

Jeremiah's Field

Long overseas flights provide an opportunity to watch back-to-back movies. Sometimes I use those flights to watch an older classic that I never saw when it was new... or one that I have seen but want to see again.

But a lot of times the description of a movie I've never heard of will pique my interest and I end up watching movies I otherwise never would have. You've got hours to kill and there's nothing to lose.

Our trip to Prague a few weeks ago was one such trip. I watched a movie called *My Old Ass*. Anyone heard of it or seen it? This is going to be a spoiler so if you've heard of the movie and have been dying to see it and don't want a spoiler, I guess cover your ears.

The main character is a free-spirited young woman named Elliott. She and her friends are enjoying their last summer before going off to college.

One of the friends gets hold of some psychedelic mushrooms and the three friends go on a camping trip to try them out. Elliott drinks her mushroom tea and while she sees her friends high as a kite, she doesn't think it's doing anything for her.

But all of a sudden, she finds her 18-year-old self sitting next to her 39-year-old self. Apparently, the mushroom trip has somehow called her older self from the future.

Her 39-year-old self gives her some good words of wisdom about how she's been treating her family members and tells her not to skip coming home for Thanksgiving. Then she tells her, whatever you do, don't get involved with a guy named Chad.

Problem is, Chad just happens to be the name of the guy she's starting to think she might be falling in love with. But her older self refuses to say why or what's wrong with Chad.

Somehow, after that she ends up being able to summon her older self on her phone. After the first mushroom experience, she keeps trying to get her 39-year-old self to say more. She tries unsuccessfully to stop seeing Chad...but she can't do it. And she's unable to find anything wrong with Chad. Her older self finally stops answering her calls.

Towards the end 39-year-old Elliott finally tearfully tells her.

There is nothing wrong with Chad. He's perfect. The problem is that he dies. She's hoping to save her younger self the pain of grief. She still tries to convince young Elliott to get out while she can and avoid the pain.

But younger Elliott, who turns out to be wiser than you'd at first think, tells her older self if we act from fear of all the difficult things that are going to happen in our future, we'd be too afraid to do anything at all. She decides that whatever time she has with Chad will be worth the pain.

She is investing in a future that she already knows is going to be different than she thought – and more painful.

The movie gets you to think about how we approach the future. When faced with a difficult choice, we sometimes say we wish we could see into the future. Or when we're struggling, we might wish we could see how it was going to all come out.

But ultimately, almost everything we do to bring about a hoped-for future is based on just that...hope. And that can be scary...maybe not quite enough assurance.

Hope is really thin for Jeremiah. Whoever put together the book of Jeremiah in its final form wasn't too concerned about chronology. It seems that the passage we read today is actually slightly earlier than last week's reading.

In what we read last week, many of Jerusalem's leaders were already in exile. This week's passage is an account of Jerusalem during the siege right before the exile. Babylon had surrounded Jerusalem and cut off access to food and water. King Zedekiah wants Jeremiah to tell him things are going to work out fine.

But Jeremiah knows they aren't going to be fine. Furious, Zedekiah locks him up. So Jeremiah is in prison when this scene takes place.

The technical description of this land deal is based in the land laws of the nation. Jeremiah's cousin apparently has to sell his land – maybe he had debts to pay or something. We're not told why he's selling. But the law said that a relative had the first right to redeem, or buy the land. The idea was that the land should stay in the family. It was a way of preserving the future for that family.

God tells Jeremiah that he's going to receive an offer to redeem Hanamel's land. And God tells him he should buy it.

OK, so at this point, Jeremiah knows that Jerusalem is going to be defeated. He knows that they are in for a long time of exile. This would not seem to be the best time to buy land in

Judah. He'll certainly never get to use that land. Why buy it? Even if it's God telling him to, what's the point?

But, not unlike the fictional Elliot, Jeremiah knows that stepping out in faith, even when you know what's coming, is a way to embody hope. This land he buys is a symbolic way of saying, God will redeem this land.

This is an embodied prophecy. He doesn't just speak God's word. God asks him to put his money where his mouth is.

Judah's defeat, Jerusalem's destruction, and the exile are all a result of the actions of their political rulers and the religious elite. Jeremiah has made that clear. It's God's judgment.

And this time of exile won't end until their sentence is complete. There's no shortcut through this. But what God is saying through Jeremiah, is that judgement won't be God's last word. They will return and when they do, there will be land to return to. This little plot of land is an act of bringing God's future into the present.

This land transaction is a tangible symbol that God's judgment will not be the last word. God will bring them back. God will give them a future with hope.

There's so much of this trip through Jeremiah I'm finding helpful. Unlike Jeremiah, I don't have God speaking directly to me. Sometimes I wish I did...although it would probably scare me to death. But we can find ways to make connections between God's word in this ancient story and our own lives now.

There's a lot going on in my family and in the world for which I can't see the outcome. I'm guessing the same in some form or another is or has been true for all of us. We know sort of generally that life will have ups and downs. But we don't get much more than that.

Yet, like Jeremiah, God does call us to keep acting in hope. To keep planting and building...to keep building homes and families and communities...to keep sending kids to school...to keep using our money wisely for our future and for the future of others...to keep fixing roads and manning soup kitchens and teaching English to immigrants. In short, God calls us to prepare for a future we may not even see.

We are a pretty individualistic society. Up to a point, that can be a good thing. We value each person as a unique individual...a person loved by God and who should be treated with dignity and respect. It's a really bad thing when we lose that – when we dehumanize someone.

But the biblical story is about God's work to restore all humanity...and really all of creation. When the prophets speak of hope, they are often seeing the long view...and a more communal view.

We are called to see that long view as well – to step out in hope to participate in God's future, even if it turns out to be a future we won't see in this life. A future that in our own time will have pain and struggle.

Hope is like an engine. It keeps us going especially in tough times. It reminds us that the future is in God's hands. The hope that comes from God is a hope that reminds us that whatever happens to us, God is with us, working toward a future with hope.

Then, with our hope for the future resting in God's hands, we are free to live in the present...to step out in faith and not huddle in fear. And trusting in God's future, we are freed from fear to live full lives...lives that while sometimes filled with pain, will also be filled with joy, peace, and love.