

“Blossom Where You Are”
Sermon delivered 10/10/10
Immanuel Lutheran Church
Neal Collins, Pastor

Jeremiah 29:1, 4–7

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. ⁴Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶Take 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. ⁷But 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.

Jeremiah

All of us, at one time or another, face situations when we say, “That is not fair.” Sometimes we are reaping what we have sown, and other times things happen to us that are beyond our control, and we find ourselves in a situation we desperately want to get out of. Most of us this morning probably know people who are reaping what they have sown, or something beyond their control is happening to them. We might even be in a tight situation ourselves this morning, wondering when is it going to end.

The lesson from Jeremiah this morning is different from the book of Job. The people Jeremiah are addressing are suffering the consequences of violating the covenant God made with them to be their God, and for them to be his people. They violated it by worshipping other gods, ignoring the poor, and general moral decay. Jeremiah prophesized to the people about their situation, and they rejected him. It is hard to hear the truth, especially when it is judgmental. Job’s situation is different. The question in Job is whether he would remain faithful if he didn’t have it all. For Jeremiah the difference is consequences.

The man who delivered this message to them, Jeremiah, throughout the 51 chapters, was called by God to be a prophet from his youth. A prophet is more than one who sees the future or makes a prediction. A prophet of God is one who delivers the Word of the Lord to the people. He was a heartbroken prophet, speaking a heartbroken message, to a hard hearted people who refused to repent. The radical nature of his message caused threats to be made on his life, publicly humiliated, thrown into a cistern, put on trial for his life, and rejected not only by his own people but by the Babylonians, for being illiterate. He was beaten, imprisoned, abandoned, and ignored. He is characterized as the weeping prophet, accusing God of seducing him. His reputation reflects his loneliness, rejection, and persecution. Nevertheless, he delivers the Word of the Lord as a prophet. The truth hurts, but needs to be heard, along with the promise.

Ministry

The first part of Jeremiah's ministry focused on prophecy, warning the folks to repent. The second part focused on proclaiming God's judgment. Then finally he ministered to those in Babylon and from Judah and Egypt. The section we have this morning is a form of ministry, it is a response to the previous chapter with the false prophet Hananiah, who proclaims peace. Jeremiah says he is lying, and will be dead in a year. Hananiah was proclaiming false optimism, which feels good for the moment but doesn't last. Like a terminally ill patient who can't face the music, Jerusalem danced on the edge of denial - making no wills, plans, or funeral arrangements, because it would soon pass. The problem with expecting a miracle, is that when it doesn't, then God goes down the tube.

Jeremiah came to a powerful realization regarding his own delusions by recognizing that God is not a Santa Claus, or a Sugar Daddy. Through this realization, he was able to love the real God of Israel. He said, "*He knows that like Jerusalem, he is the clay in the potters' hand.*" (chp.18). Many of us may see ourselves as the potter and God as the clay.

Do, Not Wish

In our lesson this morning, Jeremiah spoke some hard words when he said, "thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel to all those in exile, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon... build houses...live in them... plant gardens...marry... only when your 70 years are completed will I visit you and bring you back." Two generations will pass like the children of the Exodus. Tough Love.

Jeremiah tells the folks to *do* something, not to wish for something, build houses, plant gardens, get married; you can bloom and blossom where you are. Audrey West says "the news doesn't have to be good for you to live out the Good News in your life." Bruce Boak sees Jeremiah writing to those who are moping saying, "Your old life is dead, it is not coming back, your new life is in (fill in the space), deal with it, settle in and down, adjust." Shifting the focus from what was to what is and what can be in this new place is called a transition. Loss is difficult, especially from the stupid things we do. Like Rick Sanchez on CNN has come to learn his days at CNN are probably over. Do something, don't just wish for something from the past. Rebuilding is difficult. Letting go of bitterness is difficult.

We need a caveat here. Not everything is to be endured. If you are in an abusive relationship or know of one, whether it be relational or vocational, one seeks to leave. Making blanket statements or proclamations that one size or word from the Lord fits all is a terrible generalization. This lesson is not about being passive and doing the time. Change what is possible in the new place you find yourself after a time of grieving to build, plant, and do life.

Bloom Where You are Planted

This is more than adjusting to the new place you may find yourself. The prophet Jeremiah tells the folks in exile to "to seek the welfare of the city" and "pray for the welfare of the city." The reason for this is that if they are prosperous, you will be

prosperous. This is hard to do. As God blessed the people on the journey to the promised land with milk and honey, so now he would bless the gardens they planted and the welfare of the city through them.

The Words Jeremiah speaks to those in exile 600 years ago speak to us today. There is a promise in this text. The promise is; "I know the plans I have for you ...when you call and pray to me I will come, when you search for me with you whole heart, I will let you find me."

Only from the exile of life do we hear the Lord has a plan or a purpose for our lives, only from the exile do any of us pray with desire, and only from the exile do we search for God with our whole heart. This day has come for some you, and will come for others. The Word of the Lord is that you can you plant your trees and wait to see what the Lord is doing in your life. Can you trust God is at work in your life this day, and for the long haul? Perhaps today is the day for some of you to unpack your bags, let go of the false promises from the Hananiah's of the world, plant your trees, and seek the Lord while praying for the welfare of where you find yourself, and blossom where God has planted you.