

## The Essentials: The Church

### Session 5: VINEYARD

#### Jeremiah 31:1-14

#### Opening Collect

*Together:* Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### Read: Jeremiah 31:1-14

#### Opening Thought

Jeremiah was a witness of the complete destruction of Jerusalem and here writes about God's restoration of his people even while they are taken away to Babylon. The passage itself does not explicitly refer to Israel as a vineyard, rather God instructs his people to plant vineyards "in Samaria," ie. *not* in Israel. This imperative illuminates both the way God's people are meant to bless the world, and do so under the lively apprehension of what God will eventually do. Note how this promise of restoration is both audacious and excessive, surely suggesting an even greater reality than the return of Israel to Zion in the 530s BC. According to this passage, a central component of the church is growth. We are meant to grow *and* our growth is likely to be slow, plodding, and sometimes unobservable, like a vineyard. Our growth is given to us by God, endures in times of affliction, is driven on by his promises, is meant to promote blessing—beauty, flavor, intoxicating joy.

#### Discussion:

1. In your own words, what is church growth?
2. Imagery of a vineyard is widespread throughout the scriptures (see Isaiah 1 and 5, 1 Kings 21, and John 15). Scriptural and historical elements of a vineyard include: land, wine, food, vinedressers, weeds, rocks, etc. Since the church is a vineyard, how are these elements metaphorically present in the life of the church?
3. Who is Jesus in the figure in the vineyard (see John 15)? How does this give you hope?
4. In light of our figure (vineyard), what is our responsibility?
5. What happens to the church when it doesn't grow?

#### Check in and Closing Prayer

## Jeremiah 31:1-14

“At that time, declares the Lord, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people.”

<sup>2</sup> Thus says the Lord:

“The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest,

<sup>3</sup> the Lord appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

<sup>4</sup> Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with tambourines and shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers.

<sup>5</sup> Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant and shall enjoy the fruit.

<sup>6</sup> For there shall be a day when watchmen will call in the hill country of Ephraim: ‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God.’”

<sup>7</sup> For thus says the Lord:

“Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, ‘O Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel.’

<sup>8</sup> Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here.

<sup>9</sup> With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

<sup>10</sup> “Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.’

<sup>11</sup> For the Lord has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

<sup>12</sup> They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more.

<sup>13</sup> Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

<sup>14</sup> I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, declares the Lord.”