its own nest. If we lose this sense of contrast, of the opposites to all the grime and gore, the torture, the banality of the

computerized apocalypse, we lose the reason for trying to work for redemptive change.⁴⁵

Against the backdrop of our political world, the church can provide critical healing for the soul immersed in traumatic grief experienced from disastrous loss. In contrast to lamentation, the Book of Restoration makes space in the soul for a reaffirming joy.⁴⁶ The Book of Restoration is not optional and is required just as much as our lament. Our community's move from lament to rejoicing was a necessary healing that could not be avoided, especially when relating to the political world.

The deep compassion of God coupled with gathering are acts of God making good on His promise long before the exile. In Deuteronomy, God enumerated the conditions for blessing and cursing before Israel entered the promised land. If disobedient, the curse of losing the promised land and going into exile was the consequence, indicating that possession of the promise land was always provisional. Yet, God promised that if He ever scattered them, he would gather them with compassion:

When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations

⁴⁵ Denise Levertov, "Poetry, Prophecy, and Survival," *New and Selected Essays*, (New York: New Directions, 1992), 2281, Kindle.

⁴⁶ Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 33. O'Connor quotes David Grossman who describes how constant exposure to trauma can "shrink of the surface area of the soul" and limit the language to describe it.

where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the Lord your God has scattered you. (Dt 30:1-3).

Israel would call to mind God's word from the beginning and view God's deep compassion and gathering as God both restoring their fortunes and restoring Israel's trust in him; for He keeps his word that he stated from the beginning. New covenants are in fact old covenants that emphasize what is needed for the time. Even in Deuteronomy, we see language that is echoed in the New Testament: to obey God "with all your heart and with all your soul."

CHAPTER 2

A Vision for Our Community

On the south side of Chicago, I witnessed vision routinely become reality at the 5,000 member Carter Temple CME Church. Pastor Henry M. Williamson, Sr., now fifty-sixth Bishop of the CME Church, chose Proverbs 29:18a as his theme, “Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint,”⁴⁷ Bishop Williamson stated that the reverse is also true, “Where there are no people, the vision will perish.” To Bishop Williamson, though other factors contribute to a vision’s success, people are the most essential aspect of vision. By placing people as the vision’s priority, Bishop Williamson produced exceptional results: membership grew from 400 to 5,000 through evangelism, One Church One School, and fighting injustice as President of Rainbow/PUSH Coalition. Bishop Williamson’s ministry extended outside the church to reach people who were perishing in the community.

⁴⁷ Bishop Williamson stressed vision and the perishing nature of the King James Version “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

As it was in the southside of Chicago, people are truly perishing on the northwest quadrant of Washington D.C. While other systemic issues in education and economics exist, the most visible and immediate problem in the community is gentrification. In Northwest Washington, gentrification displaces people; in other words, people are perishing. Therefore, vision is needed that prevents the perishing nature of displacement and the people are needed, especially low-income residents, to fulfill God's vision. If the church can recreate Jeremiah's vision for community, people can live and not perish in life-giving community that brings hope to our city, nation, and world.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate the necessity for a God-given vision for our community using Jeremiah's vision in the book of Restoration as a blueprint for justice and creating community in a gentrified neighborhood. I will show God's good will for the city and the community and how the church can mediate between the two when marginalized communities are left behind by city plans. Jeremiah's vision creates room for exiles returning to Jerusalem, which serves as foundation for inclusion of low-income and no-income residents on the margin. The prophetic text attests to God's concern for local pockets of oppression within the city, and therefore I propose a model for the prophetic church which may serve as the catalyst for the fulfillment of God's vision in Jeremiah. By tapping into rich Old

Testament soil and finding its prophetic roots, the prophetic church can create connections and act bravely to enable a diverse, loving community to emerge. For example, community tension existed between those remaining in the land and the exiles highlighted by the parable of good and bad figs.⁴⁸ Yet, God sides with the exiles and acts on behalf of the landless.⁴⁹ In the end, the prophetic church produces people who walk closely and humbly with their God. How might this humility be accomplished? The people who comprise the prophetic church care for land, landowners, and those dispossessed of land. Through utilizing exilic texts, the prophetic church can revolutionize perspectives of the “other” and move communities to responsible, humble action on behalf of the landless.

A message anonymously spray painted on the corner of 14th and U street read, “Hi Gentrifier!” 14th and U streets form an intersection of Black life along U street and gentrified life along 14th street. Currently, 14th street is occupied by largely non-Black residents who fill the streets, restaurants, and shops leading towards downtown D.C. By contrast, U Street is a mix of homeless, Howard students, and local, young Black people. At this gentrified corner, a spray painted,

⁴⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in the Biblical Faith*, Second Edition, (Fortress: Minneapolis, 2002), 1891, Kindle.

⁴⁹ Brueggemann views the parable of figs in Jeremiah 24 as a radical reversal where landed folks can be disobedient and cursed whereas landless people can be obedient and blessed. He views abandonment, displacement, and restoration as the seeds of resurrection. This can serve as biblical grounds for the prophetic church.

sidewalk message caught my attention for several reasons. First, it spoke. In the community surrounding the church, speaking is a special act among residents who are surprised when greeted. Second, it named. Naming the oppressor is important. Walter Brueggemann speaks about Israel's enemy from the North being "an unnamed enemy with awesome power." The absence of a name to the enemy adds power to it: "if unnamed, (it) cannot be resisted or tamed, nor can safety even be negotiated."⁵⁰ Eventually, the enemy was named in Jeremiah 27:6: "Nebuchadnezzar the land grabber, the quintessence of imperial expansionism that threatened Israel...."⁵¹ On the street corner, "Hi Gentrifier!" names for all to see the problem faced by long-term residents. However, it is a naming by category, and thus has the possible consequence of offending and dehumanizing potential allies. This is a problem to be addressed below.

The greeting not only spoke volumes, but it spoke prophetically, inviting a variety of meanings. The message itself could be questioned as a greeting; it also implies offense "Bye Gentrifier!" or "Leave Gentrifier!" Expanding on the notion of the pastor being a prophet, the anonymous spray painter spoke prophetically and on behalf of God whether he knew it or not. The message arrested me as much

⁵⁰ Brueggemann, *Land*, 1757, Kindle.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1780, Kindle.

as any message spoken by today's religious or political leaders that is intended to have public impact. This message also provoked conversations and awoke awareness in the minds and hearts of new residents. In fact, the community spoke prophetically to me by informing me of the injustice of being removed from their housing; these voices, most of all, pushed me into the prophetic work of fighting for them to keep their homes. As I observe this prophetic writing, it is now my job to interpret this communication to congregants and community alike; that work of interpretation may itself be prophetic. Who can speak prophetically in the community? It appears that we must all listen for the prophetic to be spoken by anyone at any time, even if they are anonymous. "Hi Gentrifier!" speaks to the friction that exists between residents who suddenly live juxtaposed to the socio-economic and cultural other.

These conditions call for a God-given comprehensive, life-giving vision for all people in our community. In its best intentions, our vision is tainted by self-interests and falls short of providing sufficient welfare for others. God's vision encompasses all varieties of people living in our community. In exile, God reveals a vision of mutual benefit between oppressor and the oppressed, "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer 29:7). As oppressed exiles,

Israel not only seeks and but even initiates the welfare of its oppressors. Though this initiation appears counterintuitive, God calls Israel to be agents as well as beneficiaries of city welfare. Though city-vision originates from God, the vision creates tension for Israel: without addressing power dynamics between oppressed and oppressor, placing responsibility of initiation on exiles can be viewed as problematic or even abusive. For instance, the vision for the city states, "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce" (Jer 29:5). What of those who cannot afford land or are powerless against city mandates? How can this vision be life-giving for the oppressed if land is unavailable or unaffordable? In addition, city-vision easily creates inequities with overlooked, marginal communities; this is the case for the city of Washington, D.C and our neighborhood.

The city vision of Jeremiah 29 immediately shifts to a community vision in chapters 30-33. The brevity of the letter in chapter 29 versus the length of the book of Restoration in chapters 30-33 perhaps indicates where readers should place focus. While Jeremiah 30-33 also mentions concerns of the city, words like "outcast," "tents," "dwelling places" "mound," the "few" and "small," "congregation," "families," and "company," dominate the text. These words illumine the small, local places that do not escape God's purview and intent. Even

while exiled, God constructs a new, inclusive community of the marginalized, a vision that forecasts Jesus' focus on preaching good news for the downtrodden in Luke 4:18-19; the outcast and others are necessary part of the welfare in God's vision for the future. Even with a local focus, God's vision for the community is required due to competing interest groups. Then and now, God's detailed vision for the community is necessary to complete His vision of welfare for the nation, region, and cities.

When cities design and implement plans based on their own priorities, community needs are often ignored and the marginalized are excluded from the city's best blessings. From my experience as a pastor, city plans often contradict community needs. This contradiction is true where gentrification exists in the city. Even when city plans include low-income residents, the plans never reach low enough to the real people with real problems residing in communities. Where these conditions exist, the church is not positioned to pursue the welfare sanctioned by God's vision given to Jeremiah in the book of Restoration. If the church can reimagine its community based on inclusive, prophetic texts like Jeremiah, then the church might accept the challenge to combat the plans excluding the most vulnerable of its citizens.

Local places in God's vision are relevant to marginalized communities negatively affected by gentrification such as the homeless. Mayor Bowser recently launched a pilot program aimed at the removal of 119 tent encampments across the city. The removal of the homeless tent community tops the latest ANC agenda, giving the illusion of unity between city and community. Yet, at the last ANC meeting, Roberts Rules of Order were disregarded, silencing voices advocating for the tent community. Judging by the ANC's response, belonging to the neighborhood is strictly based on home occupancy. The removal of the tent communities is the shadow side of gentrification. By default, gentrification creates a criterion of belonging based on housing affordability, ownership, and occupancy; if you cannot afford to buy or lease a dwelling place, then you cannot belong to this neighborhood. Taking this stance, a neighbor is defined as those who can maintain housing. Lacking this qualification, one simply no longer belongs, making gentrified communities gated without the gates.⁵² In contrast, God's vision legislates care for Jacob's tents and has mercy on his dwelling places (Jer 30:18). In God's vision, tent dwellers and, like Jacob's place in Bethel, those dwelling in hard places belong to the community. The homeless have a place to

⁵² Davis, *Biblical Prophecy*, 157. Davis notes that communities are metaphorically gated due to overpriced land.

call home, a house called a tent, and a community among themselves. In God's vision, tent dwellers and those dwelling in parks receive mercy not removal.

God's vision of local places applies to our community and challenges the inhumane nature of displacement. Inhumane treatment of low-income communities appears to be rooted in assumptions regarding its residents and leaders. Sandhya Rani Jha observes that, on a larger scale, our government justified defunding housing programs for the poor based on then House Speaker Paul Ryan and other politicians' descriptions of the poor as "welfare queens," "drug runners," "men not even thinking of working", and "not quite human."⁵³ These kind of assumptions led organizers to adopt "a tool people used in global justice work: human rights."⁵⁴ Making housing a human rights issue was an unusual shift in public discourse.⁵⁵ In reality, housing doesn't have to be made a human rights issue; it *is* a human rights issue. Craig Bartholomew raises the crucial relationship between placement and humanity. To be placed is to be human; in

⁵³ Sandhya Rani Jha, *Transforming Communities: How People Like You are Healing Their Neighborhoods*, (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2017), 52-53.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 50-54. Jha documents the strategies of Cheri Honkala, one of the founding members of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU) in north Philadelphia. Federal funds were allocated by justifying who was most deserving. With a six to one housing budget gap between rich and poor, politicians decided the poor were undeserving of fund and even deserved to struggle. Honkala's shift to human rights justified housing for the poor on the claim that all humans deserve housing.

fact, all we do as humans is place based.⁵⁶ He states, “Place is so constituent of human being that perhaps this is one reason why it is so easily overlooked.”⁵⁷ Further, Bartholomew claims that being human is not only place but placemaking.⁵⁸ For over a century, both residents and the homeless have made a place for themselves in Washington, D.C. To the homeless, a park, a bench or a tent on the roadside constitute a home, a place that they make for themselves. Now, no place is made in the city for the poor as gentrification displaces them to the suburbs of Maryland. It is this placemaking that constitutes my vision for our community. Being forced to make a place in another city and state is inhumane. God’s vision for community will make a place for all persons whether homeowners, renters, or the homeless. “Indeed the suffering of displacement is not confined to refugees or those in exile...every person ‘on the move’ suffers from displacement in one form or another,” Bartholomew states.⁵⁹ The parallel of those exiled from the city and those “on the move” into the city constitute the bridge to restore the humanity of those displaced and those finding a place in the city; God’s vision of restoration to exiles in Babylon perhaps applies to the restoration of the

⁵⁶ Craig Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

humanity of the displaced. In my vision, belonging to the neighborhood will depend on being human not being housed. Seeing each other as human beings created by God is critical for the success of God's vision reaching to the least in our city. The church is positioned in its proper place, just alongside the poor who are dehumanized by displacement and alongside the lowest local government (ANC). The church uniquely placed in this position is able to do its most prophetic work.

THE PROPHETIC CHURCH MODEL

The proposed prophetic church model emerged from major challenging conditions to doing ministry in the city of Washington, D.C.: first, the physical challenges of lack of land for parking and future expansion; second, the dwindling of Black residents in the city from seventy percent to thirty percent; and third, the ineffectiveness of traditional evangelism in the community. Even with successful evangelism, no place exists to park new members in already cramped parking conditions and parking is not a solution to future expansion in a land locked city. Ultimately, cries from congregants worried about losing housing that has been owned for over forty years moved me to act and think differently about church and its potential role in our community.

I believe God's vision for community flourishing as articulated in Jeremiah could be embodied in our cities through a prophetic model of church. The prophetic church will lean heavily on the rich Old Testament prophetic tradition, specifically the exile, and integrate elements of the prophetic into the churches vision and mission. As I see it, four elements exist in the prophetic church: First, pastor and congregation prophetically present themselves in the community; second, the prophetic church transforms its evangelism and discipleship ministries for prophetic engagement; third, the message of the prophetic church teaches justice through inclusion of all residents in the community; fourth, the prophetic church actively makes a place for all people to dwell in the community.

After discerning the prophetic call, the church must be prophetically present in the community. This prophetic presence can build vital relationships that bridge gaps between church and community. Along with Jeremiah, the major prophets were among the people. Isaiah mentions that "I live among a people with unclean lips" (Is 6:1), Ezekiel was "among the exiles" (Ez 1:1), and Daniel was among the children that stood before the king (Dn 1:3-6). The prophets' shared life experiences of persecution, exile, and unclean living were grounds for acceptance by the community. Yet, that acceptance cannot be assumed as automatic. This

acceptance is distinctively perceived by Robert Greenleaf and worth consideration.

