

When I begin thinking about this passage from Jeremiah this idea of coming days caught my attention. We are currently in a time where what the coming days will bring is worrisome. Our passage from Jeremiah this morning opens up with this phrase from the Lord: “The days are surely coming.” God is saying that the future holds something which is going to be different from their current experience. Those to whom Jeremiah is speaking are being told a change is coming. Only two verses later, the phrase is “in those days”. There seems to be a time lapse conflict—“the days are surely coming” seems to look to the future while the expression “in those days seems to look into the past”. These two verses reminded me of an old TV show called *All in the Family*. It was a sitcom which featured the internal conflict of a family across generational lines, lines which revealed differences on every topic. But what sticks most in my mind is the opening scene which showed Archie and Edith singing a duet at the piano. A song whose refrain was “those were the days” while the verse lyrics reminisced about how much better things used to be. We can’t be sure exactly when this passage was composed because Jeremiah was called by God to speak to the people of Israel in a very troubled time. The events of his time included when the Babylonians invaded Judah. The people were taken into exile at two times. At the time of the second invasion, the Temple and the city of Jerusalem were completely destroyed. To the people this period surely represented the plucking up and breaking down of Judah. That had comprised part of the message Jeremiah was told was the Lord’s plan. But initially Jeremiah was also told there was to be more to it than destruction—there would be planting and building up as well. This passage begins with what seems to be the promise about that second portion of the message: The days are sure coming says the Lord when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord.” The Lord has subjected them to this uprooting, but it seems that action will no longer continue. Now they are to be replanted in the Promised Land—Israel and Judah both are to be repopulated under the watchful eyes of the Lord. Jeremiah has told the people to settle into life in Babylon, build homes, marry and have children who are to marry and have children. That indicates that they will be there for a while. Building and planting are taking place in Babylon. This message that Jeremiah brings promises something different. It seems that the Lord is promising them a change...when these days which are surely coming arrive...there will a return to the Promised Land. During this time of exile, the people must have had some doubts about the covenant they had relied upon—the promise that God had chosen them and so they were special and that land would be theirs forever...with the caveat of obedience and faithfulness to God’s laws. They must have wondered if the God they felt had claimed them was as powerful as they had believed. After all, everything that had meant anything to them was gone. Jeremiah in the name of the Lord is telling them that days are coming which will be days of restoration—returning to their homeland and the lives they had left behind—days of rebuilding homes and families and communities there. This is a message which returns hope and joy to them. But that is not the extent of the message. More than just giving them their lives back in the Promised Land, Jeremiah’s message was that God had in store for them something hard to

imagine: a whole new relationship with God. They are assured that there is still a covenant between God and them, but it is being altered by God in a fundamental manner. God has destroyed through the Babylonians and Assyrians Israel, Judah and Jerusalem for the sins of the people, specifically the injustices of their officials. Now God will replant, tend and nurture human and animal life amid the ashes. God has not abandoned the people. God had made covenant with the people when they were brought out of slavery in Egypt and led them into the land. That covenant symbolized by commandments was written on stone. It had been broken by the injustices which were allowed to flourish in the land. That covenant was based on a collective understanding of obedience. When the leaders of the nation allowed injustice and idolatry all were held guilty. And the results were visited upon future generations. When the restoration begins the covenant will be based on individuals being responsible for their own transgressions. In those days of the restoration they shall no longer say: "The parents have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." But all shall die for their own sins." This is a promise of a faithful God to a people who have not been faithful—a promise that subsequent generations will not be held responsible for the transgressions of previous ones. This new promise will not be placed on stone tablets that can be lost, stolen or broken. It will be written within them—on the hearts of the people. "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." This passage does not change the content of the covenant. The terms of the covenant still require a particular way of living—a way of justice and righteousness. But there are changes in terms of acceptance and fidelity. The reference to the Exodus history that the people have with God indicates that this is not truly a new covenant—just that covenant will require no work on the part of the people to receive and adopt. God will take control—the laws to be followed will be engraved upon their hearts. From the least to the greatest, they shall know the Lord. Best of all—God promises to forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more. The conditions of the Law of Moses remain in effect but are now based on the individual's choices—the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge—your choice determines your relationship with God. So while the people are now assured that God will not judge all because of the errors of a few, nonetheless more is now expected of the individual. Each person must step forward and profess faith and commitment to the Lord and the Lord's ways. So when we raise the question of what days we are living in, we believe that we are under the conditions of the revised covenant—we are no longer responsible for the sins of our fathers—just our own. We also embrace the new covenant brought by Jesus: the covenant of grace that promise forgiveness for our iniquities. But there is an aspect of this covenant relationship which we often overlook—we are still accountable for those laws which are now written on our hearts which include how we are to live in community with one another. The power of the promise of Jeremiah is that, in knowing the ending is unquestionably one of God's redemption and restoration, we can be bold, not timid in the way we live. The promise is that pleas for justice will be heard not only by God—but that those who have God's word written on their hearts—will also know what is just and righteous. Jesus brought the good news about God's reign and how it would look—not only in terms of our relationship with God, but also how relationships among people would look—Jesus crossed the barriers between groups showing they would no longer exist and love of the neighbor will be the rule. How do we answer for ourselves if these

are the days where we live as if the covenant is written upon our hearts? In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.