

October 09, 2016

Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-7

Bloom Where You Are Planted

"How can we sing a song to the Lord in a foreign land? ... Happy is the man who pays you back for what you have done to us..." (Psalm 137: 4, 8)

Jeremiah 29 and Psalm 137 both reflect the plight of the Israelites as exiles in Babylon. The Psalm, however, depicts a mindset of hopelessness and despair. This despair has turned, as we see in verse 8, to anger and the desire for vengeance. Jeremiah, on the other hand, brings God's word to the people calling for an entirely different attitude.

Jeremiah is countering the false prophecy that the exiles would be returning home in 2 years. His message is one of reality rather than mistaken optimism. The latter just fed the mean-spirited and destructive tone found in Psalm 137. The former calls for a specific, life-affirming, form of action. God, through Jeremiah, challenges the people to live well and even to pray for the very people who have taken them captive!

God is calling for his people to "bloom where they are planted". Needless to say, what God expects runs counter to basic human nature. We prefer to complain about, and resist, events which we didn't choose or situation that run counter to what we want.

Jeremiah, contrary to what they expected, told the Hebrews to settle down, plant roots, have children, work, succeed and take advantage of the available resources. Don't waste time worrying or wanting something that is impossible. And remember that the most powerful resource is prayer.

Jeremiah tells the captives to pray for their enemies. This prophecy reflects Jesus' teaching (Matt 5:43-46) to love your enemies. After all, anyone can love a friend - but to be a child of God and to expect God's blessing - more is expected.

The message for our times is a rich one. We face numerous places of exile. For example, think about the world around us. It is very easy to point to "those" people, or the "secular" world, and "pull a Psalm 137". That is, lamenting, "Oh, how can I be a Christian in such a place?" The answer is actually simple - you can! Just as Jeremiah told the ancient Jews, live your life by the principles and priorities of your faith. Believe in God's presence and power to help you prevail over time.

Another example is that we, too, experience a type of exile when we face the challenges of daily life such as illness or loss. For example, cancer may not allow a loved one to live as they had; but within the parameters of the disease, we can support them to live as fully as possible.

I think Jeremiah reminds us that, for the most part, we don't get to choose what happens to us, but we do have a say in how we respond. And God desires to walk with us on that journey.

Pastor Ron