

*Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall*

*St Paul's Canterbury*

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*The fountain of living water*

Where is the Lord?

Jeremiah challenges his hearers to ask the question.

Jeremiah is admonishing them for *not* asking the question, as the people of Israel are busy seeking after other things.

They are forgetting to trust God as their ancestors did.

They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.

Jeremiah is challenging the people of God to seek the fountain of living water to seek what is sustaining and enlivening rather than what turns to dust.

The people in Jerusalem who heard these words originally were aware that Babylon was gaining power and that the possibility of being overpowered was looming on the horizon.

Jeremiah could be seen as a failure as most of Israel does not listen and the people do end up in exile.

Yet these words still have power to speak to us today as they did to the people in exile when the book was finally assembled as they pondered anew their relationship with God in very changed circumstances.

They were experiencing what it meant to be cracked pots that held no water. Their nation was cracked and broken and they were sifting its ruins looking for new life.

Cracked pots that can hold no water.

It is a vivid image of what it feels like to be broken, to feel as if life is slipping through your fingers, when all is changed.

The people in exile would have been feeling the exhaustion of being in a foreign country away from all that was familiar, let alone what had happened before exile when they knew conquest was looming.

What must it be like for the people of Ukraine who go about each day confronted by the broken buildings and the fractured communities?

I think many of us are tired by the fractures and cracks caused by the last few years and the exhaustion of being still within a pandemic.

No wonder people want to pretend we are post covid when we are tired by the upheaval and the changed responsibilities it has placed on us.

There are many ways in which we might feel like those cracked pots that hold no water.

We feel most cracked when we allow the voices of fear and uncertainty to become the only voice we listen to instead of the voice of living water.

It is a paradox that Jesus himself becomes the cracked cistern for us, his body broken in suffering and death.

God's own heart is broken open anew that new life may come and that through the very broken-ness of death new life might be found, that grace and hope might abound.

Where is God? God is in the very pain and brokenness pouring out, the fountain of living water, the fountain of love that is there to restore and renew us.

We are called to the wedding banquet of broken ones to feast in God's presence and be nourished for the journey.

We are called to return to the deep trust that the people of the exodus learnt in trudging through the wilderness.

It is precisely for all of us cracked pots that Jesus came.

It is the cracked pots that Jesus invites to the table, that those who are humble will find themselves exalted.

His call is to those to whom society sees as useless. Jesus invites the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, these are the exalted ones.

Perhaps it is when we know that we are cracked that we can stop relying on ourselves and listen and seek where our gracious God is present. It is then that we can know the healing golden glaze of God's love that re-members us, that puts us back together.

We encounter the God of grace who invites us to rest in God's love, to pray and worship and trust in God who will guide us and bring new life in unexpected ways, to allow the fountain of living water to flow through us.

*A waterbearer in India had two large pots, one hung on each end of a pole, which she carried across her neck. One of the pots had a crack in it. While the other pot was perfect, and always delivered*

*a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the mistress's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.*

*For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to her master's house.*

*The poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.*

*After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream: "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you." Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?"*

*"I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your mistress's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.*

*The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in her compassion she said, "As we return to the mistress's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path."*

*Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some.*

*But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.*

*The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side?"*

*No pot is perfect so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them.*

*"For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my mistress's table. Without you being just the way you are, she would not have this beauty to grace her house."*

*Lections:*

*Jeremiah 2.4-13*

*Psalms 81.1, 10-16*

*Hebrews 13.1-8, 15-16*

*Luke 14.1, 7-14*