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You Little Resurrection
Jeremiah 29

I

I know that in a lot of families, it's common for parents and children and extended family to use endearments for each other in place of their names. You know, terms like honey. Sweetheart. Darling. Among Spanish speaking families, "Mi amor." I think of these endearments as small blessings. In place of a name, they speak intimacy and affection. These are not the kinds of words or phrases used very much in my family. I can remember my grandfather referring to me often as "Young Man." I think that was meant to communicate love and high expectations. Buddy, I suppose, was not uncommon.

I asked my friends what words they use for their children in place of their names. Kati and Daniel are expecting a child, and they're referring to him in utero as Peanut. They expect the name to stick. Jackson says the Dutch people of the upper midwest refer to their children as honyocks. As in "be quiet, you little honyock." It translates roughly to rascal or ruffian. Keith Gessen, a Russian immigrant, is the father of a five year old boy in Brooklyn, New York. He's raising his child to be bilingual in English and Russian. He started using his original language around his son not because he intended to teach his child Russian but because the Russian language is especially rich in these words of endearment. This was surprising to me. In spite of its cold reputation, Gessen says the Russian culture is very warm toward children. *Mushkin. Mazkin. Glazkin. Moy horoshiy. Moy malen'ky mal'chick.* I don't know what some of these words actually mean, but my brother, who has a masters degree in Russian, says that the language may have a lot of endearments because it's more versatile than English in terms of gender. I feel sort of unnatural using endearments like this, maybe because so many of them do seem highly gendered. Buddy. Little fella. Squirt. I can think of fewer that are feminine. Sweetheart, maybe. Princess? I don't know. If I ever have kids, I'll probably just address them in broken Russian.

II

This has been on my mind because all these baptisms and pregnancies and child births in my life brought me to reflect on what a miracle children are. I said in my sermon last week that I think children are symbolic of the resurrection because they point us to life beyond our own

lives. When I said that I wasn't sure that I actually believed it. But I've thought about it for a few more days, and yeah, I think it's true.

The birth of children has never been easy, or without danger and worry. For many families it's a deep and abiding hope that never comes to fruition. The journey of parenthood is frequently touched with loss and with grief. We know also that the choices that families have are determined by privilege and by wealth. Just think of how many people are now affected by the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision. In today's environment, there is even a growing sense of pessimism that causes families to question whether they should have children. Activists for climate action say that today's young adults are increasingly hopeless about the habitation of our planet. So much that they imagine the heat rising in their children's lifetimes and wonder whether it's even ethical to bring life into such an environment. What a tragic set of circumstances.

The prophet Jeremiah reminds us that this is hardly the first time that human beings have become cynical about their future. He speaks to the Hebrew people in exile - people removed from their homes and cast into dispersion. To their understanding, the exile was tantamount to being physically separated from God. Without the temple they were without hope. They're so determined to return to Jerusalem that they have put all their major life decisions on hold. They haven't built houses or planted orchards. They haven't paid dowries or hosted weddings. "There we sat and there we wept when we remembered Zion." You have to imagine that they are in such despair that those who are able even forestall their reproductive choices. How can we raise children here? Into this misery, Jeremiah speaks:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

All I mean to say is that death and destruction are no more in our future than in the future of Israel's exiles. As we gaze into the future what we see most clearly is dread Babylon. We see ourselves in the grip of our conquerors. Climate change. Civil war. Autocratic governments. It's our own failures and our own sins that scare us most. We could see it all coming but we didn't

stop it. This forbidding future has met us before it's even arrived - in our fear, our paralysis, our despair.

The church is not a place for casting judgments on any family's choices. We aren't about telling people what they should do. I hope you don't hear from me - a childless gay man who has never faced so many of the vexing questions of parenthood - any value judgments. But as a minister in this place, it's my role to proclaim the Gospel. We belong to a Living God who is active in our experience and present in our circumstances, a God who is calling forth new life among us, a God who can see a future far beyond what we perceive. To live is to celebrate new life. Every child among us is a little resurrection. They are gifts of God and symbols of hope. Into our fear they speak the promise of a new creation.

I do believe that because of all these horrible realities I've mentioned - climate change and our awful politics and the difficulties facing every human family - the children among us are ever more to be treasured and blessed. Given these circumstances, the children are ever more precious and miraculous. Their presence among us summons us to greater faithfulness and stewardship, to consider the gifts of God's creation beyond our lives and experiences, even to make sacrifices for the future. When we bless and baptize children - or anyone of any age for that matter - we are showing our gratitude to God for a gift that we receive. We do not take for granted any soul that is entrusted to our community. To bless and baptize is to say - Thanks be to God - and to pledge our faithfulness to the relationships now entrusted to us. Our church doesn't tell people what to do. We bless what is. We celebrate the community that is here.

III

Baptism is a sacrament of the church alongside communion. With these symbols of water, of bread and cup, we say Christ is present here - at the beginning and the end, in birth and in death, in life and in loss. In the way that the child Jesus was the incarnate love of God, we can say that the children among us are living signs and symbols of God's faithfulness. Call them whatever comes naturally to your family. Mushkins and honyocks. Peanut. Squirt. Mi amore!

In this community of faith - whenever we are in the presence of a child - we can sense the promises of God at Easter. We have a future!

Christ is Risen! You are pretty cute, you know. You little resurrection.