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### **Jeremiah 7:33–8:3 ESV**

*And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth, and none will frighten them away. <sup>34</sup> And I will silence in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, for the land shall become a waste.*

**8** *“At that time, declares the LORD, the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be brought out of their tombs. <sup>2</sup> And they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and served, which they have gone after, and which they have sought and worshiped. And they shall not be gathered or buried. They shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. <sup>3</sup> Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I have driven them, declares the LORD of hosts.*

### **Matthew 6:25–27 ESV**

<sup>25</sup> *“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?*

### **Goose poop.**

I am sure that all of you are wondering where the very theologically sounding title of this sermon came from. Goose poop. Don't start thumbing through your

Bibles, looking for references to goose poop. I'm going to explain the title to you – after we talk about our passages for today. Our first passage is from Jeremiah, one of the major prophets of the Old Testament. Jeremiah was active as a prophet from about 627 B.C. to 580 B.C. It was a particularly chaotic time for Israel. The Book of Jeremiah comes right after Isaiah, and Jeremiah is actually rather difficult to read. It's tangled and jumps around in time. But essentially, he was a prophet during the period of time leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and including the deportation of the leading citizens of Israel to Babylon. At the time, Israel was divided into two pieces, and the southern part was called Judah, which included Jerusalem. Jeremiah warned the people of Judah to abandon their sinful ways. They had drifted away from their covenant with God. Jeremiah was a doomsday prophet. When the mighty Babylonian army appeared on the horizon, ready to attack Israel, Jeremiah saw this as God's vengeance on his people for their corrupt lifestyle. This is an example of where, in the Old Testament, a foreign army is seen as acting to carry out a punishment from God. When Jerusalem was forced to surrender to the Babylonians and the captives were taken off into exile in Babylon, Jeremiah's prophecies were fulfilled.

Looking closely at our first passage, it comes from the seventh chapter of the Book of Jeremiah. He is describing how the Israelites need to return to

worshipping God – and to stop worshipping the sun and the moon. He is telling them that because of their sinful ways, Jerusalem is effectively condemned.

Here it is, slightly abbreviated:

*The dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth, and none will frighten them away. <sup>34</sup> And I will silence in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, for the land shall become a waste... The bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be brought out of their tombs. <sup>2</sup> And they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and served, which they have gone after, and which they have sought and worshiped. And they shall not be gathered or buried. They shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. <sup>3</sup> Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I have driven them, declares the LORD of hosts.*

Our second passage is part of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, where he lays out the basic principles of being a person of faith. In our passage, Jesus is saying that we should not be anxious, because God is always with us:

*<sup>25</sup> "Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"*

If God is going to feed the birds of the air, certainly God will feed and protect us.

And certainly, being anxious isn't going to extend our lives.

So, our first passage says that the dead bodies of the sinful will be food for the birds, and no one will be able to frighten the birds away. And second, just as God takes care of the birds, God will take care of us, and so we should relax. We'll get back to this.

But what about the title of this sermon? Sometimes I tell rather dramatic stories here. Today, I'm going to tell you a rather lighthearted story, one that talks about the ridiculous concerns of some people. Wendy and I live in a neighborhood in Boulder called Meadow Glen. We have a homeowners' association. This association micromanages our lives. They tell us what colors we can paint our houses, what kinds of fences we can build, what kind of materials we can put on our roofs, what color our mailboxes have to be (dark black), etc., etc., etc. Back behind our house is a creek and a few ponds. The creek is part of the Boulder Creek system and the lush lawns surrounding the ponds are watered with creek run-off. Our neighborhood serves as a flood mitigation mechanism for the city of Boulder by taking excess creek water and spreading it out over the neighborhood. The neighborhood was built about forty years ago. Our house was built in 1979. When our kids were little, they loved playing in the creek, around the ponds, and on the grass. I played catch with them back there. Julien and a buddy of his used to fish for crawdads, which his buddy's mother would

cook for them. Yes, they ate them. There are a couple of large snapping turtles, an occasional blue heron, some ducks, an occasional fox, and a large flock of geese that spend their winter behind our house. Apparently, the geese used to migrate from Canada to Mexico, but when people in the U.S. began creating bodies of water that stayed unfrozen all winter long, the geese cut their migration path short, and started flying south only until they got to the middle of the U.S., with many of them wintering in Colorado. It turns out that the beautifully manicured lawns that have been so meticulously maintained by our homeowners' association are a perfect food source for Canadian geese; it has all the nutrients they need; it is dense and easy to eat because it is kept cut short; and it is right next to a couple of ponds that they love to float around in.