The variable that marks some periods as barren or some as rich in prophetic vision is in the interest, the level of seeking, the responsiveness of the hearers. The variable is not in the presence or absence or the relative quality and force of the prophetic voices. Prophets grow in stature as people respond to their message. If their early attempts are ignored or spurned, their talent may wither away.⁶⁰

The prophet's stature grows according to the acceptance of the community. Even Jesus was subject to the acceptance or rejection of his own community, "Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house" (Mk 6:4). Acceptance of the prophetic cannot be assumed by showing up in the neighborhood, but perspective is gained by understanding the symbiotic relationship between prophet and community. The community has an independent heartbeat of its own that must be felt and heard by those who would be prophetically present with them. To be prophetically present is not only to share the lived experiences of the community but to be subject to its acceptance or rejection of you and your message.

If accepted, the prophetic presence can ease suspicions held by community residents concerning the church. From my perspective, suspicions arise for many

⁶⁰ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature and Power of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, (New York/Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2002), 22.

reasons; these include hospitality towards outsiders, a lack of engagement with community needs, pastoral indiscretions, worldly behavior, and negative media portrayals. To dispel these suspicions, it is imperative that congregants interact with the community as the pastor leads the way, since pastors are mostly the object of suspicion. One evangelistic “love journey”⁶¹ per quarter is not enough; concerns are only dispelled through multiple connections with people, and connections that show genuine concern for existing needs. Through continual contact, the pastor is also able to assess the culture of the community: in my neighborhood, love journeys revealed that faith in Christ is waning in the Black community of central D.C.; even the children do not believe all the biblical stories. “Build it and they will come,” isn’t working; evangelism can build relational bridges by being prophetically present. With pastors having personal security teams, armorbearers, and adjutants, we have barricaded ourselves within the four walls of the church; too often, pastors are so protected and isolated in the sanctuary that our own members cannot touch us. This mode of protective enclosure does not fit even the metaphor of a shepherd who leads his sheep out to pasture. To become prophetic, pastors are obligated to dig out of their protective church habitat and boldly be

⁶¹ Love journeys are organized ventures into the community by church members not to share Christ but to share information, be present, and possibly to invite people to church. It is a soft approach to evangelism designed to send more people who fear sharing their faith. These journeys must change from a focus on winning the soul but showing concern for the needs of the community.

present with the community. This is a conscious, concerted growth from pastoral into the prophetic. It is true that people are also suspicious of false prophets. Prophecy too is subject to manipulation as well, yet prophecy is imperative and foundational for a new vision: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19, 20 (NRSV)). Pastors who are prophetically present seek to serve the needs of the community, which tend to be issues of justice.

Second, evangelism ministries must prepare congregants to reach others through justice for and inclusion of all people. Equating evangelism strictly to soul saving is problematic by implicitly reducing God's care to the realm of the spiritual and excluding physical well-being. In the prophetic church, evangelism extends its reach to people that never formally commit to following Christ and assesses their physical needs. When oppression exists in the community, evangelism expands its operations to grass roots organizing. This shift is supported when the great commission of Matthew 28:19 is rooted in Jesus' mission statement from Isaiah, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners" (Is 61:1). Jesus

reached more people than He disciplined. The reach is seen at the Sermon on the Mount, "When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:1,2). Luke despiritualized the poor and records, "Blessed are the poor..."(Lk 6:20). These verses support both the spiritual and the social concerns of the gospel. As a lifetime soul winner since my teenage years, evangelism has always been a part of my church ministry. Yet, in Washington D.C., the shift from soul winning to reaching people through social needs happened organically. Of the six communities in which I pastored, the gospel has been least received in Washington, D.C. When residents and members cried out about unfair housing practices, a convicting call came upon me. The inspiration from God dawned on me to use my evangelistic talents to gather the community and fight the injustice in housing. By organizing the community for social action instead of church growth, the church benefited from the shift through unsolicited donations from the community, food contributions, and trust between church and residents. Much like the feeding of the 5,000, our church created another circle of influence that extended beyond the church. The church reached out to people, met their needs, and was accepted through a prophetic presence in the community. This acceptance led to influencing

residents who accepted our leadership in fighting for their cause. Though most community members do not attend our church, they connect with our church and seek me out for community issues. Is this extended reach included under the umbrella of evangelism? Making the extension from traditional evangelism to include grass roots organizing caused intense personal and congregational conflict. In the end, though, this extension proved to expand the church's witness, presence, and power within the community.

The vision for the prophetic church is a community unified around justice through inclusion. The new community includes diverse people with varying economic, marital, and social statuses. It dares to include the outcast, "because they have called you an outcast: 'It is Zion; no one cares for her!'" (30:17). Who are these outcasts? Jeremiah supplies a partial list: "among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here" (31:8). This is a community that explicitly makes a place for the differently abled, for women and children at their most vulnerable. This community also includes former slaves who are promised no more to be slaves but servants of the Lord (30:8). What kind of community vision is this? Dr. Ellen Davis remarks that "the worshipping community is a key concept in Jeremiah's

vision.”⁶² This vision is radically inclusive of outcasts, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised producing a community unified through one collective heart. In this community, economic equality is gained through land possession, and unity is gained through a new covenant (Jer 31:31-34).⁶³ Is this community a worshipping community? If community creates inclusivity, economic equality, and unity, isn't the creation of this community a form of worship just as much as lifting holy hands that never help the next-door neighbor? Are not those who exhibit a heart for just action close to the kingdom as much as those who confess Christ yet evidence no such action?

One-way communication written on the ground identified the beneficiaries of gentrification, the new residents, with the perpetrators of gentrification-developers and law makers. This greeting affected my view of gentrification. Before this greeting, my personal view was “new residents” not “gentrifier.” While I struggle to assign blame for gentrification to new residents, this voice from the community clearly identifies new residents as responsible for the detrimental effects of gentrification. While new residents cannot be blamed for all the ills of gentrification, do beneficiaries of gentrification deserve blame for the exile of

⁶² Davis, *Prophecy*, 157.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 157-162.

multi-generation residents? Beneficiaries cannot divorce themselves from some blame. In the end, this message begins communication but does not provide the proper connection between the groups to fulfil my vision of community.

FROM GENTRIFIER TO NEIGHBOR

The prophetic church seeks first to communicate with the purpose of connecting polarized groups. In Jeremiah 31:23-26, the writer draws our attention to Jeremiah by bracketing the text with two essential themes of the Book of Restoration: 1. To restore fortunes (30:3, 18; 31:223; 32:44: 33:7, 11, 26)⁶⁴ and 2. The days are coming (cf. 30:3, 8; 31:6, 27, 31, 38; 33:15), especially when joined with “again” or “not again.”⁶⁵ The repetition emphasizes the assurance of God’s activity in these two areas. The text tells of vital speech necessary for every genuine community, and Jeremiah’s vision for returning exiles exhibits communication that causes connection:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Once more they shall use these words in the land of Judah and in its towns when I restore their fortunes: “The LORD bless you, O abode of righteousness, O holy hill!” And Judah and all its towns shall live there together, and the farmers and those who wander with their flocks. I will satisfy the weary, and all

⁶⁴ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36: A New Translation*, (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 355.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 453-4.

who are faint I will replenish. Thereupon I awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me. (Jer 31:23-26)

This passage demonstrates speech used in a time when connections are made between contentious groups. Most notably, this speech will be spoken between two groups of traditional rivals in Judah: farmers who work the land but do not own it, and the shepherds who move about within the community. It is not a stretch to think that this speech plays a significant role in the healing of such groups. In Washington, D.C., renters, homeless and gentrifiers can use speech that unifies the opposing groups and heals the wounds of the past.

The prophetic church seeks to perform the justice work of restoring those who have lost their fortunes. The “weary” and the “faint” are to be replenished. Restoration is a major theme in the Book of Restoration. Whether resident, developer, or city official, those benefiting from gentrification possess some ability to restore fortunes of low-income residents.

Like Jeremiah, I too experienced communication from God by means of a dream-like state. This is Jeremiah’s vision, “Thereupon I awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me” (31:26). Daniel Berrigan in his commentary says of the dream, “dream or reality you know not, reality too sweet, too near for

dream.”⁶⁶ Micah 2:1-2 records that the wicked also plan land grabbing schemes sitting on their beds early in the morning; maybe the dreams God gives combat the schemes the wicked imagine. Whether God or the wicked, the waking moments seem to be a strategic time. This place between dream and reality speaks to the tension of living in this city; one that promises an almost unreal, sweet justice yet God brings you steps close enough to sense its reality. First, in leading my community to fight gentrification, God spoke to me daily as soon as I was waking from my sleep. He spoke of the daily steps necessary for success in fighting against the proposed 363-unit structure planned to be built across the street from the church. Ironically, God led me in the same steps of advocating for the poor as reported by Sandhya Rani Jha.⁶⁷ This place between dream and reality contains the same tension felt in fighting gentrification; if dreams of diversity are realized it seems too good to be true (too sweet to be a reality); yet the steps of progress toward it bring one out of its dream state as each step brings you closer to a realization of the dream (too near to be a dream). So, our fight against gentrification is like one waking from a dream, in between remembering

⁶⁶ Daniel Berrigan, *Jeremiah: The World, the Wound of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 129.

⁶⁷ The five steps for leading a poverty-stricken community are 1. Assemble a team of organizers comprised by the community, 2. Establish a community meeting place, 3. Provide fluid and accessible communication, 4. Make partners with key people across various sectors, and 5. Develop a political strategy team who will commit to the long-term struggle. Our efforts included all of these except step 5.

fragments of a dream and reality. I find that local pastors dwell mainly in the dream state, believing gentrification too big to fight; this makes God's communication coupled with our obedience so critical for the prophetic work of the church. The next words spoken are, "Behold, the days are coming" signaling Jeremiah's ministry of planting, building up, and announcing a new covenant. In the end, maybe the city will be known for and be called a just place to live.

The prophetic church places itself in between the blissful, waking moments of the dream (vision) and the painful, unfulfilled reality of people's lives. Jeremiah awakes as if from a dream and feels pleased. While this dream alters moods and offers hope, I awake to realities contrasting the dream, making the dream almost forgotten. In writing to a close friend, Dietrich Bonhoeffer mentions his tension of waking every morning to the reality of prison and Christian compromise:

I am finding (I expect you are, too) that the most difficult thing is getting up in the morning (Jer. 31:26!)...There is such a thing as a false composure which is quite unchristian. As Christians, we need not be at all ashamed of some impatience, longing, opposition to what is unnatural, and our full share of desire for freedom, earthly happiness, and opportunity for effective work.⁶⁸

If we are honest, dreams are difficult to recollect and dissipate soon into the forgotten, especially when facing oppressive conditions. Like Bonhoeffer, Jeremiah too finds the same dream-like hope elusive when he is imprisoned (Jer

⁶⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 131.

32). Though not literally imprisoned, low-income residents in our community experience similar bouts between hope and hopelessness, with the latter usually winning. Yet, our community still longs for its full share of housing in its community. Therefore, the prophetic church sits in the gap between the hope of prophetic vision and the hopelessness of the oppressed community.

Sandhya Rani Jha demonstrates how building relational bridges in our neighborhoods combats racial stereotypes that produce hate against those in the margins.⁶⁹ Around the United States, unique and creative groups are emerging that focus on building relationships that reduce fear and hate with Muslims, immigrants, LGBTQ+ community, Jews, African Americans, and women. According to Rani Jha, the pervasive presence of hate begins to be countered by knowing your neighbors through meetings and hearing their stories.⁷⁰ One such example is a group called Meeting a Muslim. After the 911 attacks, this group was formed for Americans to seek understanding through the process of non-Muslims meeting with one or more Muslims, sharing a meal, or hearing their stories. By building bridges that connect, we may become a caring community that is

⁶⁹ Rani Jha provides numerous examples of community organizations around the country who build community through a variety of means. Though African American experience is not mentioned in her chapter on The Power of Connection, most (if not all) her suggestions can be applied to the experience of gentrification.

⁷⁰ Rani Jha, *Transforming Communities*, 66.

“seeking to bridge the divides so that before another attack happens, before another dangerous policy is passed, we will know each other and value each other enough to protect one another.”⁷¹ Dangerous policies are already being proposed, such as the city’s plan to bring in 136,000 residents in eight years, without making any policy makes no place in the city for low-income residents.

The lines that divide gentrified and gentrifier must dissolve until the two residents are united as neighbors. While the outcast must not be excluded from the community, the wealthy must also be intentionally included. When deeper connections are formed, new residents, previously seen as gentrifiers, benefit the community beyond street lighting and grocery stores. During our love journeys, most gentrifiers, after hearing our story, became neighbors as they not only empathized with us but offered their support to the landless in our community. This is humility-not a minimizing or underestimation of one’s abilities but its opposite. Dr. Ellen Davis profoundly redefines humility in reverse of our cultural understanding.⁷² To her, humility is “accepting your talents as a gift from God, recognizing them as God’s gift to the world through you, and preparing yourself

⁷¹ Ibid, 72.

⁷² Davis warns of a false humility of a shrinking disposition and devaluing of one’s abilities using Proverbs 15:33, “Humility comes before pride”, and Paul’s use of humility in connection to the gifts list in Ephesians 4:1-16.

to use them accordingly."⁷³ This humility ultimately works in and on behalf of the community.⁷⁴ Using this definition, if residents can use their gifts and talents on behalf of the oppressed landless in our community, justice will come. When this bridge of humility is made, gentrifiers becomes neighbors and are moved to act on behalf of justice for the displaced.

Why Washington, D.C.? Besides New York City, Washington, D.C. is the only other city on the downswing of gentrification in the United States, offering a useful sample experience from which other urban churches may benefit. With Denver, Chicago, Boston, and Miami slated for gentrification, we can easily anticipate the same for other cities around the United States. Churches in urban areas could fight prophetically against the unjust displacement of residents occurring at the beginning of gentrification. Once fair housing is accomplished, churches can embrace gentrification. Then, when gentrification has progressed, gentrification is to be halted where the community benefits economically, racial populations are level, and economic gaps begin to decrease; gentrification beyond this point limits the city of its future possibilities. In my neighborhood, gentrification has caused an evening of population levels around thirty percent for

⁷³ Davis, *Proverbs*, 2151, Kindle.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 2159, Kindle.

both white and Black residents. The community has benefited from school improvements, healthier food options, and safer neighborhoods. If gentrification can be halted at this level, it become a win for city, developer, and residents. Then, the fight is not against gentrification per se, but against displacing low-income residents during gentrification; as is, community consisting of both gentrifiers and gentrified as neighbors offers fertile ground for the realization of Jeremiah's dream.

