

## **Lectionary Reflection**

**Sunday, February 13th**

**[Jeremiah 17:5-10](#)**

**By Teri McDowell Ott**

Walking in and among the trees has always been a preferred form of meditation for me. These tall, stately beings nourish my soul. On sunny days, I mingle with the red maples, birch and oak in our yard. They are good company when I am stressed and anxious. I may even stop to give one a hug, absorbing the quiet peace, the strength and the wisdom that comes from a strong root system that holds them steady through life's storms.

Jeremiah was a prophet to his people during a stormy time. He began his service in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. He lost his home along with others when Jerusalem was conquered and destroyed by the Babylonians. He ended his career with his people in exile. Here, in this Sunday's text, Jeremiah preaches a troubling message: They will not be going home. So how will they choose to live with exile as their new norm? Will they be like the shrub in the desert and not see when relief comes? Or will they trust God and be like a tree planted by water, sending its roots by the stream?

We can ask ourselves these same questions in our own time of exile. It's safe to say we won't be returning to pre-pandemic norms. Everything has changed. Everything has been thrown into turmoil. So how will we choose to live? How will we, like the trees, put down strong roots near a nourishing source of water?

In her book *All about Love*, I appreciated bell hooks' description of practicing affirmations to learn self-love and to heal from old wounds. Her sister, a therapist, had encouraged hooks to give affirmations a try. "Although I had for years been interested in therapeutic modes of healing" hooks writes, "affirmations always seemed to me a bit corny." She promised her sister

she would try, though, to see if she experienced any changes in her outlook. She began writing affirmations to herself in the mornings, then repeating them as part of her daily meditation practice. One of her affirmations included, “I’m breaking with old patterns and moving forward in my life.” To her surprise, hooks found this practice helpful and fulfilling. “I not only found [the affirmations] to be a tremendous energy boost – a way to kick off the day by accentuating the positive – I also found it useful to repeat [the affirmations] during the day if I felt particularly stressed or was falling into the abyss of negative thinking ... Negative thinking is absolutely disabling. When we are positive we not only accept and affirm ourselves, we are able to affirm and accept others.”

As we wander through this exhausting and uncertain landscape of pandemic exile, Jeremiah calls us to practices that nourish and sustain us, practices that root us to our living God and affirm us in God’s extraordinary love. Each must find the practice that nourishes them the best. Maybe affirmations will work for you. Or a practice of daily prayer and Scripture reading. I’ll continue to find nourishment walking among the trees, hugging a few as I go. We must give ourselves these self-affirming and life-affirming gifts because we cannot nourish ourselves or others from a parched place of lack. “Blessed are those who trust in the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream.”

Questions for reflection:

1. What thoughts or feelings arise as you read this passage?
2. In what ways are you parched for nourishment?
3. What practices nourish and strengthen you during difficult times?