**Messy Church – 15th June 2024**

**Jeremiah**

The activities are:

1. **Jeremiah says he is too young to do what God calls him to do:** Jeremiah chapter 1, verses 4 to 10
2. **Jeremiah and the potter:** Jeremiah chapter 18, verses 1 to 12
3. **Jeremiah and the pot:** Jeremiah chapter 19
4. **Jeremiah’s underwear:** Jeremiah chapter 13, verses 1 to 11
5. **Jeremiah’s destroyed scroll:** Jeremiah chapter 36 (in the Celebration)
6. **God’s New Covenant:** Jeremiah chapter 31, verses 31 to 34 (in the Celebration)
7. **Jeremiah in the well:** Jeremiah chapters 37 and 38

**Stories and Activities**

**1. Jeremiah says he is too young to do what God calls him to do:** Jeremiah chapter 1, verses 4 to 10

We don’t know how old Jeremiah was when God first spoke to him. We do know, because his book says it, that he thought he was too young. A Jewish child is considered an adult at the age of 12 or 13. At that age, a big party is given for the child, and a celebration is held in their synagogue. In the Old Testament, which is when Jeremiah lived, the celebration would probably been in Jerusalem. From the date of the celebration, the child would be expected to do adult things – for a boy, he would be expected to take part in the adult (male) prayer times, and get a job. For a girl, she would be expected to think about getting married, and to be sure she knew how to manage a household.

Although Jewish children were considered adult, it was very likely that telling older people than themselves what God wanted was not what they were expected to do! Like young adults now, they would be still expected to take instruction from their elders – they might be working, but they wouldn’t be the boss! Jeremiah expected people to refuse to hear what he had to say, even if he told them it was God’s message he was saying.

**You will need:** a piece of paper, colouring pencils or felt tip pens.

Draw a picture of the job you might like to do, or a picture of what you think you might look like as an adult.

**Talk about:** being allowed, or not allowed to do things because you “are not old enough”. Think about what you are allowed to do, or what you have been told you can do when you are older – cooking, using power tools. If you aren’t allowed to do something, why not? What are you expected to do – wash and dress yourself, choose your own clothes, make your bed?

**2. Jeremiah and the potter:** Jeremiah chapter 18, verses 1 to 12

There are two stories about Jeremiah and pottery. In this story, God sends Jeremiah to watch the potter working. Jeremiah sees that as the potter moulds the clay, if what he is making doesn’t turn out right, he squashes all the clay back together, and starts again, until he is satisfied with it. God asks Jeremiah why he should not behave similarly with his people – if they don’t behave as he wants them to, why should he not punish them by destroying them. If people live the way he wants them to, he won’t have to change anything.

God tells Jeremiah to tell his people, the Jews, that he is getting ready to punish them, so they should change their ways, but he also says that he is not expecting them to do it – he thinks they will go on being stubborn and evil.

**You will need:** some clay, a bowl of warm water, a waterproof surface to work on, and a paper plate to put your finished creation on. If you don’t have clay, play doh will be fine – you won’t need the water, but a surface you can clean would be helpful.

Keep your hands damp, and make something – a plate, or bowl, or cup (something simple). Change your mind, mash the clay up and start again – making sure both your hands and the clay are damp. If you are using play doh, this will be something you are familiar with – you may often just squash it back in the container, and make something else next time.

**Talk about:** being able to start again – the potter uses the same material at this stage of the process. If you need to start a piece of writing again, you will need more paper. God is telling Jeremiah that we all need to learn, and he wants to help us – but sometimes we don’t want to learn at all!

**3. Jeremiah and the pot:** Jeremiah chapter 19

This second story is a little different. God tells Jeremiah to buy a clay jar. When the potter has made something he is satisfied with, he bakes it, so that it keeps its shape, and can be sold and used. Jeremiah is told to take the jar outside the city, and to take some responsible citizens with him, to a place where the people of God have been worshipping and sacrificing to other gods, which their God did not want them to do. In this place, God tells him to break the jar, as a lesson in what God will do to his people if they do not start to live in the right way. Once clay has been baked, it cannot be remoulded. If you have really good glue, it might be possible to mend a jar, but it will never be as good as when it was unbroken. God wants his people to learn not to do wrong things – to be remoulded – rather than to be broken and useless.

