Sermon Notes
1/27/08
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Jeremiah 29 is one of my favorite passages in the Bible because I have found it so relevant to our present day situation. I feel like Sunday's sermon barely scratched the surface. As follow-up, I wanted to add a few more thoughts and point you to some helpful resources if you want to round out your understanding of the passage.

One of the interesting features of Jeremiah 29 is the way is turns Jewish expectations upside down. For the Jews, exile was the ultimate curse (Dt. 28-29). But for Jeremiah, it is those who have been left behind, in Jerusalem, in rebellion, who will really experience God's curse. The exiles will ultimately be blessed – blessed in their new situation, as well blessed with a share in the eschatological exodus. In other words, while the exile is bad news, Jeremiah shows them how to turn mourning into rejoicing and judgment into opportunity.

Our situation mirrors this in many ways. While the end of Christendom has made American Christians feel like they are marginalized, it also provides incredible opportunities for us. In a Christendom situation, it is easy to confuse national citizenship with church membership. "Of course I'm one of God's people….I'm an American after all." One of the pitfalls of a Christendom situation is confusion of the role of the church and the nation in God's economy. Religion gets used for political ends. Many people get just enough of an artificial gospel to be inoculated against the real thing. They have Christian consciences, but not Christian hearts. Also, in Christendom, the stigma attached to people who sin in public ways often drives them away from the church because they feel they have been condemned by self-righteous believers.

We are now entering a post-Christendom situation in which the cultural costs of being a believer are outweighing the gains. There are fewer Christians around us and less Christian influence on the nation's structures and institutions.

Like Jeremiah pointed out to the exiles in his day, this means we have a new opportunity to witness to our culture by showing our neighbors what true faith looks like. We don't have to go out in search of people who need to hear the truth; we likely live next door to them and work alongside them. The mission field surrounds us. And that should be seen as great opportunity – especially since Jeremiah also promises that in the new covenant our evangelism of our pagan neighbors will ultimately be successful (Jer. 31:34)!

It should be obvious from all that this that the church's relationship to the surrounding culture is fluid and dynamic, not fixed and static. There is no "one right way" to relate to the wider culture, suitable for all times and places. The church's gospel and mission remain the same but her posture in the culture and her strategy in reaching the culture have to be flexible. We have to understand the times.

But in most every era, God's people face the same two false alternatives: assimilation and separation. In our day, we are increasingly pressured to assimilate (e.g., admit that Christianity is just one of many religious pathways to the higher power; adopt the world's cynicism and hedonism). In response, many Christians have separated and formed a subculture. But this kind of isolationism has a double negative effect: [1] It makes it impossible for us to reach the world since we have no way of connecting the gospel to the stories people are already living by, and it keeps us relationally distant from those who need to experience God's love through interaction with his people. [2] It also fails to keep worldliness out. Whenever Christians withdraw, they don't actually separate themselves from sin…they take sin with them, in their own hearts, into the Christian ghetto.

The way of Jeremiah and Daniel is much more faithful. Yes the church/new Israel is a distinct culture from the cultures of the world, and in that sense we are separated from the world. But we are separated from the world *for the sake of the world*. Thus, we engage the world, we get involved in the world's institutions, we befriend people who live in the world – *but we do so on the gospel's terms, in a way that bears witness to Christ's lordship.* That's why I stressed the importance of being winsome on Sunday – we want to be gracious and humble, even as we boldly point people to the way, the truth, and the life. We don't want to fulfill any of the negative stereotypes of what "religious" people are like. We want to break through those stereotypes to show people what authentic humanity looks like, that is, live lived according to God's word and for his glory.

Some Christians wonder if anything they do really makes a difference. After all, if we work our jobs faithfully, and try to be a good neighbor to those around us, we still may not see any sudden change take place in the wider culture. My hunch is that God wants us to be faithful in the midst of our day-to-day routines. We go along, doing our business as usual…and then suddenly God puts a huge opportunity in front of us. Because we have been faithful over time in the small things, we suddenly get a chance to make a big impact. This certainly seems to be how it worked for Daniel in exile – you see a sort of "punctuated equilibrium" in his opportunities to make a difference. Si if god is not putting you charge of anything big and cultural-shaping, bide your time and pursue holiness, individually, familially, and vocationally. Your time may well come.

