

May 30: 36:1-32, 45:1-5***Preface:***

Well, friends, if I'm being honest...today's message is a weird one. We're going to allow this person we're hearing about for the first time today, Baruch, guide us into a discussion on what it means to consider our lives stories that we are characters in.

So that's reasonable, right?

Hopefully I'll persuade us it is. Or, you know, much, much better than that: God will use this thing to persuade us to consider the plot of our lives right now, and what it means to be an agent, an active participant, in the work God is doing in the world through us.

Let's pray.

Prayer:***Introduction:***

Today we heard Chapter 45 of Jeremiah. It's the shortest chapter in the book; in practically all the biblical books. It's also a huge jump away from

Chapter 36, which was the next chapter in our walk through Jeremiah. But that's not on accident.

Chapter 36 actually introduces us to Baruch. God tells Jeremiah to have every single thing he's said written down, hoping that the force of all of it, read in one go, will compel Judah to listen. Jeremiah finds Baruch son of Neriah to do this. He does. Because Jeremiah's been banished from the Temple, he charges Baruch with reading it out loud there. Baruch does; it's so compelling the Temple Officials want to hear it. They're shocked and scared. They realize for the first time: "Uh-oh." They tell Baruch to get Jeremiah and hide, because they're going to tell King Jehoiakim all this stuff, which reveals how they expect him to respond. Eventually this is read to the king, whose chilly, so sitting in front of a fire, and as it's read to him, he cuts off bits of the scroll and burns them to keep the fire going.

We read: ***"The king and all his attendants who heard all these words showed no fear, nor did they tear their clothes. 25 Even though Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them. 26 Instead, the king commanded***

Jerahmeel, a son of the king, Seraiah son of Azriel and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet. But the Lord had hidden them.”

And we could get sidelined talking about how bad it is in a culture that centers on corporate identity when the king, who is representative of all the people, chucks God in a fire, or we could make parallels between this moment and moments in Jesus' life, but we won't do either.

What happens is that God tells Baruch to write it all down again, this time adding a special line of judgment for Jehoiakim, and we read, this, too: “And many similar words were added to [those that Baruch wrote down].”

All sorts of stuff happens in Jeremiah before we get to today's passage, but today's passage, chapter 45, follows immediately from that moment. Baruch--who we now realize is the primary author of Jeremiah the book--didn't write it down at first.

45 When Baruch son of Neriah wrote on a scroll the words Jeremiah the prophet dictated in the

fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, Jeremiah said this to Baruch: 2 “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to you, Baruch: 3 You said, ‘Woe to me! The Lord has added sorrow to my pain; I am worn out with groaning and find no rest.’ 4 But the Lord has told me to say to you, ‘This is what the Lord says: I will overthrow what I have built and uproot what I have planted, throughout the earth. 5 Should you then seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them. For I will bring disaster on all people, declares the Lord, but wherever you go I will let you escape with your life.’”

Re: Baruch

What do we know about Baruch, then?

Not much, right? He’s “son of Neriah,” which means nothing to us. His name means “blessed.” Two seals have been found in archaeological digs that both match each other and his name, along with the title “scribe,” and while they’re disputed as to whether they belonged to this Baruch, they seem authentic. So that’s kind of neat.

And because we don't know much about him, of course, the Church and Rabbis before the Jesus filled in the gaps in all sorts of ways--there are books that aren't part of the Bible that are purported to be written by him, stories about his life that were meant to inspire people. Rabbis thought he was related to Jeremiah, suggested he saved Jeremiah's life later on in the book. Some stories have Baruch being a hero, sometimes he's upset that he's not as blessed as Jeremiah. He's considered a Saint by both Catholics and Orthodox Christians. There are theories that he's the main editor of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges.

But what's clear is that Baruch is a writer, right? A scribe. He's a note-taker, a journalist, a biographer--or something like one. Jeremiah sought him out to do what he did, which was write what Jeremiah dictated to him. That's all we really know about him.

Jeremiah is not Baruch's story. In fact, it's so much not Baruch's story that people of faith, Jewish and Christian, have made stuff up over time because they want Baruch's story, too. God gives promises to Baruch, but they aren't surprising new promises; just the ones that God's promised to anyone faithful in Judah.

The Book of Jeremiah is not Baruch's story, but he does tell it.

And he tells it faithfully, in both senses: highlighting what happened and how God was present in what happened.

He tells it coherently.

He tells it supportively.

Baruch never steals the spotlight. In fact, again, there's been this strand of thinking among people of faith for centuries that Baruch is the one who saved Jeremiah's life, who, in the Book of Jeremiah, is called "Ebed-melech," a Cushite or Ethiopian. And if that really was Baruch, giving himself a different name for some reason, all it does is double-down on the fact that Baruch is allowing Jeremiah's story to be about Jeremiah.

