

Lent Devotional April 11, 2025

Scripture

Jeremiah 29:1-14

1 These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. 2 This was after King Jeconiah, and the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the artisans, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem. 3 The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom King Zedekiah of Judah sent to Babylon to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It said: 4 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 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. 7 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. 8 For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, 9 for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the Lord.

10 For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 11 For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. 12 Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. 13 When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, 14 I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Devotion

The Rev. Kendra Buckwalter Smith '12/'13

So often in life, we find ourselves in places we'd rather not be, whether due to our own choices or circumstances beyond our control.

In today's text, Jeremiah speaks to the Hebrew people who had been carried into exile in Babylon. It was not where they thought they should be, nor where they wanted to be. In the preceding chapter, a false prophet named Hananiah told the people exactly what they wanted to hear—that this exile would not last long. Into the false hope generated by Hananiah's words, the word of the Lord came through Jeremiah speaking a greater, if more challenging hope. While false prophets encourage mere optimism, Jeremiah encourages true hope that comes only through trust in the God who holds the future of all creation in an active, loving, redeeming embrace. It's a hope that allows us to be realistic about the immediate present—to admit the hardship, the injustice, the disappointment—and to discover the ways God is working in the midst of it all.

We don't know what the future will look like. But the word of the Lord assures us that it is filled with hope. And that's all we need to know. With that knowledge, we can get at the work of responding to God's call in the present—the call to seek the welfare of the families and communities that surround us; of society that is crumbling under injustice and violence; of creation that is groaning in travail. In seeking the welfare, even of the places we'd rather not be, it turns out that our hearts are seeking the Lord who

promises to be found. For at the center of God's heart is not merely the future we imagine for ourselves, but the promise of welfare and hope for all creation.

Prayer

God of promise, we are regularly reminded that the world has wandered far from where you have called it to be. Even still, you promise that the future is filled with hope. Help us to trust in this hope and to respond to your call to settle into grateful living and actively seek the welfare of all, knowing that you are at work even in the places we'd rather not be, lovingly leading all creation to your promise fulfilled. Through Christ Jesus, the hope of the world. Amen.