**You will need:** a plate or a cup (if your parents can spare them!) which can be broken, a sturdy container, and some space, preferably outside.

Drop the crockery to be broken into the container (if you can throw it in, from a height, it might be better), and look at the pieces (carefully, they might be sharp). Think about whether you could glue them back together.

**Talk about:** the difference between the unbaked clay, and the broken crockery. If you listen to the news, you might hear about systems being broken, or people feeling broken – try to find out what might have happened in their lives to make them feel like that. Consider what people might have needed to change in their lives, to stop them feeling broken.

**4. Jeremiah’s underwear:** Jeremiah chapter 13, verses 1 to 11

God tells Jeremiah to go and buy a pair of linen shorts (these would have been his underwear). He is to wear them, and not wash them. Then God tells him to take them to the river Euphrates, and bury the shorts beside the river, among the rocks. After some time, God tells Jeremiah to go back to the river, and dig his shorts up again. When Jeremiah does it, he finds that they are now no good for anything. God says this is what his people have become like – no good for anything, because they will not stick to his rules. Just as underwear is intended to fit closely to the body, so God’s people are intended to hold tightly to him, not to worship other things that are not gods.

We don’t have time to bury our underwear and wait for it to go mouldy, and the elastic to stop being stretchy, so we are going to make an edible river and rocks

**You will need:** some ready to roll icing, or marzipan, some icing sugar, water, and food colouring, and a paper plate to work on.

Make rocks from lumps of ready to roll icing or marzipan (you can colour them brown if you like), and make runny icing (not too runny!) in green and blue, for the river, and the surrounding land. Make your scene on the paper plate!

**Talk about:** not wanting to follow the rules, or taking short cuts and ending up spoiling things – consider how you make a pompom, or a cake – what happens if you don’t follow the basic instructions?

**5. Jeremiah’s destroyed scroll:** Jeremiah chapter 36 (in the Celebration)

In this story, God tells Jeremiah to write down all the things he has told Jeremiah up to this point. So Jeremiah gets a scroll, and dictates it all to his secretary, a man called Baruch, who writes it all down. God hopes that when the people hear about all the times he has told them to improve their behaviour, or dreadful things will happen to them, they will behave better. Because he is banned from going to the Temple (because what he says upsets the authorities), Jeremiah tells Baruch to take the scroll to the Temple, and read it out there, the next time there is a fast, so that everyone can hear it.

When Baruch did this, he was heard by a young man whose dad and grandad were part of the King’s council, and he went to the King’s palace to find them and tell them what he had heard. They told one of their servants to go and fetch Baruch and the scroll. They asked Baruch to read it to them, which he did, and then they said they had to tell the King. They took the scroll from Baruch, and sent him home to Jeremiah, telling him to tell Jeremiah that they both had to hide from the King’s servants. The scroll was then read to the King. It was winter, and the King was sitting by a fire. Every so often, the King used a knife to cut off the bits of the scroll that had been read to him, and put the bits in the fire. His council asked him not to burn it, but he took no notice. He sent his son and some of their servants to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch, but they couldn’t find them. God told Jeremiah to re-create the scroll, so Baruch wrote another one, to Jeremiah’s dictation, which included some more information, including specific details about what would happen to the King who did not want to listen to God.

We are not going to make a scroll! We are going to make the sort of fire the King would have been sitting beside.

**You will need:** a paper plate, and a piece of card you can bend into a circle, or part of a card tube from a kitchen roll, or something similar, (it needs to be about an inch high (2.5 cm), but you might want to cut it longer, and then snip into the lower part, to give you tabs to stick it to the plate), glue, tiles (squares or rectangles of paper, or foam) to decorate the plate (for the palace floor), a hole punch, scraps of scrap paper.

