

**16 Pentecost
September 29, 2019**

**In the name of the God of all creation,
The God alive in each of us as god was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.**

My father died twenty years ago ... in 1999. For many years he followed the path of a corporate executive in New York City. It was a well-paying secure career and as the father of six children it was the responsible thing to do. But my parents had a dream, and when I was in high school they bought a house overlooking the Intercoastal Waterway in Morehead City, North Carolina. The family had been vacationing in the area every summer since I was a baby. And, every year when we visited the area my father would disappear for part of each day to paint watercolors of shrimp boats, and the Cape Lookout lighthouse, and sea gulls flying over sand dunes. But, purchasing a large, rambling brick house in 1960, 600 miles from our home on Long Island, with so many other priorities, seemed foolish ... even to me.

Then, when I was a sophomore in college my father left his job with DuPont and moved the family from the suburbs of New York to the house in Morehead City. He became a “starving artist” ... at least for a few years we felt like we were starving. It seemed as if his passion for art had overwhelmed his pragmatic frugality ... and maybe even all common sense. However, my father and mother, along with my younger siblings, had over thirty years of living their dream in that house. My father’s passion for art ... which my mother embraced for herself when they became empty-nesters ... became a life-giving source of joy. Not only did they paint but they became award winning artists ... and four of my younger siblings are award-winning artists as well.

So why am I telling you this story? Well, I once asked my father what had driven him ... with so many competing priorities ... to buy the house in Morehead City ... it had seemed so foolish. My father said, “It was a real stretch, but we weren’t just buying a house, we were purchasing hope ... we were investing in a dream. I had a good life when I worked for DuPont, but it was very predictable, and it didn’t include our passions. Somehow, we had to put a claim on our future.”

Buying that piece of property on the Intracoastal Waterway for my parents was the beginning of living out their dream ... of following their bliss. My dad said that when the commute to New York City seemed unbearable, when the stress of his job was overwhelming, he would think about the house overlooking the water. He had purchased a hope, and it kept their dream alive.

This morning we encounter another story about buying a piece of land, and purchasing hope. Let me set the stage for the reading from Jeremiah we heard this morning. The year is about 587 B.C.E. and the king of Babylon ... Nebuchadnezzar ... had laid siege to Jerusalem. The prophet Jeremiah was under house arrest in the palace of the Jewish king, Zedekiah. Jeremiah

had prophesied the siege of Jerusalem and the capture and exile of the king to Babylon ... and therefore had incurred the displeasure of the monarch.

So surrounded by a foreign army, and confined to his cell by a narcissistic king ... at a moment of complete hopelessness ... Jeremiah makes what seems like an act of total foolishness ... he buys land in Judah from his cousin, Hanamel.

The Babylonians were attacking Jerusalem with the full power of their army, and King Zedekiah was afraid for his future. Having imprisoned Jeremiah for declaring that the city would fall during his reign, Zedekiah is utterly powerless. In the midst of this chaos, God instructed Jeremiah to purchase a parcel of land as a promise that there will be a future for the faithful of Judah. Purchasing that piece of property symbolized the hope of a renewed people with a new covenant and a new lease from God on the land at the very moment that the only bit of the future that was clear was the fact that Jerusalem was in very deep trouble.

This boring real estate transaction was an object lesson in “hope.” Often we are overwhelmed with our own problems and become blind to the bigger picture. We wish for the way things used to be, or look for someone to blame for the current circumstances. While it is natural and healthy to lament our losses, we cannot allow this to paralyze us from taking action. Rather than simply lament our circumstances, we need to invest in and work for a better future. Even a small act can be enough to provide others with the hope they need to make it through a difficult time. Looking forward instead of backward is a testament to our faith and trust in God's ultimate control and desire for a world filled with peace and justice.

The story of the people of this congregation is a story of a people of “hope.” The same hope that Jeremiah displayed in buying a parcel of land when the future seemed so unclear. Thirteen years ago the fabric of this community of faith called St. Cyprian's was irreparably torn when most of its members left the Episcopal Church and formed a new congregation called Christ the King Anglican Church. It was devastating to the few who remained at St. Cyprian's. Yet the tiny remnant of St. Cyprian's parishioners who stood fast ... less than a dozen ... “purchased” a stake in our future. Rather than becoming paralyzed by the fear of an uncertain outlook, they called upon a holy hope, and laid a claim to what lay ahead. The struggle of this congregation to reestablish itself over this past decade has not been easy, yet the journey has been productive as our new congregation has grown in numbers and spirit. Rather than dwell in the past, this community of faith now faces its future with a renewed and holy hope ... one that has been reinforced by the ground we have already covered.

The plot of ground that Jeremiah purchased from his cousin was a sign of hope for the future of Jerusalem ... even as they were besieged. The claim upon this congregation's future by a small but tremendously faithful remnant is a hope that is alive and well in this community today. St. Cyprian's has reinvented itself as a community of faith committed to radical hospitality. We still have a way to go, but as a people of hope the future seems clear.

When this congregation was formed over a hundred and twenty years ago, it was financially supported by the Diocese of Florida. Throughout its history St. Cyprian's has received assistance from either the Diocese or Trinity Parish, or both. In 2011 St. Cyprian's crossed a threshold and became financially self-sufficient for the first time in our history. In 2013 we invested in the Commons which has become central to the life of this community. This year we are extending our transformative hospitality. The Beyond the Commons Campaign set a target of \$100,000 by the end of September. Well, it is the end of September and we have raised over \$184,000 ... \$184,697.50 to be exact! We are living into that hope that was purchased by our spiritual ancestors over a century ago ... and by that faithful remnant of just a few years ago ... and we are purchasing that hope for future generations of worshipers in this holy place.

This story from the prophet Jeremiah may seem like just a boring real estate transaction. However, underneath it lies a commitment to hope. You, the people of this congregation know about hope because that is the way you live your lives, even in the midst of your own personal struggles. And I believe that you know the truth of Paul's words to Timothy that our wealth is not counted in the size of our bank account, but in our compassion for the world around us. It is in the acting on that holy hope, in the currency of compassion, nurtured by a community of faith committed to radical hospitality, that we know the words in the First Letter to Timothy are true: by sharing generously and being rich in good deeds, we "lay up treasure for ourselves as a firm foundation for the coming age," and "take hold of the life that is truly life."

As a teenager in 1960 I may not have understood why my parents would have bought a house 600 miles from where we lived, even if it was overlooking the water on the coast of North Carolina. To me it was foolishness. But with the wisdom that age brings I now fully understand how my parents purchased a hope for their future and, by example, opened the door to their children to dream and hope for futures, and to take the risk of putting a claim on that hope and dream.

Today, this congregation is once again putting a claim on its future ... purchasing a dream ... and living into a holy hope ... as we "take hold of the life that is truly life."

Amen.