Scripture provides the vision of a mixed community of people who care for their neighbors, especially the landless residents of the community. Restoration of fortunes, or accessibility to land for all people, is part of the return to the land:

Fields shall be bought in this land of which you are saying, 'It is a desolation, without human beings or animals; it has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans.' 44 Fields shall be bought for money, and deeds shall be signed and sealed and witnessed, in the land of Benjamin, in the places around Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, of the hill country, of the Shephelah, and of the Negeb; for I will restore their fortunes, says the Lord. (Jer 32:43-44)

Jeremiah envisions a future where Chaldean land possession will return to the hands of the Jewish people: this is the restoration of fortunes. Can residents experiencing displacement expect the same restoration of fortunes? The text suggests that both covenant and land are virtually synonymous. Daniel Berrigan writes, "A small slice of geography takes the guise of and import of prophecy

itself-a small relief in a viciously factitious world of pricings and sell-outs, of betrayals, and treacheries, of greed and disregard.”⁷⁵ Further, the piece of land purchased by Jeremiah represents “an entire land restored.” As far-fetched as it seems, if our work on behalf of the displaced results in the restoration of land for even one resident, it will be a sign that God’s covenant which is land restoration is still in effect. How can this be accomplished? Bartholomew states that “we can be reoriented by scripture...toward a recovery of place today.”⁷⁶ Biblical passages like the Book of Restoration in Jeremiah point the way even for struggles of finding place in our present day. When engaged to recover place, then the new covenantal saying will manifest for the church, “And you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” (Jer 30:22). Then, we will be like one who awoke to a dream that has become reality; now is the time of rejoicing: “When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream” (Ps 126:1).

⁷⁵ Berrigan, *Jeremiah*, 140

⁷⁶ Bartholomew, *Mortals*, 6.

CHAPTER 3

Land Use and Ownership

When Scripture is read slowly, deeply, and completely, useful tools emerge to aid us in facing today's challenges of living in diverse community. In particular, the Old Testament contains a vast assemblage of writings spanning multiple centuries detailing God's covenant activity with chosen Israel. Within the Old Testament, the prophetic writings apply to many of today's urban ministries. I view prophetic writings as not ending with a period but with an ellipsis whereby their implications continue to speak with enduring relevance. Further, exilic texts address God's people facing insurmountable government powers and exploitive economic systems. In chapter 32, Jeremiah narrates a personal land transaction that symbolizes an eventual reversal of fortunes and a hopeful return to the promised land. For today's urban church, this transaction is foundational for a ministry of economic empowerment vital for confronting the looming challenge of gentrification. In fact, land possession and care, according to some scholars, is the main topic of the whole Bible, providing a scriptural lens of interpretation from Genesis to Revelation.⁷⁷

⁷⁷Brueggemann, *The Land*, 738, Kindle.

In this chapter, I will argue that Scripture is unparalleled in providing framework for economic empowerment useful for churches located in urban environments. Specifically, exile provides rich resources for the church to engage politically yet maintain its religious character. Exilic texts contrast idolatrous Babylon, a politically exploitive city that absorbs resources from its residents, with the iconic Zion, the poetic and prophetic designation for Jerusalem reconceived as a religiously faithful city, from which blessings flow down from town to countryside and out to all nations.⁷⁸ In pointing out the stark contrasts between the cities, Ellen Davis elegantly depicts this relationship between city and surrounding areas, “The icon of Zion as mother introduces into the relationship between city and hinterland the element of enduring responsibility, even lasting affection.”⁷⁹ This responsibility involves a justice/agriculture/cosmic nexus that blesses when in order and leads to destruction in its disorder. At its best, Zion blesses other nations, “May all nations be blessed in him; may they pronounce him happy,” and “may his glory fill the whole earth.”⁸⁰ (Ps 72:17, 19). Isaiah speaks of a time when this outward flow of blessing returns to Zion, “all the nations shall stream to it.”

⁷⁸ Deuteronomy celebrates blessing in both the city and the field (Dt 28:3) at the top of the list of blessings. Mt. Zion is to be the joy of the whole earth not just the city (Ps 48:2).

⁷⁹ Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*, (Cambridge: New York, 2009), 163.

(Is 2:2; Mi 4:1-3). In contrast to Washington, D.C.'s comprehensive plan, Scripture provides us a framework where blessings reach the city, suburbs, nation, and world, including the poor residents suffering injustice located within its own boundaries.

The faithful city embodies the hopes and spiritual energy inherent in the city of Washington, D.C. to bless the city, nation, and world. Further, acting prophetically, pastors can paint concrete pictures of both human suffering and God's redemption to move communities to action for justice matters in the city. I will argue that exploitation of land corresponds to exploitation in all areas of life and results in cities like Babylon. The church combats exploitation by adopting prophetic perspectives and following some of the prophetic steps written in the Scriptures; the purpose is for the church to act as an agent not only for saving souls but for saving cities as well. The result is to work for the city to resemble the traits of Zion not Babylon. I shall argue that Jeremiah's small Book of Restoration provides possibilities, power, and impetus for action in bringing equity in our communities, justice for the marginalized, and economic empowerment for the poor.

It is during exile that Jeremiah records God's plan for restoring the fortunes of Israel. According to God's plan "to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and

to overthrow, to build and to plant" (1:10), Jeremiah endlessly agonizes in lament over Israel's complete defeat (pluck up, pull down, destroy and overthrow), then details God's plan to "restore the fortunes of my people" (build and to plant). Of the eleven recurring phrases in Jeremiah, "I will restore the fortunes of my people", the Book of Restoration contains seven (30:3, 18; 31:23; 32:44; 33:7, 11, 26). Here, Jeremiah concentrates on God's plan of restoration for the exilic community. Jeremiah follows God's directions, His "great and hidden things that you have not known" (33:3), and purchases land as a sign that "houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land" (32:15b). God's plan to restore the fortunes of His people is through the purchase and maintenance of land from generation to generation. In witnessing the devastating effects of displacement, Scripture's instructions of economic empowerment through land purchase are still relevant over 2,500 years later.

While land is the primary empowerment for God's people in the Old Testament, there is a question of whether land emphasis exists in the New Testament and is relevant for today's church ministry. Besides Acts chapter 7, land does not occupy content in New Testament writings. Some exists to the opposite: land selling. Acts 2:44, 45 records, "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the

proceeds to all, as any had need.” However, these same believers return to their homes to break bread in v. 46. Did the New Testament church sell everything except their homes? Another account in Acts 4:32-37 records a Christian community that sold all their possessions including land and brought it to the Apostles. However, a sale-gone-wrong provides a clue supporting continued land possession. In Acts 5, a married couple decides to sell their land and keep back some of the proceeds. The response from the Apostle Peter might casts suspicion upon land selling as a requirement for Christian community:

While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us but to God!

This phrase leaves room for land selling as a possible choice and not a requirement. Is there any evidence that land possession mattered to the New Testament Church?

JESUS AS REDEEMER

If so, how central is Jeremiah’s land purchase to the Bible as a whole? Jesus as redeemer may provide the best connection to land redemption in the Old Testament. The redeemer concept is rooted in the Old Testament. The Torah instructs that land, when sold by its owner, is still redeemable or can be bought

back by its original owner (Lv 25:26). At worst, sold land is returned to the original owner by the year of Jubilee which does not exceed a 50-year period. Even city land is redeemable but only for one year. Of the eight mentions of God as redeemer, Isaiah does so seven times (48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5,8; 59:20; 60:16; 63:16). As redeemer, God returns exiles to their ancestral land, "Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it forth to the end of the earth; say, "'The Lord has redeemed his servant, Jacob!'" (Isaiah 48:20) The story of Ruth illustrates that people also were redeemed in tandem with land and, as this story is told, the two could not be separated (Ruth 4:1-6). Each of these instances of redemption reconnects land back to people. Every mention of redemption in the New Testament is associated with sins and transgressions.

Though the New Testament expands the dimensions of redemption, there is no evidence of nullification of its Old Testament use as a financial means of repurchasing land for future generations. Jeremiah adds the aspect of ransom with redemption, "For the Lord has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him." (Jer 31:11). The Hebrew word for ransom is *Ga'al* which carries a meaning of restoration of relationship (Jer 50:34; Ru 4:4,6); the Hebrew word for redeem is *padhah* which carried the meaning of a change in ownership by paying a price. While *padhah* was generally used in a commercial sense, money

does not always have to be involved. It also means to be released from some unfavorable condition which usually meant bondage.⁸¹ Noteworthy is the Septuagint translates redemption with the Greek, *lutroo*, meaning to set free by ransom by freeing from bondage and unshackling the prisoner. This move reveals two things: 1) New Testament redemption integrates the concept of ransom, or restoring relationship, 2.) New Testament redemption resembles Jesus purpose statement in Luke 4:18, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.” This statement is an expanded version of Old Testament redemption. Looking through the lens of love, Norman Wirzba describes redemption in an expanded version,

And we must think about the practices, like forgiveness, that repair and reinvigorate relationship that have fallen apart. All together, the diverse aspects of healing contribute to the work that Christians call redemption. It is work that leads to the worlds salvation and flourishing.⁸²

There are various forms of redemption not just forgiveness of sins. Even in the forgiveness of sins, we see the concept of ransom, a restoration of relationship that is used in the book of Ruth. This restoration of relationship can work wonders for the church in place of a carte blanche forgiveness. Jesus’ statement in Matthew

⁸¹ Psalm 130:8 is the only Old Testament connection of redemption with sin.

⁸² Norman Wirzba, *Way of Love: Recovering the Heart of Christian Community*, (San Francisco: Harper One, 2017), 146.

5:17, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill,” demonstrates that the Old Testament concept of redemption as economic repurchase of land is not abolished only expanded; among other things, redemption is expanded by its means from money to blood (I Pt 1:18) and its results from land to forgiveness of sins⁸³ (Rom 3:24, Eph 1:7, Col 1:14,). During the time of the Old Testament, people expected Jesus to redeem them from oppression in the land (Lk 1:69, 2:38, 24:21), which most certainly included economic oppression.

Why then is land rarely mentioned in respect to New Testament redemption? The first reason may be seen in the difference between New Testament and Old Testament exile. In Jeremiah, we are given a limited time of 70 years before the return; in the New Testament, the return is indefinite. Both Testaments use of redemption reflect a truth in prophecy: the Old Testaments preoccupation with an imminent return and the New Testament exclusion due to the long span of intervening time. Secondly, we may find a likely example in American slavery. The time of release was not determined as no year of Jubilee existed. However, upon release, the offer, though not granted, was land—forty

⁸³ Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching*, (WIPF and Stock; Eugene, Oregon, 1925), 188. Caution is to be taken in over spiritualizing the New Testament by adopting only the ethic of the prophets and the assuming a posture of waiting for Jesus’ return. This creates opportunities for exploitation without any threat of protest.

acres and a mule. Though not promised during the time of bondage, the redemption necessary upon release was land. Rewards are not likely discussed when release is not an option. Thirdly, liberty for exiles tend to increase over time. In the beginning of exile, a harsh persecution is the norm; over time, that persecution lessens. It is in the latter stages of exile that more liberty, influence, and change can be made. The book concludes, "Their Redeemer is strong; the Lord of hosts is his name. He will surely plead their cause, that he may give rest to the earth, but unrest to the inhabitants of Babylon." (Jer 50:34). Redemption is a type of rest for his people. Redemption is also economic restoration, "A sword against her warriors, so that they may be destroyed!" The Hebrew word for destroyed is Bazaz which is better translated plunder or rob. Jesus was angered outwardly only once: when robbery occurred in the temple (Mt 21:13). Here, a flash of God's passion to restore his people's fortunes appears. We also see the Lord's utter frustration with the current economic system operating in Jerusalem. Maybe iconic Zion resembled too much of Babylon. This may be a critical factor in the coming destruction of Jerusalem and a reason some thought Jesus was Jeremiah (Jer 7:11; Mt. 16:14). Faintly, land purchase is still relevant yet not the pressing issue at hand. The mention of a new land in Revelation indicates land possessions remains an ultimate though not immediate concern.

One might ask: how is land purchase a form of community empowerment? Communities can be empowered in any number of ways, including: justice, business, organizing, jobs, and education. According to the elders in our community, education was the means for economic empowerment; the message was to work hard, excel in school, and graduate. Then, attend a university (out of town preferable) and graduate on time. After this, work in your career field, get married, and raise children in the “fear and admonition” of the Lord. Through education, one could better their circumstances, family stability, and personal socio-economic status. Finally, the elders left the best encouragement for last: your degree is something nobody can take from you. In the Black community, higher education gives a sense of permanence, and this permanence, it seems, is most valuable.

While degrees are valued for possessing a lasting quality, other aspects of obtaining a degree are not always evident and can even be negative. Not evident is how market change factors into whether a graduate finds employment in their field or not. Also not evident is the economic success promised by the by elders of the community.⁸⁴ Most evident is how educational attainment serves as

⁸⁴ “Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity, 2020,” November 2021, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/race-and-ethnicity/2020/home.htm> The US Bureau of Labor indicates that a higher education level provides more employment opportunities. Of the college

justification for displacement of the community's most economically stable members; merely "making it out the hood" is viewed as a sign of success. The community even celebrates individual educational success and economic increase, though not much benefit returns to them. Further, education must be discussed along with the economics of education. The debt service attached to the degree document virtually transforms into a document of indentured servitude (minus the land) over the life of the graduate. In the Black community, debt and degrees go together. The Brookings Institute in Washington, D.C reported a considerable increase in the income to debt ratios for Black people in comparison to Whites, Asians, and LatinX:

Past discrimination should compel researchers and experts to seek solutions to the student debt crisis that center the experience of Black people. The Black-white wage gap is getting worse, while Black communities' indebtedness is increasing. If we can create systems that recognize these lived experiences, we can create more equitable outcomes for everyone.⁸⁵

Due to these factors, the variability of benefits received by the graduate decrease the value of education. The income-debt ratio creates more obstacles in applying

educated, Black people still earn less median income than all other racial groups, Asian (\$1,650), Whites (\$1,433), Hispanic (\$1,230), Black (\$1,166).

⁸⁵Andre M. Perry, Marshall Steinbaum, and Carl Romer "Student loans, the racial wealth divide, and why we need full student debt cancellation", Brookings, Wednesday, June 23, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/student-loans-the-racial-wealth-divide-and-why-we-need-full-student-debt-cancellation/>

to purchase a home. While we value the permanence of education, our community needs a shift to value the permanence of land to a larger degree. Adding to the colloquialism of the Black church that “nobody can take it from you,” we should also value a place of which we sing, “nobody will be able to put me out.” While we sing the latter phrase regarding our heavenly home, I will show that this phrase applies biblically to our earthly home as well.

What makes land more valuable than any other commodity? Land is an unmovable commodity that remains even when war destroys everything else. Besides the disadvantage of war times, land has the unique quality of being unmovable in all other times. Besides having a lasting quality, land’s unmovable quality is most distinct.