Punch holes in the tube so that it has holes all round (a brazier has holes to let the air in to keep the fire burning). (If you are using card, punch the holes before you stick it into a circle.) Stick the tube to the plate, and then stick the mosaic pieces to the plate, to look like a tiled floor. You can stick the mosaic pieces right up to the upright part of the brazier, hiding the tabs, if you used tabs. Put scraps of paper into the brazier, to represent the scraps of the scroll that the king burned.

**Talk about:** destroying something, in the hope that it will be forgotten. That is what the King tried to do. Have you ever tried to destroy something totally?

**7 God’s New Covenant:** Jeremiah chapter 31, verses 31 to 34 (in the Celebration)

When the bible was put together – and specifically, when the book that we call Jeremiah was collated – it was not done like the bible history books, where everything is ordered by time – first there was this king and then another king came after him. We don’t know why Jeremiah’s writings were ordered the way they were, but they do not flow in time. So the story of the burned scroll, in chapter 36, was in the reign of king Jehoiakim, who was the third king Jeremiah worked under, but the message from God, which includes the New Covenant, about the return from Babylon and the future of God’s people, which was actually given after some of the Jews had gone to Babylon, comes in chapter 31, so we have gone backwards in the book, and forward in time.

**You will need:** a piece of card – half A4 is fine – pens or pencils to write with, and a heart shape – use a template to draw round, or find some heart shaped paper – we will use heart shaped post-its. If you are making your own, you could use a different coloured paper from the card.

Fold the piece of card in half. Write on the front cover “God wants his law to be inside, on our hearts”. Stick the heart on the inside and write on it “I love God” and “I love other people”. Above the heart, write “God loves me.”

**Talk about:** the difference between learning something and having to think about it a lot, and knowing something you don’t have to think about, because it is “written on your heart”.

**7 Jeremiah down the well:** Jeremiah chapters 37 and 38

Now we have skipped over the chapters about king Jehoiakim, and the burning of Jeremiah’s scroll, and come back to king Zedekiah, who was the fifth and last king Jeremiah had dealings with – and in fact, Zedekiah was the last king to reign in Jerusalem. In chapter 37, we are told that God sent a message through Jeremiah to king Zedekiah telling him that the Babylonians would come back and destroy Jerusalem, but the king’s officials were not happy with it, and when Jeremiah wanted to leave Jerusalem to go to his family farm, they arrested him, accusing him of deserting to the enemy (the Babylonians). The officials put him in prison, and kept him there for a long time. Then Zedekiah the king sent for him, to talk to him with no-one else around. The king asked if there was any message from God, and Jeremiah told him that Jerusalem, and the king himself would be captured by the Babylonians. Then he asked why he, Jeremiah, was in prison, what crime he was accused of, what threat he was to the country. Jeremiah asked not to be sent back to the prison, because he thought he would die if he were. The king had him locked up in the palace courtyard, where he was fed daily – until the food in the city ran out.

The officials who had put Jeremiah in prison discovered that Jeremiah was talking to the people who came to the palace, and who brought him food, and was telling them God’s message, which was that the Babylonians would win, and Jerusalem would be destroyed, so they went to the king, and asked that Jeremiah be killed, or at the very least, stopped from talking to the people about this, because they (the people) were losing hope that they could win. The king told them that they must do as they felt best, he couldn’t stop them. So the officials had Jeremiah put into a water tank in the palace courtyard. The book of Jeremiah says that there was no water in the tank, but that there was still mud at the bottom, and he sank into the mud.

One of the king’s servants, a man called Ebed-Melech, when he heard where Jeremiah was, went to the king and asked permission to get him out, before he died of starvation, and the king told him to do so, and gave him some people to help get Jeremiah out. They went and found some rags of clothing, and some rope, and told Jeremiah to wrap the rags around him, so that the rope wouldn’t burn him, and then tie the rope around him, and they pulled him out. Jeremiah went back to living in the courtyard.

**You will need:** a paper plate (or thick card), some clay or play doh to make a wall, grey paint for the plate, for the courtyard floor. You can make pompom spiders and/or play doh snakes who might have lived in the tank!

