



***Last Sunday we began a series which follows on from last term's 'Intentional Discipleship': It is all about Confidence. If we are gradually becoming intentional disciples, then we should be developing the confidence to take the next step in our ministry. It's not a confidence in ourselves, but in our God and in our faith***

### **Introduction to our reading in Jeremiah**

- Jeremiah lived in Judah, which was all that was left of the Kingdom of Israel by 626 BC, when he was called to be a prophet. Judah was surrounded by three seats of power: Egypt to the south and east, Syria-Iraq to the west and Turkey in the north. Judah, together with Canaan and Lebanon occupied the thin stretch of fertile land along the eastern Mediterranean Sea. The tribes were small but the land rich, so control of this 'fertile crescent' was pivotal to which of the big countries would become the Super-Power, or 'Suzerain'. So, time and again the Israelites were subjected to what is known as 'Suzerainty' which meant that a large power would threaten them with a choice:
  - 1) We are the Super-power. Resist us and we'll destroy you.
  - 2) Or pay us taxes, be subject to our king and we'll get rid of the Canaanite tribes that keep annoying you and we'll leave you in peace - although we might make you move you away from your homeland.
- Suzerainty was very similar to God's covenant with Israel – except for an all-important third clause:
  - 1) Deut. 28: 1-14, God says I AM the Super-Power; trust & obey Me & all will go well with your lives.
  - 2) Deut. 28: 15-Ch. 29, if you ignore my laws you will find everything going wrong in your lives.
  - 3) **Deut. 30: 1-6, but I will always gather you back; I will restore your lives when you return to Me.**

### **Jeremiah's call to Confidence and trust in the LORD. Read Jeremiah 17: 7-8.**

- Jeremiah was prophesying during the last five Kings of Judah. There had already been too many examples of the Israelites trusting in their own strength or military power and on making bargaining treaties with other powers, (2 Kings 18: 19-21). Our reading comes towards the end of his ministry.
- **Verse 7:** LORD in capital letters always denotes the name of God- **I AM, I WAS and I WILL BE** – the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God who is the Suzerain, the Super-Power, the Almighty.
- **Verses 7 & 8:** The blessing of having the confidence to trust in the LORD.
- It seems likely that Jeremiah was thinking of **Psalm 1**. Meditating on God's word increases our confidence in Him as we see His promises realized in our lives & grow into healthy and fruitful people.

### **Our Call to Confidence and Trust in the Lord.**

- God is with us – He offers us His Presence **Mtt. 28: 18-20**, His protection when in danger, **Dan. 3: 16-17, 25** and even when we lose our lives **Acts 7: 54-60**.
- Jesus has equipped us with His Holy Spirit, **Ephesians 4; 7, 11-13b**.
- Is our confidence in our self, our strength, our network or our strategies for getting our own way? We might see growth and results but self-centredness is unlikely to result in healthy 'fruit'.
- When our confidence is in God we become:
  - Spiritually healthy because we are united to Jesus, the Great Physician.
  - We grow more like Jesus who trusted His heavenly Father, even when on the cross.
  - We become more 'fruitful' – the Spirit works in our lives, God's Kingdom is expanded.

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### **Questions for discussion**

1. ***Can we think of modern-day examples of Suzerainty? And perhaps some not-so modern examples .....?***
2. ***Do we sometimes wonder if the covenant promises almost seem to be too simple, or even too difficult?***
3. ***Compare Jer. 17: 7-8 with Psalm 1 and think about what it means to be 'fruitful'. [Also Galatians 5: 22-3]***
4. ***Are we being called to do start some service for God at St Paul's, or to do something different?***
5. ***Are we willing to emerge from our comfort zone and take the next step in our walk with Jesus?***
6. ***Have we ever found that growing in grace and fruitfulness involves pain as well as pleasure?***
7. ***If so the faithful Jeremiah reminds us of God's faithfulness to us in Jeremiah 29: 11.***