Personally, the pertinent message of land purchase is echoed by elders who walked closely with me in life and ministry. In remarkably simple terms, my grandfather, Abelino Soto Andujo, provided extensively for our family through a career in real estate. As a twelve-year-old uneducated immigrant, he began as a field worker, then business owner and finally settled on real estate. When asked why he invested in land but never the stock market, he simple stated, “Because I can see it.” Always a man of few words, he gave value to seeing and placing hands on his property. Another echoing message comes from Bishop Dotcy I. Isom, Jr.,

my first Bishop and the forty-third Bishop of the CME Church. Bishop Isom publicly and sternly instructed us as young pastors to buy land for ourselves and the church, especially adjacent properties. Adjacent properties were critical due to the prospect of future growth and that land would not be available for many years. Bishop Isom stated, "Land is something of which God is not making any more," and all should be done in the church's power to purchase land. In fact, Bishop Isom's first assignment to me as a young pastor was to purchase land for the church. Mr. Willie T. Summerville, my godfather and deacon in the Baptist church, counseled me to purchase land right after graduation: "You need something with your name on it," he would say. Encouraging members to own property establishes an unmovable community which can serve as a power base to contend for the poor. Meanwhile, the church sets a good example with land acquisitions of its own that enables it to meet the needs of its growing community. All these echoes show that both practical and worldly wisdom know the imperative of land purchase. Summarizing the wise echoes of these elders who are now with the Lord, land is not only everlasting and unmovable but is also visible and tangible, scarce and precious, and urgent and critical to our identity. While the education message was well heard, now is the time for the land message to be heard even louder. In our community, most people will not receive a degree making land

purchase a more viable option for empowerment.⁸⁶ Education tends to displace the talented from community and land purchase binds them to the community.

Yet, education still benefits even the working class of our communities. Promoting education and skills programs for incarcerated inmates can provide the means for gainful employment. Instituting restorative justice programs has reduce recidivism; these programs have expanded to restore justice in school districts, for hate crimes, and other neighborhood issues.⁸⁷ Economic empowerment trainings can train low-income residents to maintain good credit, increase savings, and purchase a home. Financial literacy and training programs like Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America (NACA) offers assistance for first-time home buyers and even access to economic justice advocates. Education programs like these are designed to stabilize our community economically and through land possession.

While much scholarship exists linking land use with Biblical covenant, the concern for low-income residents in Washington, D.C is with land possession. In rural areas, land use is of utmost concern; in land-locked urban areas, usage is

⁸⁶ Cristobal de Brey, Joel McFarland, and Lauren Musu, "Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2018," <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019038.pdf>. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Black student enrollment (36 percent) is lower than Asians (58 percent), White (42 percent), Hispanic (39 percent) as of 2016.

⁸⁷ Jha, 39,40.

limited by cramped space and strict zoning laws. The land in Washington, D.C does not provide food but offers high priced housing available only to the wealthy. The kinds of land purchase available to the poor are simply for possession which is virtually impossible within the city limits. Since land is so scarcely available for purchase, low-income residents must seek and value land possession like never before.

As the ultimate source of empowerment, our people must value land from the viewpoint of God's economy and not from the world's economy. During exile, the value of the land in Judah was worthless; in God's economy, land is priceless. Due to wartime conditions, God's instructions to buy land makes no economic sense. If markets were in place to assess Jeremiah's plot in Anathoth, surely the land would be worth little. Yet in God's economy, the value of land is not subject to fluctuating markets. In God's economy, land has a value too high to be assessed and never bottoms out to zero. While land could be viewed as an investment, an inheritance, or a possession, it is best seen as a gift from God; God is best seen as landowner. The opportunity to purchase land is a gift from God which the church must always act urgently to accept. Like Jeremiah, the church must see past current circumstances and hear, "For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land" (Jer 32:15).

The hopeful point here is for D.C residents to know that land will be bought here again. God's strategy of restoration is to redeem land when the world sees land as worthless. Buy it! For the church, we must teach God's strategy of passing land to the next generation over selling the land and splitting the proceeds. When we value land as God does, we will possess an everlasting inheritance. God's economy for the church and community can revolutionize and empower a people historically powerless in this country.

GOD AS LANDOWNER

These measures are connected to a fundamental truth about the land in God's economy: God is the landowner. This concept of God originates in Leviticus 25:23, "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants." This verse encapsulates God's economy, 1.) God owns the land, 2.) Land is not to be sold, and 3.) We are God's tenants of the land. God provides land to Israel as a means for survival and economic stability for the family. Selling of land was allowed in dire cases yet even that land could be redeemed by family and was to be returned within 50 years period; this was the year of Jubilee which returned all persons back to their ancestral land (Lv. 25:13).

Exile confirmed the status of Israel as tenant and God as owner. Washington, D.C has witnessed tenants change from Native Americans, Europeans, Jew, Blacks, and now to the wealthy. Now is the time ripe to spread God's message of land possession and retain land in recognition of God as landowner. When the church shifts toward God as landowner, then the church and community are unmovable making gentrification virtually impossible. The idea of God as landowner may provide the hope needed in stressful times of unjust housing measures and extreme tax laws. If residents can manage to retain land as a possession for their future generations, the community remains intact with only slight changes in its makeup and character.

Forsaking God as landowner leads to the devastating, destructive practice of the perpetual selling of land and other commodities. The continual selling of land eventually creates a mass of poor, landless people who struggle to live and suffer oppression. These devastating economic conditions existed in both in the time of Jeremiah (Jer 7:6,7) and Jesus,

Palestine thus came to possess a class of poor, destitute and unemployed, and landless peasants, side by side with a class of wealthy farmers, great landed proprietors, and rich bankers. The former waxed poorer and poorer, sinking into mendicancy, crushed and depressed, hoping for miracles, filling the streets of town and village with beggary and piety (in

the case of the more robust)with brigandage, highway robbery, and revolt.⁸⁸

So devastated were the people that those who had enough strength revolted while those too famished passively awaited the coming of the kingdom. It is the latter group to which Jesus preached the gospel. Both groups sought release from devastating poverty, just by different means. Knowing this, the case could be made that lack of access to food was a deciding factor in who accepted the gospel. Nonetheless, these conditions were created by Israel's abandonment of God as landowner which also led to their destruction. The system of selling creates the drastic income gaps present then and now. The same economic gaps existed in Washington, D.C. when Black churches and homeowners began selling property after the 1968 riots. Whether Old Testament, New Testament or even now, land used as a commodity seems to be attached to both devastation and destruction. Israel was disobedient not only in redeeming the land but also in redeeming its poor (Lv 25:35-38).

God's as landowner not only means possession and retention but also care. When God promises Jeremiah that "Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land," the purchasing of the land was a form of redemption not

⁸⁸ Klausner, *Nazareth*, 189.

permission to treat the land as a commodity (Jer 32:34). The focus is caring for the fields and vineyards for its maximum yield. How might churches care for the land and honor God as the landowner? New church buildings can choose to go green with landscaping. In Riverside, California, our church decided to go green with landscaping in contrast to all the other lush green church landscapes in the area. Instead of concrete, we used degradable granite for our walkways. Our hillside was spread with small trees and plants each equipped with a water-drip system. Ground cover started with a one twig in the ground. Windows were clear so we can connect with God's creation during worship. The landscape was meager not due to lack of resources but by choice. When I revisited the property fifteen years later, I could appreciate the growth of the beautiful scenery knowing we kept our responsibility with God as our landowner.

How might urban churches care for land when land possession is more crucial than agricultural production? Obviously, the opportunities to grow food in urban areas is miniscule and seem pointless; yet these small opportunities can produce a great crop. In Washington, D.C., most church properties consist of a sanctuary, an educational wing, and a small strip of land, now concrete, for parking. Some churches, like ours, still have small strips of uncreted land. What if those strips in the backyard, roofs and balconies were used for a

community gardens? What good might it yield to the community? Gardens not only yield food to eat but also supply “our need for nurture, beauty, companionship, and good work.”⁸⁹ Wirzba states further,

The real work, the most important task, is to better involve people in each other’s lives, enable them to see how they can be a help to each other, and then invite God’s love to take root and grow between them. Good gardening work is about helping people learn to love each other and their homes.⁹⁰

Caring for God’s land aids in caring for one’s home; once we possess the land we must care for it as well, knowing that the small garden aids us in living with and loving each other. Instead of calling another community meeting with refreshments, plant a garden and the meetings will continue, growing people closer together.⁹¹ Maybe more gardens will spring up after deep connections are made while tending the small garden.

Just like Jeremiah’s symbolic land purchase, gardens also possess a deeper meaning through the symbolic act of seed planting. Seed planting connects us to the creation story in Genesis chapter 1. Ellen Davis describes the celebration of the seed,

⁸⁹ Wirzba, 61.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 66.

⁹¹ Ibid., 61-64. Wirzba tells of the Lords’ Acre, a garden planted in western North Carolina. Beyond the sharing of food, relationship grew stronger and true repentance was experienced.

It is evident that the seemingly otiose repetitions of the root, z-r-‘, “seed,” in Genesis 1 are purposeful: they bespeak a poet’s alertness to the world. Far from abstract analysis, this is liturgical celebration of the familiar yet inexhaustible mystery of fruitfulness as it was expected by the Israelite and other agrarian peoples of the Near Eastern uplands.⁹²

The familiar act of seed planting brought the awareness of endless possibilities of fruitfulness and a greater awareness of the larger world to the Priestly writer. Part of the possibilities of seed planting is how it defies the costly system of food production.⁹³ Could seed planting also be the cause of eternal assurances based on the self-generating longevity?⁹⁴ Somehow, between seed and sower, both are planted; this is a mystery. Maybe also through seed planting, we show a tangible sign of our awareness of God as landowner, demonstrating our larger view of His economy beyond the one we see. And, to act prophetically by planting, to indicate that God’s plan of land-based economy will return one day, “For land will not always be sold in perpetuity.” Because of this mysterious nature of seed planting, gardens should be planted immediately, especially in the city. Perhaps, planting seed is a sign for Israel, “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the

⁹² Davis, *Scripture*, 50.

⁹³ Gorringer, *Built*, 2955-2971 Kindle. Gorringer details the exorbitant costs of transporting food into cities, which absorb most natural resources in general. The upkeep of large cities is unsustainable.

⁹⁴ The sun, moon, stars, sea and even Israel as seed are signs of God everlasting covenant with them (Jer 31:35-37, 42).

seed of animals.” (Jer 31:27) Maybe God has planted us as well (Ps 92:14-14) in our community to build it according to his economy, to care for the land and the built environment even that with seeks to be built in our environment. Planted as seed so we too could flourish, economically and otherwise, along with not in contrast to our community it too may flourish. Planted to nourish both resident, environment, and city. Maybe seed planting provides new meaning to our denomination’s association as “God’s Tender Plant.”⁹⁵ The notion of church planting can also gain immeasurable by further apply the aspect planting the seed.

Our city faces the same challenges as the church yet have more opportunity to start gardens. Many row-houses contain some front yard space with larger back yard spaces; some homes on the fringe of the city have marginally more space. However, back yard space is encumbered by sunrooms, patios, and parking spaces leaving minimal grass for planting. Yet the community does plant; it is just that they plant signs. Just walking through the neighborhood one can read the signs of what happens inside the house. Rainbow signs, signs read “Black Lives Matter,” and even “Education Matters” litter the landscape; signs reveal who the resident supports politically and their political agenda. One sign read like a social

⁹⁵ The founders of the CME church chose the tender plant of Isaiah 53:2 as its symbol for its beginning and trajectory for the future.

creed, “We believe in Black Lives Matter, No Human is Illegal, Love is Love, Women Rights are Human Rights, Science is Real, Water is Life, Injustice Anywhere is a Threat to Justice Everywhere.” If we can unashamedly plant signs in the front yard, seeds can easily be planted in the backyard. In this small measure, we are alert to God’s ownership of His creation. As a city, Washington, D.C does well with parks, open fields, wooded areas, water systems, and reserving nature. Rock Creek Park is the grandest of many smaller parks and reserved areas throughout the city giving residents opportunities for connection and appreciation of the environment. The city can improve in regulating new structures that maximize units leaving marginal space between sidewalk and structure.

If agricultural land use in urban land-locked cities seems like a stretch, concrete ministry examples already exist. The Black Church Food Security Network partners farmers with churches to create empowerment through agricultural along the Atlantic seaboard. Twenty-five churches throughout the eastern seaboard plant gardens on church grounds and partner with farmers to create an ecosystem of empowerment in Black communities. The ministries begin with agriculture then spread out into areas like social justice:

Leah Penniman, a 2019 James Beard Leadership Award recipient for her food sovereignty work at Soul Fire Farm west of Albany, New York, called the Black Church Food Security Network “brilliant and elegant”...“When

community bands together to create a solution to a systemic problem, that creates unification in the community, it creates pride and self-determination, it creates hope, it provides an example for our young people that they can see an issue in their community, take action and really have some positive change.”⁹⁶

The possibilities from planting sees seems endless. God seems to empower communities committed to returning to a land-based economy. In our context, land should be identified in the city to be dedicated for food sovereignty so community empowerment can be multiplied across the city.

Finally, the building structures upon the land must also be used to reflect God as landowner. Row-house renovations are downsized to one to two bedrooms by creating one open space on the ground level; new structures propose a majority of studio and one-bedroom units. Besides being overpriced for low-income residents, these units are designed for young, wealthy singles or couples. The single mothers and children are unable to be housed in these units and thereby displaced; these are the persons God desires in his community (31:8; 31:15). As zoning laws dictate that new, exterior architecture blend with surrounding buildings, no laws regulate that the inner structure matches the population of the community in which it is built. How might churches combat such systemic

⁹⁶ Edie Gross, “A network of black farmers and black churches delivers fresh food from soil to sanctuary,” *faithandleadership.com*, May 28, 2019, <https://faithandleadership.com/network-black-farmers-and-black-churches-delivers-fresh-food-soil-sanctuary>

inequities that oppress its membership? Gorringer provides a theological framework for the built environment, “a theology committed to its context, to the local as the key to the global, to the concrete, and to the necessity of praxis. It is also a theology which understands ‘sin’ in a structural way, as being spiritual precisely in economic, social and political dimensions.”⁹⁷ Gorringer’s supplies a theology that fits our praxis. In response to displacement, our church involved itself in community meetings, ministerial alliances, zoning meetings, and city council meetings to stand with community members in jeopardy of losing their homes. The church was meeting the most urgent needs of members and then community members living in the context of displacement. Akin to its New Testament roots, the Church’s work against displacement merges church and home once again.⁹⁸ Church structures are now used for community meetings, resource centers, and advancing God’s message of hope in the community context. Churches are needed to proactively participate in zoning, planning, and city council meetings and voice their opinions; it is those who voice their opinions that get the best results.⁹⁹ Gorringer beautifully describes the stance of Christian theology as it relates to the build environment,

⁹⁷ Gorringer, 309, Kindle.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 171, Kindle.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 3329, Kindle.

A new architecture springing from a Christologically refracted vision, refracted by the cross and resurrection, would be an architecture and planning which recovered human scale, and architecture and planning which were modest and beautiful at the same time. In the educational task of shaping the future, Church is but one voice: but it too has a voice.¹⁰⁰

The voice of the church is a voice that will eventually obtain results. Like Jeremiah, it is this voice that shrieks in face of the horrors people face in displacement. Like John the Baptist, the voice still disturbs the wilderness though it stands alone. The voice is prophetic, which means it may not manifest even in the lifetime of the one who speaks it, but it must be spoken with the belief that God will bring justice. This voice speaks not only for land possession, but how structures work to deny opportunities for land possession. In the end, the church works so that land possession, land care, and structures built on the land, all speak to the landowner, God.

