



**“FAST AND FURIOUS/SLOW AND CURIOUS”**  
**SCRIPTURE: JEREMIAH 4: 11-12, 22-28**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**September 11, 2022, GCPC Palooza**  
The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

**Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28**

4:11 At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem: A hot wind comes from me out of the bare heights in the desert toward my poor people, not to winnow or cleanse--

4:12 a wind too strong for that. Now it is I who speak in judgment against them.

4:22 "For my people are foolish, they do not know me; they are stupid children, they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil, but do not know how to do good."

4:23 I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light.

4:24 I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro.

4:25 I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled.

4:26 I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger.

4:27 For thus says the LORD: The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end.

4:28 Because of this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above grow black; for I have spoken, I have purposed; I have not relented nor will I turn back.

The Word of the LORD.

**Thanks be to God.**

---

The passage from Hebrew Scripture that Andrew just read is withering. And it is A LOT.

So this sermon begins with cause to pause. Breathe. Notice how it feels to hear these words of fury—and tracing them to the mouth of deity. Breathe, ground yourself—maybe take your shoes off, maybe put your hand on your heart or your belly. Maybe put your palms on top of your thighs to stay here, stay in contact with this moment and your body as we hear about God’s fury toward human beings.

"For my people are foolish, they do not know me; they are stupid children, they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil, but do not know how to do good."

Pause and imagine a wind too strong to even scatter seeds and cleanse the air—a wind that leaves behind it waste and void, that sends all the birds away.

You look around and all you see is desert, ruins of cities. You look up and the mountains are shaking, quaking, swaying as tall pines sway.

"For thus says the LORD: The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end. Because of this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above grow black; for I have spoken, I have purposed; I have not relented nor will I turn back."

The Prophet Jeremiah calls his community to see the layers of desolation they are living with as the result of God’s fury because of their failure to understand, their failure to know how to do good, their skillful capacity for evil.

It’s a withering word to an occupied culture. One could even say that God is blaming the victim here.

The destruction of the Temple—not just a building but the center of identity for God’s covenant people, the center of gravity for the people of God, the destruction of the Temple had unraveled identity, community, practice, systems of authority and learning. So much was coming undone.

And Babylonian occupation was not gentle or merciful—there was humiliation, mutilation, deportation. Assassinations of leaders, destruction of places to gather and be reminded of community values, erosion of systems of education and commerce.

So can we blame people in these conditions for falling away from the way they had been taught, from the things they had been taught to believe? When you are in danger, when your family is in danger, when desolation surrounds you and when an occupied city is your home—you do what you have to do to survive.

God's fury might sound like insult to injury. AND that is the word that Jeremiah was given to deliver—to call the people to remember who they are before it is too late.

It's a lot. Jeremiah is A LOT. The second longest book in the Hebrew scriptures. And it is full of fury.

And our brains being as deeply conditioned by white supremacy culture as they are—well we take all this and try to make it fit into a binary way of thinking.

Either/or thinking is a potent tool of white supremacy culture.

Something is either good or bad. You're either with us or against us. God is either angry or merciful. You can trust someone or not trust them.

Either/or—that's the binary that we've been taught to fit the world into. What are some ways the binary shows up in our contemporary culture?

(get responses)

Yes, to all those things.

But here's the thing about the cultures that gave rise to Hebrew scripture like Jeremiah's prophecy. Those were not cultures built on binaries. In fact, Hebrew scriptures are full of nuance and even contradictions. And those

contradictions don't mean one part of it is wrong and another right, or one part true and another part false.

Hebrew scripture is full of stories and poetry and history that is slanted like all history always is. Hebrew scripture is also full of all kinds of metaphors and personifications of Divine Love. I have heard many a Christian repeat the incorrect trope that Jesus ushered in a more merciful understanding of God to answer the wrathful God portrayed in Hebrew scripture.

Hebrew scripture is actually full of stories and poetry of God's tender mercies alongside passages like the one we read together. There are places in Hebrew scripture where prophets actually change God's mind about something. There are places in Hebrew scripture where God restores and God liberates. And there are places where God sounds a whole lot like an abusive parent. All of that is a part of the biblical witness that we wrestle with together.

Human beings have always struggled to know how Divine Love works—and how to read the tea leaves of our time in terms of Divine Judgment and mercy.

And it's important to remember that not staying stuck in the binary is part of what we are practicing together every day. It's a really different rhythm than the one we're used to—where you can divide up the world into neat categories. Our Judeo-Christian heritage was not born in the binary. It is supremacy culture that co-opted Christianity with the binary as its tool to take away some of the power of our faith.

Part of deprogramming from white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalist ways of seeing the world is learning how to be at home with ambiguity.

Ambiguity means we need to slow down sometimes and be curious with each other, even with ourselves.

Sometimes we need to collectively slow down and be curious. I believe we are at such a place right now at Grace Covenant. We need each other, and it can be hard to stay engaged when life is throwing so much at each of us. We are all carrying a lot in our own lives. And the world is unrelenting in loading us

down with more and more of a toxic load. Whether you are able to consciously acknowledge it or not, your body, your spirit is metabolizing so very much right now—every day.

There is a mass extinction underway like never before in human history. That impacts you and me. There is a global backlash right now against movements of liberation. That impacts you and me. There is violence in every nook and cranny of American society. That's been true our whole lives. That wears on us—and some bodies are weathered more than others—bodies especially marked by this culture for violence. And all of us, on some level, are terrified of what might happen next. Guns are a very concrete symptom of just how terrified and terrifying American culture is.

We like to say we are the land of the free. But we are captive to violence that polices our bodies and our imaginations and our sense of who and when and where we can move all the time.

This fall we can be both/and, Grace Covenant.

Both furious and curious.

Both faithful and afraid.

Both engaged and taking care of ourselves.

Both energized and tired.

Both committed and needing to slow down sometimes.

These sacred pauses for curiosity are not the same as saying—we're going too fast, or that things are changing too fast.

The fact is the pace of change in terms of race and oppression has been WAY TOO SLOW!!!! WAY TOO SLOW! We don't need to slow that work down.

We need to understand that part of the work is the courage to be curious with each other and with ourselves. To inquire when something lands in a certain way. To ask for a pause when a feeling or an experience needs more of our collective attention.

That is a part of the work of ridding the world of white supremacy patriarchal capitalism—because that mess does not want us to slow down. In fact, white supremacy patriarchal capitalism is always telling us when we need to speed up, get more done in a shorter amount of time, rest less and go harder.

Our resistance to all of that will take many forms, but in order for our resistance to be sustainable it has to include the capacity to slow down—the space to be both furious and curious. The space to soak in how interwoven faith and fury really are in a community devoted to discovering a collective way of life that is defined by mutual liberation.

So we'll end this sermon and begin this fall with the powerful words of a prophetess of our time—who calls us to the practice of fury and faith. We will take time with Amanda Gorman's poem "Faith and Fury", with her words—for weeks and weeks—sacred pauses and aha moments.

This morning, the invitation is to listen for a word or phrase in her poem that calls to you for more attention, to spend more time with you as you move into the coming week. There are copies of Amanda Gorman's poem in the narthex if you'd like to take it home with you.

But for now, slow down, be curious, be furious, notice some sensations of how it feels to practice being faithful in a dangerous world.

(poem read by many people)

Thanks be to God.