

*... May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and of you, who are ROCK, REDEEMER, and COMFORTER of us all. Amen.*

Jeremiah 29:11-14 ... Each week we are visiting with a familiar biblical story which invites us to listen and respond with courage, trust, & live with hope. Today the focus is with a well-known passage from Jeremiah... and God's encouraging words for leading God's People.

In the year 626BC, God called Jeremiah to speak boldly to the Jewish people. Jeremiah was just a youth, but finally said yes to the call. Jeremiah was sent to warn God's people that their sin and idolatry was seen and disappointing to God. Consequences would follow as the Babylonians were coming. Jeremiah was to tell the ruler NOT to resist. If they resisted, Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed and the people would be taken into exile. In short, Jeremiah was to tell the people to obey God's directive. But no one wanted to hear Jeremiah's words.

The king & leaders were angry with Jeremiah. Some wanted to stone him. Meanwhile the false prophets told different stories and urged the king to fight the Babylonians, trust that God was on their side. In short, Jeremiah was arrested, persecuted and harassed for calling the king and the people to repent and surrender. Jeremiah continued to preach the warnings of destruction.

In 597 BC the Babylonians arrived and did just as Jeremiah had said, taking many of Judah's leaders into exile and destroying Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 29 is a letter written to the surviving elders, priests, prophets, and all the people exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem. Its purpose is to provide encouragement and instruction to settle in Babylon for a lengthy period of time. The people would need to marry, build, plant, and, most importantly, pray for the welfare of the city as the future depends on it (4-7). In short, bloom where you are planted. To hear more on this, I recommend listening to the message Nancy Everstine provided in the ONLINE worship of August 30 (last week).

Today's passage that Jelinda read for is the promise of hope that all is not lost, they are not forgotten, but there will be a 70 year stretch before the plan comes to fruition. The plan includes peace and hope... all good news to a people who have been dislocated and dejected.

These verses are so powerful, and have provided encouragement to so many; perhaps we should hear them again.

... I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the LORD; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope. <sup>12</sup>When you call me and come and pray to me, I will listen to you. <sup>13</sup>When you search for me, yes, search for me with all your heart, you will find me. <sup>14</sup>I will be present for you, declares the LORD, and I will end your captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have scattered you, and I will bring you home after your long exile, <sup>[a]</sup> declares the LORD.

How can these words speak peace and hope to us today... in the midst of a pandemic that calls us to be in exile in our homes, out of our churches, out of our schools, out of our businesses...? How might these words speak peace & hope to us today... in the midst of upheaval in the calls for attention to racial justice, equal access to educational tools? How might these words speak peace and hope to us today as we enter the last two months before a national election... when it is hard to know what is true, what is false, what is misrepresented, what is spun for a particular perspective or to create chaos?

These words of 2600 years ago speak into our own lives, over and over and over, because we hear the promise of God... I am with you... I will not abandon you nor forsake you...I want abundant life for you... full of peace and of hope.

I will provide for you... I will bless you...and your family.

Jeremiah provides the evidence that God hears us when we pray.

Now, more than ever, friends, seek ye FIRST, God...call upon God, Jesus, Spirit...trust in God for there are plans to provide a future with hope.

. Let's pray...

*Lord, there are so many times when I feel like I'm in exile... in these moments when I feel alone, afraid, uncertain about the future, help me to trust you. Right now, Lord, I trust my future to you. Right now, Lord, I trust that you will rescue me from exile. Right now, Lord, I believe you have plans for me...plans for a future with peace, plans for a future with hope. Amen.*

*HOLY COMMUNION LITURGY – Blessing the Elements of bread wafers and juice.*