The exile/exodus motif that plays out on Jeremiah is really just small scale version of the biblical story as a whole. Adam and his wife started off with access to the garden, God's sanctuary on earth. When they sinned, they were exiled from God's presence. But at the cross, Jesus took the curse of exile upon himself. He was excluded from the city (Heb. 13), even excluded from the fellowship of the Father and Spirit, so that we could be included once again. He was kicked out of the city that was so that we can take possession of the city that is to come.

We can use the exile in a number of ways. It's a useful metaphor. In our transient culture many people end up living in places they find less than desirable. Perhaps many of you did not choose to live in Birmingham; the choice was made for you. (I'm not saying

Birmingham is undesirable – I feel just the opposite. But I know that in the modern world, there are always people who end up in a place where they do not fell totally at home.)

Jeremiah would apply his message to that situation: Even if you're away from home, make a home where God has put you. Do not hold yourself aloof or separate from the people and culture. Make the most of it. Get I involved. Get know your neighbors. Learn about the cultural quirks of the place. Visit local museums and landmarks. Talk to people who have lived in the city a long time about how things have changed. Get to know the names of civil and business leaders and pray for them. Etc. In short, train yourself to love and embrace the place God has put you – for only in that way can you really seek for and pray for its *shalom*.

While we are entering an exile situation in the West, other parts of the world are moving into a Christendom situation. This is a fascinating development on the world stage. I'm not sure if there are more books being published on the end of Christendom in the West or the rise of a new Christendom in the South and East. At any rate, we should not think the cause of the gospel is failing. The church in our part of the world is waning, but she is thriving beyond measure elsewhere. That's hopeful thought.

Let me add a little bit of nuance to my discussion of how Christians should engage the culture. In almost every situation, we end up with "insiders" and "outsiders." That is, God uses and the church includes both those who navigate their way their way through worldly institutions to the top and those who stand on the outside to prophetically critique them from the edges.

It is fascinating to consider that Jesus' original band of disciples included both Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot, two men who had a very different relationship to the political structures of the day. Obviously, both had to change their views of Israel and Rome when they committed to following Jesus. And whereas they would have been terrible enemies before meeting Jesus, their common share in his ministry made them friends. The gospel should appeal to both insiders and outsiders, elites and plebs.

Take another example. Obadiah was part of King Ahab's monarchy. But he used his power for good, working on the inside. At one point, he was able to hide fifty prophets in a cave, sparing their lives. He was a covert agent for the kingdom in the midst of a corrupt political system. Meanwhile, Elijah stood on the outside of Ahab's regime and gave a scathing prophetic critique. Obadiah and Elijah – one an insider, another an outsider, and yet both faithfully engaged the system from the place God had put them.

It was the same for Jeremiah and Daniel. Daniel became one of the cultural elites, with a great deal of influence. He was likely Nebudchandezzar's right hand man when the Babylonian armies invaded and conquered Jerusalem for good, razing the temple to the ground. Jeremiah, meanwhile, was on the outside of the power structures, as marginalized

as could be. He was there in Jerusalem when it was finally leveled – and he wept over it (cf. Lamentations). But both Daniel and Jeremiah were doing God's work, and there even seems to be an implicit appreciation for one another (Daniel obviously implements the program of Jeremiah 29, and Jeremiah endorses the work of Babylon as a work of God that should be accepted).

John the Baptist and Paul were outsiders. John ended up with his a head on a platter because of a political, prophetic critique of Herod, offered from the outside. Paul was a citizen of the empire and used his citizenship for good. But that was protection against persecution. He was arrested as an enemy of Caesar and carted off to Rome. Meanwhile, there are other hints in the NT that there were believers inside the regimes of both Herod and Caesar. There were outsiders who got in trouble with the powers that be – while there were insiders trying to reshape the political order from within (ultimately this came to fruition with the conversion of Constantine).

Some of us will find ourselves more on the inside, others on the outside, of the cultural power structures of the day. But wherever God puts us, we have a role to play.

It is not enough for the church to have a vision for the church; she must also have a vision for the city. She must show care and concern for the wider community, not simply her own members. The heavenly city has a responsibility for the earthly city – not just to condemn the earthly city where she is in rebellion, but to bring forgiveness, healing, transformation, and blessing.

