

*Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Jeremiah 31:7-14 (EHV)**

<sup>7</sup> This is what the Lord says.

Sing with joy for Jacob, and shout for the greatest of the nations.

Make your praises heard and say, "Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel!"

<sup>8</sup> Watch, I will bring them from a land in the north and gather them from the ends of the earth.

The blind and the lame will be there, the pregnant woman together with the woman in labor.

They will return as a huge community.

<sup>9</sup> They will come weeping.

They will pray as I bring them back.

I will lead them beside streams of water, on a level path where they will not stumble.

For I am a father to Israel.

Ephraim is my firstborn.

<sup>10</sup> Hear the word of the Lord, you nations.

Declare it in the distant islands.

Say that he who scattered Israel will gather him and watch over him like a shepherd watching his flock.

<sup>11</sup> For the Lord will ransom Jacob and redeem him from the hand of the one who is stronger than him.

<sup>12</sup> They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion, and they will rejoice in the goodness of the Lord, for the grain, the new wine, the oil, and the young of the flocks and herds.

Their lives will thrive like a well-watered garden.

They will not grow weak anymore.

<sup>13</sup> Then the virgin will rejoice and dance.

The young men and the old will be glad together, for I will turn their mourning into joy.

I will comfort them and give them joy instead of sorrow.

<sup>14</sup> I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my goodness, declares the Lord.

*Dear heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit on us so we may be filled with joy knowing you will satisfy us with your goodness through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

We all celebrated Christmas and our entry into a New Year recently.

During these celebrations, it's quite possible you indulged by feasting on some tasty rich food. Not only this, but it's also possible you had plenty of food left over!

If this is the case, you may have had to be a little creative on how to finish off the 'remnants of Christmas past' before it goes off or everyone's sick of the same food!

If you don't do this in good time, the remnants, the leftovers, and the scraps from your tasty celebrations may start to go off. It may even become harmful for you if it's left too long. So, while the food used to be delicious and desired, it can quickly change to be something tolerated for a while, before it becomes something unwanted and discarded.

Now, you may be wondering why I'm talking about Christmas leftovers today!

Well, this is because the reading from Jeremiah is preached to the remnants, the leftovers, and the scraps of Israel. It's proclaimed to the black sheep, the ostracised, the excluded, the shunned, and the unwanted.

You see, once they were the precious holy people of God, but because they had no longer practiced justice, mercy, and faithfulness as they promised God they would do, they had been exiled, kicked out, carted away, and left to rot far away from their home. Not only this, but they also considered themselves far from their God as they could no longer worship him in his temple.

Jeremiah's words were therefore received as good news for these remnants of God's people as they anticipated their restoration by God himself.

Now, even though these words are proclaimed to the remnants of Israel and don't seem to apply directly to you today, it may depend on how you perceive yourselves or how others might perceive you.

For example, it could be all of you are popular, that you fit in well with everyone, and are often surrounded by supportive family and friends, but it's also possible not all of you feel this way.

Some of you may feel like you're the black sheep of your family or community. You may often feel left out, as if you don't quite fit in, or believe you're not truly welcome. It could be some of you feel shunned, banished, ignored, or are out of favour with others.

In a sense then, this text is written to all those who feel left out, not welcomed, or discarded by others, or even by God.

In fact, it might surprise you how many people can feel unwelcomed and unwanted by their own families, friends, or even by fellow congregational members.

There are many reasons some of you might feel this way.

- Perhaps something was said to you, or about you, which made you question how valuable you are to them.
- Perhaps someone didn't value your difference of opinion, and you felt judged or put down by them.
- Perhaps you suspect people are talking about you behind your back, and what they're saying is presumptuous, critical and unsympathetic.
- Maybe you've done something which makes you feel ashamed or unworthy, and nothing anyone says or does can get rid of this feeling.
- Maybe something was done to you which makes you question your worthiness or loveliness.
- Perhaps you're hypersensitive to any disapproving frowns or vocalised judgments because you have a fragile sense of self-worth.
- Perhaps you've judged yourselves as not being loveable or valuable.