But there is one more thing. Between the lawn and the ponds is a cement walkway. And of course, the geese eat the grass, and on their way to the ponds, they poop out the barely digested grass. The poop doesn't smell. It isn't a health risk. But yes, as you walk around the neighborhood in the winter, you have to watch where you step. Thus, the problem: there are people in our neighborhood who want to get rid of the geese because of their poop. Wendy and I believe that the geese are beautiful animals, and we love watching them fly across the sky in a huge V shape, land on the grass, and walk around eating. Sometimes we get to

watch them raising their goslings in and around the ponds. Our neighborhood created a food source for them. We created bodies of water for them. We changed their migratory patterns. And now – people want to get rid of them because they poop on the cement. This has become a great source of anxiety, conflict, and debate in our neighborhood, with people broken into two camps, the pro-poopers and the anti-poopers. The anti-poopers want to put up statues of coyotes to scare the geese away and maybe use other sorts of technology to make noise, perhaps. On the other hand, the pro-poopers want to leave the geese alone and not do anything to discourage them from using our grounds as their southern home. What’s funny is how animated and emotional people have become over this issue. There’s a pandemic going on. The nation is in political turmoil. There are wars, populations on the move, and people starving all over the globe. Many millions of people in the U.S. have lost their jobs. Hospitals are spilling over with dangerously sick COVID patients. But our neighborhood? All anyone can talk about is goose poop. I’ll get back to this.

Let’s look at our Bible passages carefully. These two quotes, from Jeremiah, the doomsday prophet, and Jesus, who brought us the New Covenant, are excellent examples of the contrast between the Old Testament and the New Testament Gods. Oh, it’s the same God, of course, and it’s not that God changed

between the Old and the New Testament. But it's the focus of Scripture that has largely changed. The reason for the change in focus is Jesus. What we see as we transition from Old to New Testament is that we get a bigger picture of the character of God. This is because God came to Earth in the person of Jesus, and through Jesus we are able to see more of God. So, rather than the Old Testament God being one of anger and vengeance, and the New Testament God being one of love and forgiveness, God is all of these things. God does deal with evil. God, at least metaphorically, will use the *dead bodies of evil people as food for the birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth*. And once God sends those birds to deal with those who do evil, *none will frighten them away*. But God also wants us to *Look at the birds of the air and see that they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet our heavenly Father feeds them*. Surely, God will look after us. By keeping God in our lives and following the example of Jesus, we can relax and be free from worry. Jesus brought us that perspective, one of calmness and freedom from anxiety no matter what happens to us.

So, getting back to my neighborhood, I think that perhaps my neighbors are projecting their fear and anxiety about the pandemic onto the Canadian geese and their poop. I don't think people would be getting this worked up over some goose poop on the walkway if times were normal. This is how we often react to

stress and many of us have seen this in other aspects of our lives. During times of strife, we have to work to remain calm, to know that God is with us. While many in this world are alone and scared, we have confidence that God does not send us something we can't handle, and that in the end, our faith will be stronger. When we feel anxious, we reach out for support from God and our fellow believers, rather than striking out at each other because we either love Canadian geese or we hate Canadian goose poop. On this third Sunday of Advent, we remember that even under the greatest pressure, God lifts us up so that we live in joy.

There's something else we should look at here. I chose the Jeremiah quote partly for fun because it talks about birds eating people and no one being able to chase the birds away. Jeremiah is telling those people who are worshipping the sun and the moon like the Babylonians that it won't do any good to put up fake coyotes or make supersonic noise. But I chose this passage for a more serious reason. There are people who think that perhaps the End Times are coming, that this pandemic is just the beginning of a tailspin for humanity. God is about to do to us what God did to the people of Jeremiah's day. I don't happen to believe this. But more subtly, there is something more to the shift of emphasis from the Old to the New Testament. With the coming of Jesus, there is a New Covenant between the faithful and God. While God will still deal with evil, we don't have to

worry about tit for tat from God. With the Gospels comes a new emphasis on salvation, of forgiveness, of regeneration after doing wrong. God no longer punishes entire peoples; when God deals with evil, God deals with individuals. Symbolically, Jesus sacrificed his blood so that we wouldn't have to shed our blood when we turn our backs on God. Our faith is what saves us from retaliation. We are very imperfect. When God's wrath comes upon us as individual believers, we seek correction. We work to find our way back to the right path of forgiving others, lifting up those who have the least, and always seeking the humble and loving solution to conflict. God isn't going to send the Babylonians or a pandemic to punish us. God will work to transform us instead. Please pray with me.

*God, we thank you for the generous way you have chosen to deal with us. You will not feed us to the birds. You will not send evil after us simply because we need correction. Instead, we can focus on bettering ourselves and our world. As we hopefully approach the end of the pandemic, please let us rise from this not only stronger in our faith but also feeling more confident that we have no need to be anxious. On this third Sunday of Advent, let us live in joy, even during a pandemic. Amen.*