

### “Bear Witness to Hope”

Once upon a time the field outside the northeast wall of Jerusalem called Anathoth belonged to a cousin of Jeremiah's by the name of Hanamel. This field was part of the family's heritage. Hanamel farmed that field until the Babylonian army forced him off the land, then occupied it in during the second occupation of Israel some 586 years before the birth of Jesus.

At that time, the law of redemption called for the eldest male head of household to redeem, to buy back property or people if necessary in order to restore the property or the person to the family.

Because Hanamel was displaced by the army, thus impoverished, he went to Cousin Jeremiah, the eldest male in the clan, to ask him to redeem the land. What a useless proposition that would be, since the Babylonian army was parked right there, poised, ready to reduce Jerusalem to rubble in very short order. Jerusalem was doomed and everybody knew it - Jeremiah had been delivering that message, it seemed like forever.

Nonetheless, in what seemed like throwing good money after bad, Jeremiah paid the redemption price, 17 shekels of silver, for worthless land. No only that, he did so in a most public manner. He recorded the deeds, and had them sealed for posterity.

*9 “I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, weighing out seven ounces of silver for him. 10 I signed the record and sealed it and had some people witness it. I also weighed out the silver on the scales. 11 Then I took both copies of the record of ownership—the one that was sealed that had the demands and limits of ownership, and the one that was not sealed. 12 And I gave them to Baruch son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah. My cousin Hanamel, the other witnesses who signed the*

*record of ownership, and many Jews sitting in the courtyard of the guard saw me give the record of ownership to Baruch.*

*13 “With all the people watching, I told Baruch, 14 ‘This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: Take both copies of the record of ownership—the sealed copy and the copy that was not sealed—and put them in a clay jar so they will last a long time.’ 15 This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: ‘In the future my people will once again buy houses and fields for grain and vineyards in the land of Israel.’*

NCV

Who was it?? Wasn't it Paul Harvey who had a radio segment called "The Rest of the Story?" Read the rest of this story in your Bibles or at [Biblegateway.com](http://Biblegateway.com). Read from vs 16 to the end of the 32<sup>nd</sup> chapter in Jeremiah.

Why did Jerry do such a foolish thing in such a public way? I suppose the short answer is, "That's what God told me to do."

The deeper answer is, this was a way to testify, to bear witness to hope, to the hope in God's promise: *"In the future my people will once again buy house and fields for grain and vineyards in the land of Israel."*

There, with the Babylonian army camped at the gates to the city, Jerry heard, and proclaimed God's promise, thus giving hope to the people. To the people about to endure defeat for the second time in 10 years, to the people about to be forced into exile for 40 years ---- , by the purchase of land, and the public registry of the deeds, Jeremiah proclaimed the hope promised by God. *"In the future, my people will once again buy houses and fields for grain and vineyards in the land of Israel."*

Let me ask? Is there anything, anyone more useless than a witness who will not proclaim what he has seen or heard? A witness who remains silent in the face of what she has witnessed?

Even the State of Connecticut knows this - remember the slogan, "See Something? Say Something!"? The witness who sees a crime and says nothing. The witness who sees even a small act of kindness or generosity and says nothing. The witness who sees or hears a promise of hope and stays silent? Imagine if the witnesses to the resurrected Christ had remained silent. . . .

A question ?? What is the most effective form of advertizing? WoM  
How many of you have ever said this: "If you want some good food at a nice place and a reasonable price, just go up the road to Savvi's."

People who discover a great product, a fantastic barber, a delicious bakery, a great restaurant, an honest car dealer, a skilled craftsman, competent computer repair guy, *and* who tell their friends are the best advertizement that can ever happen for the business owner. Such folk are witnesses, witnesses who speak up and speak out.

Friends, we the church, are created by the message, the promise, the reality of Great Hope. We know something of God's love for all creation for we are witnesses to God's love for all creation. We are the folks who look at a sunset or the advent of fall and see the hand of God. We are the folks who see the creativity of God when we listen to a symphony, or see a painting, or a magnificent building. We are the folks who hear the call of God to help when we see children suffering from thirst, dying from hunger or a gunshot.

We are the folks who know of the great message of God's compassionate, steadfast, generous love, because that message has awakened something in our own hearts. The message has ignited a passion and compassion in our souls, or brought peace to our troubled spirits, or strengthened us with the courage to forgive and ask to be forgiven.

We are witnesses to hope, and yet we are too often silent, private, witnesses. We are good folk, solid Congregationalists, members of the United Church of Christ, but all too often we fail to Bear Witness to

Hope, in the best advertising way, by word of mouth.

The question is have we done the deep listening, that we know our own faith answer for the one who asks, “Why give so many hours to the food pantry? Why put so much energy into the CROP walk or the Work Camp or the treasurer’s office or the choir rehearsals, or the Sunday School or the White Gift service or all those other ministries that go on in this place?”

I am the same way. When interim clergy begin with a church in a new area, it doesn’t take long for the local clergy association to set up a meet and greet. Mine happened last Thursday. I was asked, “what brought you into ministry?” - and I answered truthfully, “because as I was stumbling along trying to figure out what I was going to be when I grew up, I stumbled into pastoral ministry and discovered that those shoes fit me pretty well.”

It was a true answer. And it begged the question. I remained silent about the God who has pursued me with a relentless gentleness, since I was in high school - and I passed my fiftieth high school reunion this year.

In our hymnal we have the lyrics to an 1880 hymn, Selection # 440:

*I sought the Lord and afterward I knew,  
God moved my soul to seek him, seeking me.  
It was not I that found, O Savior true;  
no, I was found of thee.*

If I had had the courage to speak a deeper truth; rather than speak of shoes, I would have tried to recall and quote that hymn and in doing so, I would have Born Witness to Hope.

Friends, somewhere in Paul’s letters I think there is a phrase, “be ready anytime to give an accounting for the hope that lies within your heart.” If Paul didn’t say that -he should have. Let us be prepared to Bear Witness, Bear Public Witness to the Hope that lies within our heart

of hearts.

Let us do that deep listening to go beneath our first truth, to find the Truth. “Why do you do what you do?” I asked a man, a grocer, in another church. He shrugged and said simply, “God has been good to me. Why wouldn’t I give back to God?”

It is true that any one teaching Sunday School loves kids, and to this day I remember two special teachers, now long gone, Mary Hall and Gladys Howe, who took on the class of 63 when we were the eighth grade class of 59. But even deeper than their God-given love of kids, they had been touched and called by the God of love. And on occasion they would speak, aloud in English of that call.

Underneath anyone’s love of kids, underneath anyone’s willingness to help, underneath anyone’s willingness to share gifts and talents in the church, is some knowledge of how God has blessed and shaped us in love. Let us listen, remember, and be prepared to give account for the hope that lies in our hearts. Let us Bear Witness to Hope. Amen.