Re: Jeremiah:

Jeremiah is the star of his own story. And, look: Our biographies ought to star us! We ought to be the stars of our own stories.

And I don't want us to express some false-piety, "Oh, isn't Jesus the star of all our own stories?" "Yes. Sure." We all need to live well, come to be able to say with Paul, "I no longer live but Christ lives in me."

But our biographies ought to star us, right?

What I mean is that sometimes we go through seasons in life in which we feel like we're not even the stars in our own stories. We're not the protagonists in the novels of our own lives. We're...bystanders. Ancillary characters. We feel unimportant, doing unimportant things.

And, look, it's a terrible, terrible feeling. To feel like you're not the star of your own story is a terrible feeling. Some of us have experienced more than a season of this; it's felt more like our whole life. And if that's the case, it's something to really grieve, and something to talk through with someone else.

You know what I mean when I say we ought to be the stars of our own stories, don't you? I mean that we ought to experience life as one in which we have agency, we have meaning, we have power. Yes: We

submit to God, and act as we're lead; yes, we discover how to make meaning from the events that come our way, and yes we give up power for the sake of others. There is a plot to our lives and there is a plotter. But there's something deeply sad about being in a room with another person and forgetting they are there on account of how deeply they shrink into the scenery. We are all so valuable, so wonderful, that none of us deserves to become scenery, and Jeremiah--who faithfully submits to God, who is persecuted and harassed, who nonetheless knows exactly what he's about and why he does what he does, even when he's resistant--Jeremiah is the star of the book that bears his name. And I want all of us to know that we're the star of the book that bears our name, stars in the plot of our life story that God is authoring.

So again, I want us to be the stars of our own stories. But as far as today goes, it's all we're given of Baruch's story. And that makes sense, because he's telling Jeremiah's, not his own.

Transition:

We have these two people, then.

Jeremiah, whose story this is. He's its star. He is the

star of his own story.

And Baruch, who gives us Jeremiah's story.

Here's the thing:

The Thing:

I think we are, simply by virtue of being alive, meant to be both stars of our own story and also characters in others.

We're meant to be both Baruch and Jeremiah; those who both help move others' stories forward, and those who star in our own.

On Jeremiah:

As Jeremiah, I want our sense of who we are to have a weighty presence, I want us to have agency, and the sense that there is plot happening in our lives, and if there's plot, then there is also an author, and that author cares enough about us to focus on us. I want us to make choices, take risks, plant roots. I want us to be the main character to ourselves. And if we don't feel that way then talk it out with someone, anyone. Maybe start with the author.

On Baruch:

But because our focus is on Baruch today, not Jeremiah, I do want to have us think about what it means to help move others' stories forward, faithfully.

It might mean, sometimes, that we act like biographers. Probably not professionally, probably not to Baruch's extent...but we can help people remember the plot-lines of their own stories. We can help collect and collate the events that have happened in one another's lives. Baruch's life became bound up in Jeremiah's; he heard from Jeremiah all that had happened to him. He was able to write and re-write Jeremiah's story. And in helping others remember their own life story, we become their advocates, too: Remember how God has been to you? Remember how great you are? Remember your failures, so that you don't repeat them?

And to help someone remember their own story is to act with love, to be their advocate, to live in solidarity with them, and help them realize: This is your story.

We get out of the way. Jeremiah wasn't about Baruch, and Baruch knew it. He may have even played a sensational role in it, but didn't want to be

sensationalized, because what mattered was supporting Jeremiah, not stealing his spotlight.

In the end, both Baruch and Jeremiah are kidnapped by some Israelites who want to flee to Egypt for help, when neither they nor God want them to. Baruch becomes so good at collecting and collating and reminding that the end of his and Jeremiah's story becomes shared.

Let me leave us with some questions:

Are you starring in your own story? I think you're supposed to. Do you see that there's plot, and if plot, there's an author. And how are you doing with the author of your story right now?

Do you realize that you are a part of someone else's story. You may be so tightly bound to them that your plots have the same ending, like Jeremiah and Baruch's. Or maybe you're just in solidarity together for a brief moment, a chapter or two. How can you help others see the plot in their lives? How can you direct them toward the author, God who loves them? Can you help those who God has written you together with remember God more clearly, and wake up to their

starring role in their own life?

This may be a little too metaphorical for some of us, and, I dunno. I'm done, basically, so there's no going back. But we are always both Jeremiah and Baruch, meant to be starring in our own life, and meant to be supporting others as they live in the plot God's writing for them.

Our stories are intertwined, and we're not alone. But each role comes with responsibilities: As we star in our stories we must search for the God who is authoring them, and know we are worth the story that's being written with our lives, and live up to that worthiness. As we support others, we help them remember themselves, their God, and the work that's yet to do.

Remember Jeremiah. Remember Baruch. We're meant to play both their parts, for ourselves and for others.