CHAPTER 4

A True Hope

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 3264, Kindle

As our church leads the fight against displacement of poor residents, cultivating a true hope is a critical factor. As a pastor, most of my work entails maintaining hope amid the vicissitudes of urban life. Our community began hoping against hope that we could save homes and retain poor residents in the city with affordable housing. In our fight against displacement, true hope must be maintained in the face of systemic opposition lead by persons seated in positions of power. Our true and faithful hope began when facing the machinations of gentrification: negotiating with wealthy developers, pleading with a lukewarm city council, adjusting to mayoral measures that supports developers,¹⁰¹ and being mired in legal maneuvering. Jeremiah's Book of Restoration instructs the church in such moments.

In this chapter, I follow the fluctuations of Jeremiah's hope and posit how his hope was maintained. Hope's fluctuations are based in the narrative accounts in Jeremiah 32 and supplemented by other useful texts in Jeremiah outside the Book of Restoration. After Jeremiah's land purchase, God supplies the foundation for his hope, ""For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields

¹⁰¹ "Mayor Bowser Unveils New Tools to Add Affordable Housing," [mayor.dc.gov](https://mayor.dc.gov/release/mayor-bowser-unveils-new-tools-add-affordable-housing), December 16, 2021, <https://mayor.dc.gov/release/mayor-bowser-unveils-new-tools-add-affordable-housing>. Recent mayoral measures address homelessness and seek to provide housing for low-income residents however these measures are miniscule and late when compared to the arrival of 136,000 new residents. These measures seek to use church property for further development.

and vineyards shall again be bought in this land” (Jer 32:15). The prayer conversation between Jeremiah and God immediately follows providing clues for maintaining this hope, “Ah Lord God! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you” (Jer 32:17), and “The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: See, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?” (Jer32:26, 27). The repetition of the phrase “too hard” plus the two images of God contain enough reason for pause and analysis. The former provides context for the emergence of true hope and the latter provides a critical augmentation in God’s image as “The God of all flesh.” Yet, inserted between these two hopeful statements, Jeremiah reveals signs of despair:

See, the siege ramps have been cast up against the city to take it, and the city, faced with sword, famine, and pestilence, has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it. What you spoke has happened, as you yourself can see. Yet you, O Lord God, have said to me, “Buy the field for money and get witnesses” —though the city has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans (Jer 32:24,25).

After the land purchase, Jeremiah’s prayer reveals his internal struggle between hope and despair, a sort of buyer’s remorse. This prayer conversation occurs in the tension between a hope generating land purchase and a despair caused by Israel’s deteriorating war conditions. In such conditions, how does the capacity to hope counter the debilitating effects of despair? This tension best fits our fight against

displacement in Washington, D.C. Through these texts, I will argue that a true hope is needed to navigate the daily fluctuations of fighting for housing and that true hope is maintained long term by knowing that God is also God of powerful people in the city and, eventually, holds them accountable.

DISCERNING A TRUE HOPE

While the Bible leaves its most essential concepts undefined, descriptions and explications of hope are abundantly available for readers to piece together. Before hope can be discerned, an irreducible relation between faith and hope is acknowledged. An example is in faith's most recognized passage which also includes hope, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). For hope, one foundational description is, "Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become 'the father of many nations,' according to what was said, 'So numerous shall your descendants be'" (Rom 4:18). Hope's intertwining with itself, "Hoping against hope," displays its complexity, leaving one to ponder if hope is grasped by logic.¹⁰² Further, the Apostle Paul provides an explication of hope:

¹⁰² Walter Brueggemann, *Preaching Jeremiah: Announcing God's Restorative Passion*, (Fortress: Minneapolis, 2020), 149-50.

And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Rom 5:3-5)

In these verses, Paul details a succession of producing, or birthing, like a genealogy; suffering gives birth to endurance which births character which finally births hope. The concept of genealogy provides a framework for hope to be absent yet in formation; one who continues to endure intense suffering gains a greater sense of hope's eventual emergence. This is good news for believers who require time to absorb the shock of suffering and are not required to produce hope on demand. Concerning faith, the church tends to believe the immediacy of "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rom 4:3). The church presumes that belief provides the immediate gift of righteousness or salvation.¹⁰³ Yet, Paul lists a process of steps between faith and righteousness: Abraham did not "weaken" (4:19), "waver" (4:20), and was "fully convinced" (4:21). "And therefore," the following verse indicates, "It was imputed to him for righteousness." (4:22) If faith and hope involve a process, then their

¹⁰³ The concept of salvation, sanctification, and righteousness are seen as both instant possessions and also part of a lifelong process (Phil 2:10-13, Heb 10:26, 2 Cor 2:15).

absence is not necessarily giving up hope or losing faith but might be bringing both to maturity and full fruition (5:2c, 5).

In the Book of Restoration, hope's birthing process begins by a proclamation of future restoration. Though hope's futuristic language saturates the text, the first explicit mention of hope is linked to its fulfillment:¹⁰⁴ "there is hope for your future, says the Lord, your children shall come back to their own country" (Jer 31:17). Israel's hope is in rebuilding their country marked by the return of its descendants. Yet, this emergence of hope is the offspring of a succession of suffering "uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow" established at the beginning of the book. Ellen Davis traces the trajectory of hope from Jeremiah 1:10, "The long-term goal of prophecy is represented as the transformation and renewal of a people and culture."¹⁰⁵ After twenty-eight chapters in which the established capital of Jerusalem is torn down, the long-term goal of Israel's planting and building emerges once again.¹⁰⁶ As a sure sign of the fulfillment of the exiles' return, Jeremiah's purchase is a tangible hope

¹⁰⁴ Jeremiah uses the future tense continually and keeps the reader looking forward not backwards (30:11, 20-24; 31:1; 4-6, 8,9, 11-14, 23, 24; 27-30, 31-34; 32:33-44). Phrases that claim, "I will", "the days are coming", and use of the future tense "I will" along with words like "again" to speak to the thread of hope resonant in this book.

¹⁰⁵ Davis, *Prophecy*, 157.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

foreshadowing God's redemption of the whole land of Israel. It seems by its very nature that hope's inception is tied to a future fulfillment, a long-term goal.

What challenges might be presented in maintaining hope for the long-term? In the book of Jeremiah, hope is most challenged by presumption and despair. A true hope is moderate and is kept from these distortions. Presumption is taking God's deliverance for granted and being dismissive of the difficulty at hand. This carefree confidence is not true hope.¹⁰⁷ Israel's presumption is witnessed when it places hope in a quick deliverance, "And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: This is how I will break the yoke of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon from the neck of all the nations within two years.' At this, the prophet Jeremiah went his way" (Jer 28:11). Yet, Jeremiah had already provided a true hope through his long-term prophecy, "This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (Jer 25:11).

¹⁰⁷ Christopher Beem, "What 13th-century Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas can teach us about hope in times of despair" theconversation.com, January 19, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/what-13th-century-christian-theologian-thomas-aquinas-can-teach-us-about-hope-in-times-of-despair-174954>. Presumption is defined as "the easy confidence that everything is going to be fine."

To avoid presumption, hope is best maintained by long-term thinking.¹⁰⁸

At Hananiah's two-year prediction, Jeremiah went his way. Just as Jeremiah paused at this point, we would be wise to do the same. When Jeremiah leaves, he has lost the contest with Hananiah in the eyes of the priests and people (28:5). Though the scriptural focus is on Jeremiah's yoke, a thread of time is also present. Jeremiah's departure is caused by his recognition that God is in control of the timing of God's deliverance. Scripture attests to God's exclusive knowledge about when God will act. Where did Jeremiah go? Jeremiah 23:18 states, "For who has stood in the council of the Lord to see and to hear his word? Who has given heed to his word to proclaim it?" Jeremiah does not respond immediately; he departs to a private place to listen once again for God's word to him.

True prophecy is also characterized by patience. Hananiah prophesies immediately in front of people while Jeremiah retreats to the council to "see and hear" God's word. Upon his return, Jeremiah upgrades the wooden yoke to iron and prophesies concerning time: Hananiah is to die within the year, "So Hananiah died the same year in the seventh month" (Jer 28:17). Jeremiah's prophecies were true and verified by definite timing. What might be the reason that Israel did not

¹⁰⁸ Cries of "how long" resound throughout scripture and illustrate how pain intensifies when compounded with an unknown duration; suffering becomes excruciating (Ps 13:1, 89:46, Hb 1:2, Rv 6:10).

take heed? God's revelation of seventy years in exile was an act of mercy; however, when false hopes operate, a strategy designed to provide hope can lead to despair.¹⁰⁹ Hoping for deliverance in two years is bearable and even exciting; hope over seventy years, when placed alongside presumptive false prophecies, is more difficult. Nonetheless, true hope looks to God's saving purposes despite our inability to discern or control God's timing. True hope is either anchored in a definite time given by God or fights for survival throughout undetermined time. Latching hope to a false time spells its inevitable extinction. Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life." Over an undefined period, hope doesn't need the excitement of presumption; it just needs to persist. If hope can survive to its fulfillment, then life can revive like never before. The key is for hope to be maintained until its fulfillment, a difficult task for sure. In the Black church tradition, true hope is best captured by the song depicting God as "an on-time God." The lyrics inform us that "He may not come when you want Him, but He will be there right on time." The lyrics imply that God does not come when we think we are most in need but instead comes when the need is greatest. Somehow, hope has been experienced in this way in our community. This

¹⁰⁹ Israel seems to reject the first prophecy of seventy years in favor of two years. The seventy years prophecy restated in chapter 29 may have gained traction after the death of Hananiah, yet not fully embraced until after the two-year period had expired. This speaks to the lingering danger of false prophecy and may be part of the "rooting out" that was necessary during this time.

song, and others like it, encourage the fainting hearts of waiting believers to look for a future hope even after we think God missed moments to save or deliver us.

Israel's hope was also challenged by despair brought by the deteriorating conditions of war. After Jeremiah's hopeful land purchase, despair is witnessed while the Babylonian army encroaches upon the city walls, "And though the city will be given into the hands of the Babylonians, you, Sovereign Lord, say to me, 'Buy the field with silver and have the transaction witnessed'" (Jer 32:25). This verse captures how despair battles alongside hope; in one breath, Jeremiah sees the difficulty of returning to the city, then half-heartedly acknowledges his hopeful act of land purchase. This play between hope and despair is all too familiar. For hope not to plunge into despair, one must anticipate the absolute worst scenario, which Zedekiah never contemplates. Brueggemann points out that Zedekiah, discouraged by worsening conditions, asks too early for God's wonders, *pela*, of deliverance.¹¹⁰ In this case, Israel would reach its "nullification point",¹¹¹ where it lost everything, before God would revive Israel's hope for His wonders. Jeremiah dashed Israel's false hopes of God's early deliverance, only to revive their hopes on a more solid basis: hope's allowance for and survival beyond

¹¹⁰ Brueggemann, *Preaching*, 150.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

nullification points. Somehow, true hope elevates God's freedom to act over His accessibility in our perceived time of need.¹¹² True hope meets its most difficult challenges through surviving past the worst conditions and thinking long-term, starting with creation itself.

MAINTAINING TRUE HOPE

Ultimately, a true hope is maintained by a growing understanding of God's works since creation. Cited throughout Scripture as a reliable basis for hope, King Zedekiah places his hope in God's historic wonders of delivering Israel, "Please inquire of the Lord on our behalf, for King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon is making war against us; perhaps the Lord will perform a wonderful deed for us, as he has often done, and will make him withdraw from us" (Jer 21:2). God's history of faithful deliverance was a source of hope for Israel whenever nations threatened its existence. Likewise, Black people in America continue to hope based on God's activity of deliverances since slavery. Further, grass roots organizations hope in the heritage of the American political system that it can deliver its promises if

¹¹² Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 40th Anniversary Edition, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018), 29. Brueggemann notes the tension between God's freedom in choosing to be present versus the easy accessibility expected by believers.

properly engaged.¹¹³ Throughout Scripture, Israel's hopes in God are based on His historical track record. Zedekiah hopes in God who has performed so many wonders of the past. All groups of people are to understand that God's historical activity extends prior to His activity for any people. It is this grater arena of creation, prior to Israel's formation through Abraham, that escapes Zedekiah's view and where God fixes Jeremiah's attention.

Hope can be maintained in the worst circumstances when based on the understanding of God's activity in creation. The Hebrew word for "wonderful deed" is *pela*; this mention of *pela* is the only mention of the word outside of Jeremiah 32 and God's conversation about anything being too hard for God (Jer 32:17, 27). If we hope for anything, it is for some wonderful deed performed by God. What is the difference between Jeremiah and Zedekiah's hope? Jeremiah understands God not only as the God of Israel's past but the God of creation, "It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm!" (Jer 32:17b). God's concern and range of activity precedes His covenant with Israel. Further, Jeremiah's knowledge of God is extended when God answers his prayer, "The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: See, I am the Lord,

¹¹³ Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America*, (Princeton: Princeton Press, 2010), 104.

the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?" (Jer 32:26-27). The term "the God of all flesh" grabs the reader's attention and further informs Jeremiah of how God governs his creation. In Jeremiah's extreme conditions, the key for Jeremiah's hope is understanding God as the God of all flesh.

How might Jeremiah understand God's self-definition as the God of all flesh? On the surface, "the God of all flesh" moves Jeremiah's attention to God's action in human affairs, especially their exile to Babylon. A closer look at "The God of all flesh" indicates God's historic action in the cycle of destruction and restoration since creation. Brueggemann traces the term "all flesh" in reference to the flood and its implications in Genesis 6-9 when God destroys "all flesh" yet restores it through the ark. As it relates to Jeremiah, Brueggemann states,

The two subunits of the divine oracle, vv. 28-35 on punishment and vv. 36-41 on restoration, summarize the final form of the Jeremiah tradition, a twofold assertion variously voiced through the verb cluster in 1:10. Notably the God who speaks this double future for Jerusalem is "the God of *all flesh*" (v. 27). The scope of Yahweh's rule is as broad as creation in the Jeremiah tradition; however, this language suggests that Yahweh is God of Israel, but *also* God of Babylon. This usage of "all flesh" expands Yahweh's sphere beyond the covenant with Israel.¹¹⁴

From this, we confirm God's involvement in the affairs of the flesh but also extend his authority not only as God of Israel but as "God of Babylon;"¹¹⁵ this is cause for

¹¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann and K. C. Hanson, *The God of All Flesh and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge, England, 2017), 4.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

more hope. Surely, God's cycle of destruction and restoration began with the flood, and his covenant with Noah. While these events precede Israel, God never abolishes His everlasting covenant.¹¹⁶

ONGOING WONDERS

How does Israel maintain this hope throughout seventy years of exile? God maintains the hopes of Israel through intimacy not immediacy. Some uncertainty still exists, even for Jeremiah, in preserving Israel in the face of powerful enemies. In response to this uncertainty, God asks Jeremiah to continue to call on Him, "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known" (Jer 33:3). It is intimacy that will maintain hope against despair throughout the seventy-year exile. God provides this intimacy by the means of continual prayer. Presumptuous prayer perceives God's presence in and answer to prayer as immanent despite God's will or life's contingencies. Famines, pestilence, and the ills of war do happen though we pray for rain, health, and peace. Prayer's energy fills the gap in our lives of these contingencies, even daily. We do not know what is going to happen, but God let us know what is going to happen.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 5.

