

The Book of Jeremiah is the second of the Prophets in the Christian Old Testament. Of all the prophets, Jeremiah comes through most clearly as a person, ruminating to his scribe Baruch about his role as a servant of God with little good news for his audience. His book is intended as a message to the Jews in exile in Babylon, explaining the disaster of exile as God's response to Israel's pagan worship: the people, says Jeremiah, are like an unfaithful wife and rebellious children, their infidelity and rebelliousness made judgement inevitable, although restoration and a new covenant are foreshadowed.

In today's section we read of a letter that Jeremiah writes from Jerusalem to the community of those exiled in Babylon warning them to not trust the false prophets who teach not to worry about things, that God's deliverance from the domination of Babylon (in 597 BCE) will soon be over. Jeremiah tells the people to settle in, to be hospitable to their neighbors, living a normal life as peaceable subjects of Babylon.

the words of the letter scholars believe this letter was sent – and thus this all occurred between the first invasion of Israel by Babylon in 597 BCE and the definitive defeat and massive deportation of people that happened in response to an Israelite rebellion in 587 & 583 BCE.

seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile

It's remarkable that Jeremiah commands the Jews to pray for the hated heathen power that has defeated them. There is no other such teaching or word in all the literature of the period of the Babylonian Captivity. Scholars hear within this command the invitation to the exiles to have courage, to not be afraid, to live as a "light to the nations" (Isaiah 46:2 and 52:10) so that the Babylonians might discover the goodness of Yahweh and trust in the God of the Promised Land of homecoming and peace.

October 6, 2019

Jeremiah 29:1-14

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹These 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. ²This 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. ³The 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: 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. ⁸For 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, ⁹for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the Lord.

¹⁰For 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. ¹¹For 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. ¹²Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴I 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.

Luke 10:1-12

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹ *After this* the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he

himself intended to go. ² He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.

⁴ Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' ⁶ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷ Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹ cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' ¹² I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What word, phrase or image grabs your attention in the passages?**
- **Both Jesus and Jeremiah invite those that walk in the Way of God to practice hospitality and live in relationship with those around them. How would that have been hard for them?; easy?**
- **When have you felt most "welcomed" in life? When have you felt the most "unwelcome"?**
- **How do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – to us as the church – about hospitality and welcome....how we practice it? How we are called, appointed and sent into our world to welcome others and in so doing be a light to the nations of God's welcome made visible in Jesus? How is such a call today a radical, revolutionary risk? How is it needed in our divided nation?**

The book of Luke: Things are not always as they seem. Sometimes what most hinders our perception of what God is doing is our own expectation of what God should do or would do. Luke writes his gospel account of the person and passion of Jesus of Nazareth for someone names Theophilus. The name in Greek means "One who loves God". It is a name, and could also be a metaphorical name that Luke intends for all who seek to follow the Way of Jesus. Luke bases his account upon eyewitness accounts. That's what he tells us in his introductory prologue chapter 1:1-4. He writes to invite and exhort others to place their trust and faith in Jesus as the Way to real life. Our section is in the middle of the gospel as Jesus sends out a larger group of followers to travel among local towns in ancient Israel to tell of Jesus' teaching, example, and to invite those who are interested to join in this revolutionarily inclusive community.

After this Chapter 10 of Luke follows a section in which Jesus lays out what it costs to follow his example, to live his way of life. He describes it as a radical break from the past and the way we live, inviting disciples to radical welcoming and hospitality in which power is renounced, humility is embraced and God is known.

kingdom of God the Greek word we translate as "kingdom" is Basileia (from which we get Basilica). It can also be translated as empire, or reign. It's not just geographic but also spiritual, economic and social. For us in the 21st century it's good to recall that it's more than just an area of which a king is in charge.

Sodom This town is first referred to in Genesis 14, and later is judged by God and destroyed in Genesis 18-19. It is often associated with the neighboring town of Gomorrah. Sodom is introduced when some angels visit it and find rest and refuge with Lot, the nephew of Abraham. While some read the story of a condemnation of sexual proclivity and homosexuality in particular. It's in that vein that the terms Sodom and Gomorrah have become through history metaphors for sexuality, and even resulted in the use of the word sodomy and sodomite in our language. And yet other First Testament words and teachings of the Rabbis identifies the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah as that of refusing hospitality and help to those in need. In Ezekiel 16:48-50, God compares Jerusalem to Sodom, saying "Sodom never did what you and your daughters have done." He explains that the sin of Sodom was that "She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me."