Paint the plate and leave it to dry. While it dries, make the wall of the tank with clay or play doh. (Really, most of the tank would have been below the courtyard floor, with a hole at the top, like an enclosed well.) When the painted plate is dry, put the wall on the plate, and the spiders and snakes around and inside the wall.

**For the pop pom spider, you will need:** a small pompom maker, some yarn, and some short lengths of pipecleaner (you might need a pair of snips, to cut them down to size), some wiggly eyes.

Make the pompom in the usual way, but before you close the rings, put four lengths of pipecleaner across the middle (spiders have eight legs!). Then close the rings, and finish the pompom in the usual way, making sure you pull the finishing thread tight. Remove the spider from the pompom, and stick on a pair of wiggly eyes.

**For the snakes, you will need:** play doh or clay

Shape your snake until it looks the way you want it.

**Talk about:** having to live with things you don’t like. Lots of people don’t like spiders or snakes – they are scared of the way they move, or that they might hurt them. But everyone has to learn to cope with things they don’t like – not everyone likes the same things to eat, but sometimes we have to eat things we don’t like; some people have to do jobs they don’t like, or live in a place they don’t like – but we don’t always get the choice. Life can be about making the best of what we don’t like, rather than complaining about it all of the time.

**Celebration**

If we think about Old Testament prophets at all, the bit we often imagine is “old”. Jeremiah wasn’t old. He may just have been a teenager when God first called him. His excuse to God for not doing what God said was, “I’m too young.” God doesn’t let us make excuses like that. He told Jeremiah to go out and speak to everyone. He also said that he, God, would look after him.

Song Our God is so big <https://youtu.be/Aq1ZIC4lsEw?si=Cx06gnm0k2H3ZLpG>

Jeremiah lived at a time when things were changing in the world. Judah was a state with a king, but that king had another king who was more powerful than he was and Judah had to give him money and do what he told them. But that king was losing authority to another king of another country. However, people didn’t think that this new king could get control quickly. They thought that the Egyptian pharaoh would step in. God knew that this wasn’t what was going to happen.

A lot of Jeremiah’s prophesies were acted out, like with the shorts or the potter. Sometimes he had to write things down on a scroll and send them to the king. The king didn’t want to hear what Jeremiah was saying, so as each bit was read to him, he tore that bit off and threw it in a fire.

We’ll make the fire and tile a floor.

We are going to sing Jesus, you are changing me. <https://youtu.be/WdwIE0EmHaA?si=xIutlXz710L5V1Bm>

Jeremiah kept trying to tell the king he was wrong, but kings don’t like to hear that. Eventually Jeremiah was thrown into a dry well, with spiders and snakes at the bottom. He was rescued by Ebed-Melech, who not only pulled him out of the well, but gave him padding so the rope he used didn’t hurt.

The story didn’t end well. The king never listened, and eventually he was killed and the people were taken away as prisoners. Jeremiah ended up in Egypt, but we don’t know what happened later.

One of the nice things, though, is that God said that he didn’t want his people to just follow laws like a rule-book, he wanted them to follow him from their hearts. God said he would write his laws on our hearts.

We’ll make heart cards. What would you write?

Let’s pray.

Dear God,

When we think we know better than you, forgive us.

When we just follow the rules half-heartedly, forgive us.

When we just want to do the easy thing, forgive us.

Write your laws on our hearts,

Amen

We’ll sing I do not know what lies ahead <https://youtu.be/1Y5uK7xU-Ew?si=nGABTIrvaduW_tZn>

Next Messy Church is 20th July. See you then.

Enjoy our celebration on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw>

Then have tea or a treat if it isn’t tea time!

If you send me pictures of anything you do, I will share them on the Church Facebook page (if you want to send pictures that you don’t want shared, just tell me. I’ll only share the one’s you’re happy to share.)

Harlington Messy Church Team

We’ll have a Zoom meeting open for those who can’t come to the church. Our end of Zoom will go on YouTube during the celebration, but we won’t put pictures from your end on. Contact me if you want the link for Zoom. Look out for the broadcast on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube Channel. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw/videos>