Through prayer, Jeremiah gained both intimacy and intimate knowledge of coming events concerning Israel, his economic prospects, and his future hopes. If called upon even further, God will supply guarded and inaccessible answers throughout the duration of exile.¹¹⁷ God increased Jeremiah's intimate knowledge regarding the future fate of Israel and its surrounding neighbors (Jer 46-52); no doubt this brought assurance to Jeremiah's hopes of Israel's return. Further, God promises immediate answer to prayer upon return from exile (Jer 29:10-14). The implication is that God might not act so readily during exile. Yet, what God lacks in immediacy he makes up in intimacy. Daniel Berrigan describes the application of Jeremiah 33:3,

An invitation, and a strange one. The prisoner is to 'call to Me, and I will answer you.' Answer? But not, let it be inferred, in a matter that might be thought pressing to the prisoner: release, vindication, restoration of honor and status...there is work where one is. The Prisoner, for the time being, is to accept the bolts and bars, with what peace he can muster.¹¹⁸

Here, we see the removal of immediacy in this prayer. In exilic moments, let us not think of immediate release from the present, pressing hour of despair. Having properly learned a true hope, the petitioner doesn't place undue pressure on the present nor does she require God to act right now.¹¹⁹ Yet, God provides intimacy,

¹¹⁷ *Lundbom*, 529.

¹¹⁸ *Berrigan*, 142-43.

¹¹⁹ Jesus' Passover arrival in Jerusalem were grounded in false hopes seen in the excited shouts from the crowd, "Hosannah", interpreted as "save now".

“But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings” (Jer 23:22). Standing in God’s presence is accessible to the petitioner to be renewed in hope day by day. What great wonders await Israel in exile? If the following verses are any indication, God reveals healing wonders for both city and people (Jer 33: 4–9), and righteousness for both leader and city (vv. 14-16); through intimate prayer, Hezekiah learned of such healing wonders, even for himself (2 Kgs 20:1-6). This is the long-term goal of prophecy and God’s will for both people, leaders, and city; it only happens through intimacy with God.

Can the church trust in such words spoken so long ago? What happens when the church prays in exilic situations understanding that God will show wonders amongst us? Bishop Henry M. Williamson’s ministry at Carter Temple CME Church in Chicago was based on Jeremiah 33:3, “Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known,” and Deuteronomy 29:29, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law.” Unique to Bishop Williamson’s ministry was a daily prayer meeting at 6:00 a.m. No matter how busy or tired, Bishop Williamson attended this small band of praying believers. As he balanced running for Bishop multiple times,

pastoring a 5,000-member church, serving as Chairman of Rainbow/Push, founding a national One Church/One School program, he believed in the secret, inaccessible, hidden, and great wonders of God through prayer. Bishop Williamson was known for his exuberant, youthful energy, his vision, and his ability to do all things well. This was accomplished in the exile like conditions of south side Chicago. As a result, his ministry still stands as a living testament of one who calls upon the Lord. As a Bishop, he saved a district from financial ruin, revived many congregations, and, even as his health suffered, he called on the Lord and was restored. It is not a coincidence that, as God instructs Jeremiah to seek the secret things of God over 2,500 years ago, our greatest living example of successful ministry in our denomination lives by Jeremiah 33:3; I have never heard of any other pastor that claimed these two verses as foundations for ministry. This is the living power, relevance, and proof of God's wonderful activity through the lens of exilic experience. As we hope truly in God, prayer ensures that we also lead others truly, exemplifying the power of God in our lives.

As the church hopes in the present, moments like these are depressurized and God is not expected to deliver results today. In maintaining hope, the church needs to make long-term ministry plans and develop strong teams to solve the issue of displacement especially beyond points of nullification. For the church,

hope is better maintained when we broaden our brackets of time and gain a sense of timing of God's wonderful acts.

Knowledge of the God of all flesh is practically applied when extending His reign beyond the God of Babylon to include the God of Nebuchadnezzar. Knowing God in this way heightens hopes in face-to-face interactions with the "flesh" who occupy seats of power in local government. The book of Jeremiah ends with Zedekiah dying in jail (52:11) and Jehoiachin, the Davidic King, being treated favorably by the new king who "spoke kindly to him" (Jer 52:32). This ending calls for reexamination of the "face to face" and "eye-to-eye" interaction of kings prophesied by Jeremiah. Jeremiah's prophecy was not just for the nation but also for those persons seated in positions of power.

And you yourself shall not escape from his hand but shall surely be captured and handed over to him; you shall see the king of Babylon eye to eye and speak with him face to face; and you shall go to Babylon. Yet hear the word of the Lord, O King Zedekiah of Judah! Thus says the Lord concerning you: You shall not die by the sword; you shall die in peace. And as spices were burned for your ancestors, the earlier kings who preceded you, so they shall burn spices for you and lament for you, saying, "Alas, lord!" For I have spoken the word, says the Lord (Jer 34:3-5).

To avoid the encounter with Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah flees only to be captured and brought face-to-face with Nebuchadnezzar who gouges both eyes and imprisons him (Jer 39:4-7; 52:9-11). The inclusion of these persons in prophecy coupled with the conclusion of the book illustrate that God, throughout all the

destruction and displacement, did not lose track of holding individual kings accountable. As the God of all flesh, even down to the individual, He is God of Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar, and Evil-merodach, too. To extend the application of the God of all flesh even further, Jeremiah uniquely notes Israel's treatment by local officials. Israelite officials Irijah, a captain of the ward, and Pashur the priest met Jeremiah with mocking words, harsh imprisonment, and cruel treatment (Jer 37:11-16; 20:1-6). Babylonian local officials Nebuzaradan, Rabsaris, Nergalsharezer, Rabmag, treated Jeremiah with human dignity, freedom, and kindness (Jer 39:11-14; 40:1-6), yet executed many of Israel's high-ranking officials (Jer 52:24-27). These encounters factor mightily in the battle between hope and despair. He is God of Irijah and Nebuzaradan, too. To this, the church must believe that God is the God of Zoning Commissioners and ward councilmembers of Washington, D.C. This is immeasurably hopeful.

The gouging of Zedekiah's eyes demonstrates the accountability that God holds for leaders as the God of all flesh. The gouging of Zedekiah's eyes is symbolic of presumptions held by leaders that only foresee God's favor in their future. Berrigan calls this phenomenon "regal eyes," a viewpoint that cannot be changed by forecasts of doom by those they hold in contempt,

He dared to say (a strange, vivid, perhaps demeaning phrase):
"Zedekiah...shall be taken into the hands of the king of Babylon, and

he shall speak with him face to face, and see him eye to eye. We imagine how that foray into the King's future was received! How the considerable ego of Zedekiah would rear up at such effrontery, such a diminution of his greatness. Therefore, imprison the upstart, forthwith!¹²⁰

Kings become blind to God's activity and deaf to hearing truth from any power greater than their own, whether human or divine. The phenomenon of regal eyes and ears exists within the system of gentrification as well. Pastors cause friction with city leaders when speaking truth and acting prophetically in our neighborhood; these city leaders who have eyes, but do not see," and "who have ears, but do not hear" (Jer 5:21). The church must know a God who is the God of all flesh including the flesh in positions of power: presidents of developers, chairs and board members, councilmembers, the mayor, lawyers, HUD representatives, and community pastors. The face-to-face and eye to eye interaction with these persons in the flesh can plummet hopes near its extinction. As we fight for those who are displaced, we behold uncompromising personages, receive rejection couched in kind language, overlook slightly offensive language, sit opposite the arrogant, stomach blatant disregard, plea against uncompromising positions, wait for unfulfilled promises, and navigate political landscapes. Even imprisonment must be contemplated as a last effort to fight the injustice of displacement. Hope

¹²⁰ Berrigan, 135.

is to be maintained amid interaction with these regal eyes and ears. The church must believe that the God of all flesh is the God of regal “flesh” also. The book of Jeremiah provides such hope.

For urban pastors, the book of restoration provides true hope in God who acts beyond the pressing circumstances of the present. In urban areas, disasters and trauma are ever present providing temptations for false hopes to be created. Pastors can act and expect God to act even beyond these disasters. Like Jeremiah, pastors might expect to take risks, make personal sacrifices, and invest resources by inserting himself into the work of restoration. Local pastors in Washington, D.C. view the work against gentrification as vain and unproductive. We face political maneuvering and movements against the poor, yet our rightful position is to stand in the council of God and speak truth to power to those seated in positions of influence.; however, one might question the effectiveness of speaking truth to power through direct confrontation. Old Testament prophets possessed the stature to speak to kings, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr; speaking truth to power is more effective when pastors creatively imagine strategies for their communities based on prophetic principles. The Book of Restoration provides such strategies and hope for our present fight for displaced residents. Having begun this work by calling on the Lord (or Him calling me) and only being guided

by conscience and the spirit, I rejoice in finding hope in the firm footing of the Old Testament; this Book of Restoration also restores fortunes of hope, assurance, and victory. In preaching true hope, pastors announce hope's timely birth and its daily maintenance between presumption and despair through prayerful intimacy with the God of all flesh.

The church can hope in the God of all flesh who still cycles destruction and restoration to exiles and reigns over those seated in power who oppress them. Jeremiah prophesies Israel's destruction while promising restoration through their return. Though Babylon and other nations prosper from Israel's defeat, they too are fated for destruction (Jer 46-50). These cycles are God's prerogative to perform as the God of all flesh. In the church's fight against displacement, a cycle of loss in housing, even utter loss, figures in as a possible outcome. In the worst-case scenario, many more low-income residents may yet be displaced resulting in the Black population shrinking to single digit percentages. Washington, D.C. boasts an affordable housing waiting list that has risen to over 40,000 people since 2013; newly constructed studio and one-bedroom units plunge residents' hopes of return next to zero. This destruction cycle of displacement may continue despite community efforts. According to these trends, displaced exiles are close to utter destruction. At this place in the cycle, the church responds with a delicate

discernment and management of the timely, prophetic utterance of true hope avoiding the dealing of near-sighted, false hopes. The time calls for long-term planning, coalition building, and prayerful strategies; through this, hope anchors our fight beyond moments of despair caused by fluctuations of loss and wins. Yet, hope is primarily anchored in the knowledge of the God of all flesh, who ultimately cycles destruction to oppressive powers.

Jeremiah's ending is symbolic, containing various layers of meaning. Jeremiah's ending could speak to God's cycle of destruction and restoration, the reliability of prophecy, Israel's everlasting covenant, and the latest sign of Israel's return from exile. Yet, the cycle of destruction and restoration and God's everlasting covenant with Israel are both signs of assurance. The interaction between King Evil Merodach and King Jehoiachin by the end of the book provides a promising sign that God can bring favor from those in supreme power in face-to-face and eye-to-eye encounters even after previous conflicts. The fact that the book ends with the relief of a jailed, powerless king who is treated kindly is calling our attention to God's wonders of restoring the fortunes of his people.

Still, speaking truth to power in our time requires more finesse than confrontation. Speaking truth to power now calls for the use of imagination more than direct conflict. Jeremiah's call to be a prophet to the nations (Jer 1:10) coupled

with the centralized power of Israel's king, made confrontation an effective tool. Today, power is diffused throughout the city which requires the prophetic person to creatively imagine new methods given this context. The prophetic person exchanges confrontation with persons of power (the mayor, councilperson, or chair of the zoning commission) with imagining ways to accomplish prophetic goals by combating the systems that causes oppression. Brueggemann describes a way forward for prophetic action:

“prophet vs king’ is increasingly difficult to bring off and without great social effect. A confrontational model assumes that the “prophetic voice has enough clout, either social or moral, to gain a hearing. Currently, the old “prophetic stance” of such churches lacks much of that authority, so that the old confrontational approach is largely ineffectual posturing. Given that social reality, which I think cannot be doubted, I suspect that whatever is “prophetic” must be more cunning and more nuanced, and perhaps more ironic.”¹²¹

The church's lack of clout and “the powerless prophetic voice”¹²² of pastors is true yet painful to admit. The new prophetic approach may now include cunning strategies, nuanced speech, and authoring articles of irony as acceptable and effective forms of prophetic work.

Possible strategies might be creating awareness and support through online articles, videos and blogs in lieu of uncertain coverage by the media. Further

¹²¹ Brueggemann, *Imagination*, 243, Kindle.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 252.

community support might be garnered via Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter contacts in the community replacing the door-to-door approach. Creating online testimonies of issues experienced by real people and providing opportunities for zoom rallies. Further networking with local and national justice groups like the Poor People's Campaign would provide opportunities strengthen our strategic approach. Participation on online podcasts, radio, chat groups to extend our knowledge and sharpen our organization. Through these imaginative approaches, prophetic texts provide not a blueprint but a direction in which steps are discerned by prophetic person who interpret their context. Forms of the prophetic provide direction for our work, not a blueprint. Admittedly, work in these areas may blur the lines between church and politics. Yet lines were crossed already when pursuing justice for the poor. In my justice work, which is still in the beginning stages, I witness to God's provision of strange strategies, unlikely alliances, and the necessity for cunning opposed to confrontation; speaking truth to power today can terminate your movement and tarnish your name in the process. Justice works needs writing of the ironic sort to bring awareness and attention to its causes. Some caution is advised in engaging the cunning of imagination; imaginations running wild can be destructive, oppressive, and devious. Yet, when guided by the word of God and anchored in the Holy Spirit, imagination can yield work that not only

brings justice, but also amazement that brings glory to God. Moreover, intimacy with God in prayer can stimulate our imaginations for building God's kingdom while sustaining us in the face of seemingly impossible obstacles. When used in this way, imagination abundantly ponders the various uses of the cunning kind resulting in the same long-term goals of justice achieved in the Old Testament.

In the appendices to this study, I offer a few written examples of speaking truth to power in a prophetic whisper opposed to direct confrontation. These examples include a depiction of displacement through use of poetry, truth telling at a slant to City Council, a sermon to our congregation, and an address picturing pastors as gathering shepherds. These examples address various ways in which speaking truth to power is nuanced in the church and city.