Not only this, but sometimes you might feel judged or unwelcome by God himself.

- You may feel as if you're not worthy of his love and attention.
- You may feel insignificant and small in his presence.
- You may wonder if God truly forgives you or loves you.
- You may even question whether he really wants you to be with him in heaven.

So, what does God say to the remnants, the exiled, the shunned, and the unwelcome people of God through the prophet Jeremiah?

Well, God says you're to sing aloud with joy, praising God by saying: 'Lord, save your people, the remnants!' as if asking God for help is how we might praise him!

You're to look with faithful expectation that God will save the leftovers, the unwanted, and the scraps of humanity, including you.

God promises he's going to gather all his people from the furthest places on earth. No matter what dark cave you might want to crawl into, he searches for each of you in order to gather you into his holy presence as dearly loved and valuable to him.

Even those who normally can't travel because they're blind, lame, or heavily pregnant; they'll also be

gathered by God himself. It doesn't matter whether you feel broken, feeble, depressed, or burdened. God searches for each of you in order to bring you home to him.

In fact, God himself will lead his people. He'll lead you beside streams of living water – water which cleanses and nourishes you.

You could argue that these streams of waters can be likened to the waters of baptism which cleanses each of you from your sins, refreshes you with God's washing of forgiveness, adopts you as God's holy and precious children, and joins you to Jesus himself who carries you in his body to his heavenly home.

These waters not only wash away your own sins, but they also cleanse you from any unrighteousness done toward you in order to purify you and make you holy and innocent.

Even if you feel picked on or abandoned by God, he himself promises to gather you into his arms in order to restore you to fullness and wholeness – not only for your own sake, but also for the sake of the whole community. He wants all of the flock of his wayward sheep to be reconciled into a newly restored and wholesome community.

This whole community, including you, will be filled with joy. Not because you rejoice in your own goodness or worthiness, but because you rejoice in the Lord's goodness, mercy, and faithfulness to all his people, including the remnants and discarded.

He loves all of you – warts and all. He chose to gather the scraps of humanity to be his own people.

It's like loving the discarded leftovers from Christmas so much, he chose to grab them out of the bin and restore them to their former glory through the power of his loving mercy!

And that's what he does for each of you. Even though you might sometimes feel unwanted and discarded, he wants to gather each of you to himself and restore you to joy and peace by reinstating you into his holy and beloved community.

You even experience a taste of this here on earth as you feast on the grain and wine of his Son's body and blood in the Lord's Supper and the oil of the Holy Spirit, but the fullness of this joy and peace is reserved for your time in heaven where you get to gather around the Lamb of God and feast on his goodness.

It's only in the goodness of the Lord, where the troubled, the lonely, the depressed, the young, the old, the mourning, and the discarded remnants will have their joy and peace restored through faith.

After all, your joy isn't restored by dwelling on your own unworthiness, or on what others have done to you, or on what you've done, or on what you didn't do right, or on your fears or desires for human approval and love, but your joy is restored by dwelling on and trusting in the Lord's goodness, compassion, mercy, and steadfast love for broken, imperfect, scared, and scarred people like you and me.

Yes, it could be some of you *feel* useless, unworthy, sad, depressed, ashamed, unwanted, or like a discarded remnant. But the good news is, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who fully forgives you and promises life eternal with him, is for each and every one of you, no matter how you feel.

The good news is:

You are the people God comes to save.

You are the people he loves.

You are the people his Son Jesus died for.

You are the people he forgives.

You are the people he washes clean in the waters of baptism.

You are the people he restores.

You are the people promised to be received into his eternal kingdom.

You are the people he wants to gather around himself to feast on his Son's body and blood in perfect fellowship.

You are the people he wants to see rejoice and be glad for your Lord comes to gather you and reinstate you as his own dearly loved children.

You are the people who will experience his joy, comfort and peace through faith in his promises.

Therefore, by trusting that God loves all his people, even those who feel discarded and unwanted, may

...

*...the peace and joy of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

Pastor Stuart Kleinig

South Burnett Lutheran Parish

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Christmas

4<sup>th</sup> January 2026