

Yasmin Pena, was a high school senior from Connecticut, who loved to dance, draw, sing and act. She dreamt of a New York art college.

Yasmin got sick, was diagnosed with Covid 19 and spent weeks in hospital with her organs progressively failing. She eventually died. Yasmin was 18.

Michael Lang headed off to University in Ohio. He loved to fish and be outdoors. He got Covid 19 from his roommate, went home to quarantine, and fell in to a coma. After 4 weeks in hospital grasping for air as his lungs melted, he died. He too was 18.

Adeline Fagan always wanted to be a doctor. From the time she could walk she carried a Fisher Price stethoscope around her neck. She was frightened by this disease after seeing what it in the hospital where she worked. After one of her rotations Adeline got Covid. She battled the virus for two months, until exhausted, she died in her mother and father's arms. She was 28.

We will never be the same, the parents of these young people said.

We will never get over what has happened to us and our families.

In the US 2 people die every minute from Covid 19. It seems that the Federal and State governments have abandoned all responsibility for their people as they bickered over lockdowns, wearing of masks, social distancing and washing of hands.

The outgoing President plays golf, writes on twitter or incites insurrection instead of addressing the crisis or people like the parents of Yasmin, Michael or Adeline.

In Jeremiah's time, the plague of the Assyrians was waning, but was quickly replaced with the virus of the Babylonians. Because of their leader's inability to come to terms with the new bullies on the block, Babylon destroyed Israel after they rebelled. With burnings, attacks and sieges, Jerusalem and all Israel were reduced to rubble. The temple destroyed and the Davidic kingship dis established. Israel was ruined.

The suffering of the people knew no bounds as they were starved to death and killed off by the enemy. Those that survived were marched off in to exile, 1000's of kilometres away.

We will never be the same the Israelites said.

We will never be able to forget what has happened to us they cried.

Into this pain and suffering, into this grief and death, the Prophet Jeremiah speaks these improbable words.

"I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow."

Into the world of the parents of Yasmin Pena, Michael Lang, and Adeline Fagan, and to us, God speaks these same words.

Words of hope spoken in the darkest of times, words that carry spark and substance because of who stands behind them. We are all asked to believe that this hope is based in God, not in the political winds swirling around us. Like Israel we are asked to believe that Assyria and Babylon do not have the final word, that neither Donald Trump, nor Covid 19, speak that word either.

We are asked to believe that that final word belongs to God and is to Israel, the parents, sons and daughters of all people killed by Covid 19, and to us all ... and is a word of hope.

As improbable a word of hope as anyone is likely to hear. But Israel, all those who mourn and us are asked to believe that God is the authority here too, and God says,

“I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.”

2020 was a very difficult year, if possible 2021 has started off even worse for many, and may continue like that for some time ... but Jeremiah encourages us, implores us, even in the darkest of times, to hope. Not because he's an optimist. Not because things will simply get better, but because of who God is, and what God has said ...

that ... “mourning will become joy ... comfort will be forthcoming ... and sorrow will become gladness”.

Let's hear what he has to say in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

Thanks be to God.