CONCLUSION

Urban pastors can heal communities by intentionally gathering them to meet their needs and not just for membership. The extension of the church's reach in the community is greater than its seating capacity and membership; this is an area of church growth that will benefit with more study. As gatherer, the pastor fulfills a need that can be filled by no other; great benefits are experienced in the gathering when the church's fold is extended to meet the political needs of the community. The pastor must know of such power and responsibility utilize the power of his prophetic voice or prophetic whisper. This will keep pastors from

running for political office where their prophetic voice may be compromised. More research can be given to the pastor and church as gatherers and healing agents outside of the church.

Jeremiah's life and message seem to possess continual relevance in the life of the church. I have pastored six churches in the east, west, Midwest and northeast; every church except for one had the same vision based on the great commission. Oddly, such consensus on the great commission deafened the church to Matthew's message and numbed it to evangelism. The monolithic emphasis on winning souls also justifies prioritizing spiritual needs while created gaps in physical needs in the community. A church in Hartford, Connecticut developed its own vision by including the laity as contributors to the vision. Their vision was "Seeking the Peace of the City" based on Jeremiah 29:7; the vision resonated with me, and no changes were made to that vision. Including lay persons in the vision planning process transforms scope and ownership of the vision. As my vision for church lands in the same area of Jeremiah, it seems that the prophet is relevant, and his message transforming. In Jesus' time, it was said, ""Some say you are John the Baptizer, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (Mt 16:14) Why might Jeremiah's life and message continually resound after thousands of

years? More study could be given to how Jeremiah seems to resonate in today's church when released from the silo vision of Matthew 28.

Might Jeremiah's book be about restoring God's image in the eyes of Israel? Throughout the thesis, new images of God continued to emerge: God as healer, God's deep passion, God as gatherer, God as redeemer, God as landowner, and God as the God of all flesh. Israel lost sight of God. What is also restored for Israel is a deepened understanding of their God: now, they know Him as He wants to be known. A further study of the images of God revealed in exile especially those that emerge from Jeremiah's question, double questions, and triple questions. What life-giving images are yet to be gained through such a study of Jeremiah? Our generation might know God better through the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah's combination of land use and land ownership was the most challenging yet pleasant discovery in the thesis. Planting seeds in the immeasurably precious soil of inner-city Washington, D.C. is a small act that create unspeakable benefits. Honoring God as landowner in such a way could signal a reversal of fortunes regarding inner city economics; we seek a return to a land-based economic system as a foundation for the poor. The image of Jesus as our Redeemer helps to inform the link to land in the New Testament understanding.

The most critical element for the Black community is hope. The pervasiveness of hopeless despair characterizes the ongoing battle in the souls of Black people. The community is hopeless with displacement just as much as Black-on-Black crime, violence, theft, drugs, and prostitution; these elements seem to be an accepted part of Black life. Jeremiah's Book of Restoration could be used as a template to battle any of these ills of which we speak; displacement, however, seems to be a snug fit for the book bringing hope to our extended congregation. Most helpful has been Brueggemann's re-interpretation of the classic notion of speaking truth to power; He believes that pastors should not confront power because pastors do not possess the personage of an Old Testament prophet. The imaginative ways in which to approach power leaves room for much more research and methods to be discovered.

APPENDIX

I will See You on the Other Side

The paperwork indicated that the mortgage began in 1979. One of my members, a single mother of three, began informing me that something was amiss with her housing. After approaching the matter a few times, I decided to view her contract as she had asked. The mother was in her mid-to-late twenties and emerged into the flow of neighborhood life: dressing up, going out on weekends, smoking and drinking on the porch, and taking care of their kids. We now live in a community where we no longer are the majority. Poor Black mothers are being outcast by how new housing is constructed; they cannot afford new housing and could not fit their families into new studio and one-bedroom condos. For Black

mothers, our community has become foreign and inhospitable; they are outcast in Washington, D.C. How are these mothers viewed by our new residents? Are they welcome to stay or wished to be displaced to Prince George's County?

3 colored girls, of age! stroll by
-their color flagrant,
 their voices vagrant
their laughter wild, flagellant, dissociated
from the fixed scene.¹²³

This mother had a story. She worked off and on, but mostly off. She was not the greatest mother by society's standard, yet she was not neglectful of her children. She gave her life to Christ after many casual conversations with one of my members usually after Bible Study. Invariably, the mother would be on the porch (smoking, drinking or both) and the member would stop to converse with her. The mother had moved back home to assist her mother (further referred to as grandmother) who was suffering from dementia. As the condition worsened, the mother voiced concerns over the property. In 1979, Marion Barry introduced the 2nd Northwest housing co-op. Young mothers jumped at the chance to own their own property in the city. Forty years later, ownership is in dispute.

The neighborhood knew us, from the greatest to the smallest. We knocked on their doors, prayed with them, and met their needs on a regular basis. The leaders of the gangster crews knew me, and we talked often; one came by my office

¹²³ William Carlos Williams, *Patterson*, Revised by Christopher McGowan, (New York: New Directions, 1992), 59.

(with drink in hand) for counseling and paid us a ten-minute visit with his friends one Sunday. With this mother, I was asked to help in situations of conflict among residents on more than one occasion. We achieved much peace through these relationships.

I quickly perused the housing contract, yet no language indicated a transfer of property to other family members. Since no other names were present on the paperwork, the family had to relocate when the dementia worsened. The mother of three moved to Prince George's County, the place where all Black residents were exiled. The grandmother soon died and now the property lies vacant. The property is on the corner right across the street as a reminder.

Tears flowed from the young mother's eyes as her family packed their belongings and prepared for a new life elsewhere. "This is not fair," the mother sobbed as her children tried to console her. Other members who were instrumental in her life, even some who had become God parents to the children, were present to provide solace and hope. Warsaw Shire, an immigrant from war torn Kenya, describes the move from stability to displacement:

...Do they not know that stability is like a lover with a sweet mouth upon your body one second; the next you are a tremor lying on the floor covered in rubble and old currency waiting for its return. All I can say is, I was once like you, the apathy, the pity, the ungrateful placement and now my home is the mouth of a shark, now my home is the barrel of a gun. I'll see you on the other side.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Warsaw Shire, "Conversations About Home (at the deportation centre)", *teaching my mother how to give birth*, (United Kingdom: flipped eye, 2011), 22.

Many people are already on the other side of Prince George's County; many more are to join our member on the other side. Maybe some residents can be saved as other residents, like me overcome the apathy and taking for granted our placement in Washington, D.C.

I have never felt so helpless as a pastor. I have always found a way to help those in need. I felt like I could have done more. I was too busy doing other things. How did I allow this to happen right across the street from the church with one who gave her life to God? To the mother's credit, her faith was shaken but she was holding on. She did not have to ask me the questions because I saw it written on her fearful, grieving face: Is this what I am to expect for giving my life to God? If this is the result, then why believe anyway? I might as well live according to my previous life; my prayers have gone unheard.

This was my first personal brush with the displacement of gentrification. I took it personally that someone believed in God with such a disastrous result. One thing was becoming clear: this community cannot see God unless God can help with their housing. My questions abounded: Can God help with housing? Can I tell displaced people to hold to their faith while they are losing property? How real is the church's offer of salvation if it cannot save their homes? The answers would not come at this time. I had more voices to hear.

The church was almost empty after morning worship. A slight knock on the door. "Pastor, it's one of the mothers of the church," one of the ministers informed me. "Sure, let her in." The door opened and the mother, who leaned upon her walker, concerned but serenely stated, "Rev., you know they are trying to kick us out over there." Over there was the same co-op where my previous member has been displaced. "Oh yeah," I responded. Emotions from the previous displacement overcame me. She continued, "Yeah, looks like me and my daughter will have to leave." "Really, why is that?" I answered. "It's the contract," she retorted. She stated that she would bring the paperwork next week. The following week, she waved the paperwork at the entry of the door. I gladly received all the paperwork and resolved to drop everything, this time, and read it thoroughly; with her permission, I distributed it to some real estate agents in the church for good measure. The following week, I informed the mother of the church that the documents did not indicate any reason she should relocate after thirty years of residency. She left relieved only to return two week later with a louder cry of woe informing us of notes left on her door, the co-op board informing her that she would have to relocate because of renovations, and the rude responses by the administration of the property. I decided to interview a few more residents and the experience was the same: disgust, offense, and dread over the future. These were the same people to whom we shared the plan of salvation. Was there a plan to save their homes?

Through these cries, God fixed a resolve to pour my energy into displacement. If I do not do anything else at Miles Memorial CME Church, I will fight displacement. Displacement was now priority number one and everything else a far second. I am thankful for the mother who decided to knock on her pastor's door and evangelized me to the work of saving homes. Through her voice, all other voices came together, and I sensed a call to pastor beyond the pulpit and beyond the four walls – saving souls would take a back seat to saving homes. The struggle took place in my soul as to how I could justify this shift to my congregation, colleagues, and Bishop.

I acted before my theology was in place. Today, I still struggle with the work due to it being so foreign to my pastoral understanding. However, the work of this thesis is to aid all pastors in the justification of making such shifts: Healing, vision, land use, and hope are not merely justification for community work but also direction for achieving goals such as justice in housing. Let the church,

Say amen. Say amend.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Across the Street from Gentrification

Hello and good day to City council persons and Mayor Muriel Bowser,

I am Juliano A. Andujo. I serve as pastor of Miles Memorial Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church in the Northwest quadrant, a church that has served both the city and Shaw neighborhood over the past 135 years. I have served for seven years as the pastor of Miles and twenty-six years pastoring throughout the nation. I currently reside in the Northeast quadrant of Washington, D.C. I speak today as both resident and pastor of residents throughout our great city.

I acknowledge the historic legacy of housing collaboration between city council and African American houses of worship in our city. The city's relationship with congregations, many of which are now relocated or dissolved, are yet still alive in our memory. Even our church, at the city demands of eminent

domain, relocated after the 1968 riots yielding prime property for Highway 365 to merge into the city onto New York Avenue. I invite with great expectation an even greater collaboration going forward.

We face yet another housing cycle as the city greatly benefits from gentrification and the influx of 136,000 new residents by 2025; you even insisted that 12% of all housing must be low income. Studies indicate that gentrification causes all residents to prosper: income levels of all residents increase, quality of education increases, and access to resources increase. We are grateful for safer streets, clean and fresh supermarkets, and an array of new restaurants from which to choose. Even the city prospers evidenced with a robust city treasury, a prosperity that the city has never seen. This is all documented.

Has the whole story been told? I am here to tell the undocumented story from my vantage point across the street from gentrification. Gentrification is in full swing on both sides of my corner at 5th and N street. It is not gentrification that we are fighting but the displacement caused by gentrification. Studies cannot tell the full story or hear the voices from residents displaced by gentrification. Someone must move to make room for the 136,000 new residents in our land locked city. I am here to tell part of that story. As a pastor, community residents and members tell me their stories. The multiple cries of anguish still linger as displacement over the dread of displacement. My address to you today is that of the people's cry: the prophet Jeremiah records the cries of Jews traumatized by

losing a home and being displaced, “My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. Hark, the cry of my poor people from everywhere in the land.” I too like Jeremiah became grieved and sick from the cries of the poor people in my neighborhood. It was the cries in Egypt that moved God to act in delivering Israel from bondage. The prophet Jeremiah tells how the people’s cries moved God to restore them, “Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord: they shall come back from the land of the enemy.” (Jer 31:16,17) God hears the cries of his people and restores their fortunes as before. So, I propose that the city council answer this question with their intellect and their treasury: how can we restore Washington, D.C. residents who have been displaced beyond city limits? I suspect that you will pursue this task at the same level and with the same vigor as the 136,000 newly displaced residents.

Contractors use tactics to remove residents from existing structures to build new ones. It is documented that the Brookland Manor residents experienced harassment from “security,” disbanding groups of residents without cause, and even threatening imprisonment if residents did not comply. This cannot be part of the mayor’s goal to increase low-income residents by 12%.

If new housing is to include 12% low-income residents, who is tracking how many low-income residents are displaced in the process? Some easy math can yield the answer. For instance, at 1800 6th street, 12% of the proposed 363 new units

(fulfilling 1% of the mayor's plan) are designated for low-income which will yield forty-four new units. Yet, who is tracking the sixty-three low-income units marked to be demolished? This exchange yields a loss of 30% low-income housing. The contractor's plan has a hidden loss not perceived by the public and does not accomplish the mayor's goal of 12% increase in low-income housing. I am requesting contractor accountability and collaboration with inner-city African American to ensure that the character of our community is not changed as outlined by the Zoning Commission guidelines. Further, the low-income levels set by HUD for Washington, D.C. is over \$60,000; the median income for African Americans in northwest Washington, D.C. is just over \$30,000. This accomplishments of this system of determining low-income is clear: poor residents presently living in Washington, D.C. are displaced to counties outside the city. I call for the city council to pursue change of HUD calculations for low-income to include only Washington, D.C. incomes and not those of wealthy counties in the D.C./Maryland/Virginia area which swell low-income levels to \$60,000, thus exiling residents.

As a city, what might happen if we do not change? The prophet Jeremiah records,

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing and does not give them their wages; who says, "I will build myself a spacious house with large upper rooms," and who cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar, and painting it with vermilion. Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with

him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me says the Lord. But your eyes and heart are only on your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence.
(Jer 22: 13-17)

If we choose to ignore the voices of his people, then a woe, which is not a curse, but a looming, inescapable consequence remains. When Washington, D.C. does what is just and right specifically regarding housing, then it will be well with her. When you judge the cause presented to you today of the poor and needy specifically in respect to housing, then it will be well with you. Not by attending church, but is not this what it means to know the Lord? I pray that all of you, in your own way, know the Lord in this way.

A servant of the Lord,

Juliano A. Andujo

Sermon to Congregation

Jeremiah 30: 17

This message is the first of four messages based on the Book of Restoration in Jeremiah 30-33: 1. Healing from Trauma 2. Vision for Community, 3. Landownership and Land use, 4. Hope After the Disaster.

God has placed a little book within the book of Jeremiah: it is commonly known as the Book of Restoration in Jeremiah 30-33. I am renaming the book due to the recurring phrase, "I will restore." Are you aware of God's restorative action? The children of Israel were returning from exile back to the land that God had promised them (if they were obedient). God was returning them from their point of departure. Restoration then is about recovering anything that was lost. In returning, Israel needed health and healing, not of physical wounds, but those

caused by trauma and disaster. The Hebrew word for wound is Makkah which mean blow and whose root meaning is to strike. The wound is symbolic for trauma of the mind and heart experienced in exile; only God could heal them on the inside.

What is trauma? Trauma is when an individual has an experience of being wounded and the lingering effects of that experience hinder that person long after the event; when a group of people are traumatized then it is labeled as a disaster. Israel had been through both and so have we. We have experienced trauma as individuals from violence, domestic violence, gun violence, child abuse, loss of family, rape, molestation, child abuse, and absence of parents. We have experienced disaster through events like the George Floyd video, the death of Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, the storming of the Capitol, and hurricane Katrina. The beginning of the book of restoration begins with healing of traumatized persons. Yet, when we pay detailed attention to the collapse, then we make room for God's healing. How do we pay attention to the collapse? Kathleen O'Connor states that the trauma experienced by the survivors in the book of Jeremiah correlates with victims traumatized by domestic violence. Trauma is experienced in three phases: 1. Shattered memories, 2. Inability to articulate the trauma, and 3. A numbness to the trauma

1. The Healing of Shattered Memories.

*“For I will restore health to you,
and your wounds I will heal,
says the Lord,
because they have called you an outcast:
“It is Zion; no one cares for her!”
Jer 30:17*

This book is about Jeremiah, a traumatized survivor, writing in bits and pieces as the memories come back to him. For most the book is difficult to read because it is not chronological and intersperses poetry, prose, oracle, hymns, and liturgies that seem to make no logical sense. Such is the experience for one who is a survivor who is experiencing trauma. By reading the book of Jeremiah, the reader is immersed into the world of the survivors in exile: chaos, lack of meaning, disillusionment, and shattered memories. O’Connor explains that the brain shuts down as a survival strategy and can only receive so much information at one time. If the individual process every bit of information during the trauma, survival may not be possible. However, these memories are not gone; they continue to reside in the mind like ghosts in a haunted house. Their unannounced return is frightening. It is these memories that traumatize. This trauma not only frightens but consumes the person with its past.

Questions of healing are asked in chapter 8:22,

“Is there no Balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?”

*Why then has the health of my poor people
not been restored?"*

The first two questions are asked to gain consensus: yes, there is a balm in Gilead and , yes, there is a physician there. Then why is there no healing. After some time has passed, Jeremiah challenges the thoughts and memories of God's traumatized people. The must struggle with what they know about God and His absence in their healing. The people must sit with what they know about God and what is unhealed in their condition. Later, God reveals that the reason they are not healed is because they do not know Him (9:1, 2). In other words, they know him through the teachings of torah, but they lived as if God were not present or had the ability to heal. In the church, we affirm, "God is good, all the time, and all the time God is good." If God is good all the time, then why are we experiencing the trauma of losing our neighborhood and dreading becoming displaced? Like Israel, we must sit between these contradictions; it may well be that we do not know God as restorer just yet.

2. Articulating Your Story

*For thus says the Lord: Your hurt is incurable, your wound is grievous.
There is no one to uphold your cause, no medicine for your wound, no healing for you.
All your lovers have forgotten you; they care nothing for you;
for I have dealt you the blow of an enemy, the punishment of a merciless foe,
because your guilt is great, because your sins are so numerous.*

*Why do you cry out over your hurt? Your pain is incurable. Because your guilt is great,
because your sins are so numerous, I have done these things to you.*

Jer 30:12-15

In other word, learning to share these memories and tell the story brings healing. Traumatized people often have difficulty expressing their pain. Studies show the left brain turns off during trauma and cannot understand or articulates the events. They produce phrases like, "It was a living hell," "I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy, or "I just cannot describe it." Victims are shocked into a dumbness and there is no capacity to talk about it. People might say to traumatized survivors, "Why are you so mute", "why aren't you saying anything," "why are you so silent? Survivors must turn it off, just so they could go on.

In these verses, God articulates and diagnoses the trauma for Israel. They are incurable, terminally ill, mortally wounded, forsaken by lovers, with neither counsel nor comfort. No one is left to save or care for Israel: "because they have called you an outcast: 'It is Zion; no one cares for her!

3. Penetrate Numbness with Rejoicing

*I am going to restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob,
and have compassion on his dwellings;
the city shall be rebuilt upon its mound,
and the citadel set on its rightful site.
Out of them shall come thanksgiving,
and the sound of merrymakers.
I will make them many, and they shall not be few;*

I will make them honored, and they shall not be disdained.

Jer 30:18, 19

Lastly, traumatized victims experience numbness; it shuts them down emotionally. People might say, "Why are you so distant," "You are absent," or "I can't seem to get a response from you." As another survival mechanism, people shut down so they can go on: they turn off emotionally and spiritually. No room for hope and trust in God or others for that matter. A person may become numb just to keep things going, like a job, family or school. These victims are not alive to the world.

Jeremiah heals Israel's numbness by showing God as co-sufferer. The double question is used once more: "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in? As often as I speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore, I am deeply moved for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord." The double question is used to deepen Israel's sense of God's own pain; using words like "dear" and "delight" reveal the underlying depth of God's compassion, especially when used in context to Ephraim. The mention of God's grief for Ephraim echoes the same empathetic suffering stated earlier in the context of healing, "For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me." (Jer 8:21); in both cases, when Israel' hurts, God hurts deeply. When God is moved

deeply, the Hebrew word for “bowels” is used to indicate suffering at the deepest level possible.

God’s grief signals Israel’s change from mourning to joy. Why continue in writhing labor when you cannot produce a child? Israel will tell “again you will take up your timbrels” (Jer 30:4b), Samaria and Judah will come together to worship (31:6b), “Sing with joy for Jacob...Make your praises heard” (31:7), and “They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion” (30:12). The following verse sums up the healing from numbness, “Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord” (30:13). The reason for joy is caused by the assurance of God’s restoration, “Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord: they shall come back from the land of the enemy” (31:16). God hears Rachel, an ancestral figure of extreme grief, when she has “lamentation and bitter weeping”; God tells her to stop crying (v. 16). Then, He heard Ephraim pleading. The text indicates the latter: he was “ashamed”, “dismayed”, and “disgraced” (31:19). Through these two iconic figures, God heals both bitter, sorrowful

weeping and the effects of emotional self-flagellation. He heals them both through his compassion (31:20b). Yet, we are not the only people who have become numb.

Walter Brueggemann speaks of “the royal situation” in Egypt and Israel that have become numb to the plight of the poor. The response of the church is to speak truth to power and use our prophetic imagination in creative ways to approach power with effective results. We cannot expect zoning, city council, the ANC, or even the mayor to “get it.” The fact that power has such traits calls for prophetic action from the church. Yet, God will show mercy specifically in housing,

I am going to restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwellings; the city shall be rebuilt upon its mound, and the citadel set on its rightful site.
(30:18)

Will God assist us in our work to restore housing to the poor? Yes, He will. Where is God in our fight for housing? Right alongside us. Can God help us to fight the authorities? He has promised us so in His Book of Restoration.

A Letter to Inner-City Pastors

To my fellow pastors of inner-city Washington, D.C.,

My message today is how we are to pastor in this city in this season.

We now pastor in the city that is attracting more wealth than any other city in the United States. Nowhere in our nation is disparity between extreme wealth and extreme poverty more apparent than in Washington, D.C. Economic trends indicate national disparities of mounting wealth in eastern and western coastal regions leaving interior regions destitute. The economic imbalance manifests distinctly in housing with “blight and abandonment” characterizing the American interior and “affordability and gentrification” its extreme coasts. Among coastal cities, Washington, D.C. fared the best: more than New York, San Francisco, and

Los Angeles. Even when much of the country was still struggling to recover from the Great Recession, Washington, D.C. prospered.

Washington, D.C. has become prosperous in the land as signaled by Jeff Bezos' decision to buy a spacious mansion in the District's most elite neighborhood of Kalorama and to build his second headquarters in the greater Washington, D.C. area. What is the cause of such attraction? The tech industry mainly but restaurants, stores, grocery stores and, yes, housing. As of October 2021, median housing costs have reached an all-time high in local areas: \$535,000 for the greater Washington, D.C. area, \$705,000 in Washington, D.C., and \$1,530,000 for single family housing in Falls Church, Virginia. All this for 136,000 new residents by 2025. The 136,000 sounds a lot like the 144,000 in Revelation. Who are these who descend upon our great city? They are mostly young, white, wealthy, and single with no children.

What is our responsibility in view of such a wealthy influx of resident? God models the shepherd role primarily through acts of gathering. Jeremiah uses the pastoral language of gathering to depict the restoration of Israel to the land: "I will bring them back" (30:3, 10; 31:8), "they shall come" (30:6, 31:9, 16, 17), "scattered" (30:11; 31:10), "gathered" (31:8,10), "congregation" (30:20) and other shepherd language (31:24,32). The act of gathering is illumined by its Hebrew definition,

qavats, which means to grasp by the hand or collect; God gathered Israel in such fashion He "took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt" (31:32b). This gathering is to be distinguished from *qahal*, an assembly, or a call to gather without necessarily having a purpose. *Qavats* focuses on the process and purpose of gathering people to a central location; the gathering is intentional with an emphasis on the process of gathering and its final result.

In Jeremiah's time, shepherds who neglected the critical act of gathering the flock brought unavoidable consequences upon themselves. Yes, feeding is essential, "I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer 3:23). Yet, much more attention is given to the subject of scattering versus gathering His flock:

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. (Jer 23:1-4)

God pinpoints the problem as pastoral neglect of gathering His people. How bad is the problem of pastoral neglect of gathering? Jeremiah's use of woe here indicates a scathing prophetic invective that forecasts eventual disaster and not the usual association with lament. Gathering, then, is not optional for pastors and carries weighty consequences, both then and now. Perhaps, that consequence was

forecasted in the previous chapter, “The wind shall shepherd all your shepherds”

(Jer 22:22). God models the act of gathering again for the shepherds:

Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord. (Jer 23:3,4)

Gathering, then, is act of bringing God’s people together which results in the absence of a true peace, hope, and provision for what is needed. Gathering is an essential element that needs to be restored in the pastoral ministry.

Pastoring is not just tending to the flock of your congregation but extending your fold to the needy in our community. The pastoral role of gathering is best seen through the rare use of the word congregation within the prophetic books. The word only appears three times in the prophetic books, two of them in Jeremiah (6:18; 31:20). The Hebrew word for congregation is *‘edhah* which pertains to the gathering of animals, furthering the pastoral imagery. Most scholars agree to the primary purpose of the congregation is for worship. Yet, the purpose of this congregation was not just for worship (Ps 111:1) but also for of war (Jgs 20:1), crowning Kings, (I Kgs 12:20), and other political matters. This gathering of the congregation extends beyond worship to concrete matters as evidenced in the following verse, “Their prince shall be one of their own, their ruler shall come from

their midst; I will bring him near and he shall approach me, for who would otherwise dare to approach me? Says the Lord.” (Jer 30:21). This gathered group would involve itself in electing officials from among the gathered faithful. The congregation after exile would include community concerns. Even in worship, the temple in Jerusalem would gather the Northern Kingdom, “For there shall be a day when sentinels will call in the hill country of Ephraim: ‘Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God” (Jer 31:6; cf. 33:1). Whether gathered for worship or political concerns, the traditional congregation is expanded to include others.

The act of gathering is a concrete practice that expands the influence and ministry of the church. In response to hurtful cries from the threat of housing displacement, healing began in our neighborhood through gathering. These healing steps occurred through various kinds of gatherings, hearing stories, and ongoing pastoral care for the community. It all begins with the act of gathering. The act of gathering that usually happens on Sunday morning; that is a call to gather, *qahal*, or a call to worship. This gathering, *qavats*, happens by grasping people by the hand. Grabbing the community’s hand means knocking on doors, canvassing the community, conducting surveys, providing transportation, and follow up contacts. If we gather for worship, then we are evangelizing; when we gather for community concerns, then we are organizing on a grass roots level. The

church needs both. When we gathered the community in this way, the church's influence expanded. People connected with the church and viewed the pastor as their own. Relationships formed and care was given to our newly gathered community. New ministry was forming through the act of gathering.

The act of gathering is also a form of healing. Our first gathering of the community was for a community housing meeting sponsored by our church. A panel consisted of a lawyer, a regional elder, a community leader and a president of a ministerial alliance in the city; many other pastors had comments. Even one of our White brothers who was leader of a downtown clergy alliance attended. The church was packed with community residents. People gathered in the basement for a free breakfast; one could sense healing amid the sound of laughter, conversation, and fellowship. The two-hour meeting was mixed with concern, anger, tears, and one attendee stormed out in frustration over how she had been treated. After many questions and much information provided, applause and singing erupted in response to comments rendered by a leading activist and pastor; God could be sensed in the midst. Healing was happening from this upstairs gathering. Afterwards, we all met across the street where the property in question was located. We prayed at the gates surrounding the property. Again, more healing could be sensed, even new hope was forming.

Two weeks later, we gathered to protest displacement at the downtown Zoning Commission meeting. We gathered later to get on the bus. Prior to boarding the bus, we held a spiritual riot (like a rally) on the inside of the church. We boarded the buses, headed downtown to zoning, got off the bus, checked in, and took every seat in the zoning meeting room with nearly 150 people. We began to sing songs and pray prior to the meeting. The zoning commission sided with us, and we rejoiced. We gathered downstairs in the hallway for prayer, got back on the bus, and prayed before deboarding. I witnessed healing happening at each stage of these gatherings. Finally, I hugged every person and thanked them for gathering. Some thanked me and expressed a joyful hope for our ongoing work together. Others lingered requesting prayer for themselves and for their loved ones. Is not this a congregation also? Though many attends other churches, am I not also a pastor to them? What would distinguish this community congregation from the one that worships on Sunday? We gathered, prayed together, experienced healing through articulating our pain, and penetrated the numbness by rejoicing together with hope.

Just coming together was healing in itself; the cause of the healing was due mostly to the lack of gathering in the Black community, except for funerals. Even in the funeral setting, little space is given for balanced healing. Just like Sunday

worship, funeral attendees are exhorted to rejoice upon entering, upbeat songs are rendered, and programs invariably place the word “funeral” with “homegoing celebration.” With all the celebration, when can one genuinely express grief or lament? The community meeting allowed space for all emotions to be expressed, even tears.

Jeremiah’s little Book of Restoration follows a thorough lamentation of Judah’s destruction. The book announces, among other things, healing, joy, love, reassurance, vision, and hope which elements are just as required as lamentation. Answering the question of what relation joy has to our political world, poet Denise Levertov answered,

But we need also the poetry of praise, of love for the world, the vision of the potential for good even in our species which has so messed up the rest of creation, so fouled its own nest. If we lose this sense of contrast, of the opposites to all the grime and gore, the torture, the banality of the computerized apocalypse, we have lost the reason for trying to work for redemptive change.

Against the backdrop of our political world, the church can provide a sense of contrast that is critical for healing the soul immersed in traumatic grief experienced from disastrous loss. In contrast to lamentation, the book of Restoration makes space in the soul for a reaffirming joy. The book of Restoration is not optional and is required just as much as lamentations. Our community’s

move from lament to rejoicing was a necessary healing that could not be avoided, especially when relating to the political world. Will you join me? Extend your fold and be a gatherer like your Chief Shepherd. Gather, not for saving souls but for saving homes. Gather, not for increase in your membership but healing of survivors traumatized by displacement. Gather, extending the bounds of your congregation to include those in God's new and true congregation: the lame, the single mothers, the parents, and the displaced. Maybe God has gathered us here today, to heal you as shepherds and return you back to your gathering ministry. God bless you my brothers and sisters.

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