If we are in an exile situation, we must remember *God* put us here (Jer. 29:4). No society is impervious to the power of the gospel, if we will only bear witness faithfully. Jeremiah reminds us that exile is not a sign we are abandoned – God is still with us (Jer. 29:10-14). Therefore, we can be bold in both prayer and action.

While the exile for the Jews lasted 70 years, in another sense it lasted much longer. (Daniel 9 stretches it out to 490 years, down to time of Christ). Our cultural exile might last a very long time. Indeed, China might be a discipled, Christianized nation before America is again.

But no matter what happens, we know what we're supposed to be doing.

While in exile, we cannot be content with personal salvation. The easy thing to do is focus all our Spiritual energy on becoming better Christians in private. But we must understand that God's redemptive plan always includes more than individual souls. God is reconciling all things to himself in Christ – and that includes the state, arts, business, education, etc.

N. T. Wright captures this aspect of our calling well:

As I've said before, God is going to fix the whole world. He's going to put the whole world to rights. But actually, the advance plan for that is to put human beings to rights in advance. And when that happens, which is what happens through the gospel, it isn't just, *Phew! I'm okay now so I'm going to heaven!* It's *I am actually being put right, in order that I can be part of that ongoing purpose.*In other words, it's both *conversion* and *call*, which as it was for Paul… *converted* to see that Jesus is the Messiah, which he'd never dreamt of before, *called* simultaneously *ipso facto* to be the apostle to the Gentiles. And in the same way, when the gospel reaches an individual, it is so that they can take part in God's larger kingdom project.

In the sermon, I talked about how we are the priests of the city, called to stand between God and the city and pull down his blessings through prayer. Aidan Kavanaugh captures well the cosmic, urban scope of our priestly ministry in the liturgy. In the liturgy we "do the world right." We diagnose the world's ills and distribute the solution.

The Sunday liturgy of Christians addresses itself primarily to the object of the assembly's ministry, the world. The Sunday liturgy is not the Church assembled to address itself. The liturgy thus does not cater to the assembly. It summons the assembly to enact itself publicly for the life of the world. Nor does this take place as a dialogue with the world, often a partner whose uninterested absence reduces the dialogue to an ecclesiastical monologue. The liturgy presumes that the world is always present in the summoned assembly, which although not of "this world" lives deep in its midst as the corporate agent, under God in Christ, of its salvation. In this view, the liturgical assembly IS the world being renovated according to the divine pleasure - not as patient being passively worked upon but as active agent faithfully cooperating in its rehabilitation. What one witnesses in the liturgy is the world being done as the world's Creator and Redeemer will the world to be done. The liturgy does the world and does it at its very center, for it is here that the world's malaise and its cure well up together, inextricably entwined.

Tim Keller has made Jeremiah 29 a driving text behind his ministry. He offers some helpful thoughts in a couple of blogposts (http://www.redeemer2.com/visioncampaign/index.cfm?page=keller_blog), which I have reproduced in their entirety here:

Oct 3rd

As a follow-up to this week's sermon on "The City" and last week's weblog entry about Jeremiah 29, I'd like to call your attention to a little known incident in Jeremiah 32.

Somewhere in the year 588-587 BC, after Nebuchadnezzar had already taken the professional classes of Jerusalem away for exile and (they hoped) cultural assimilation, and just as the Babylonian army was descending on the starving and plague-devastated city of Jerusalem (32:24) to finally destroy it, Jeremiah's cousin came to him in prison

(32:2; 33:1.) He urged Jeremiah to buy a field from him. What a ridiculous (and incredibly exploitative) request! The entire economy of Israel was collapsing. All real estate in Israel was now worthless. Anyone in his right mind should pick up everything of value that he could carry on his back and just get out. But 'the word of the Lord' came to Jeremiah (32:6-8a) and told him to buy the field! Why? *"This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says: Take these documents, both the sealed and the unsealed copies of the deed of purchase, and put them in a clay jar so they will last a long time. For….houses, fields, and vineyards will again be bought in this land."* (32:15)

This is remarkable. What do we learn from this?

A) First, this shows that the Bible does not split off 'spiritual' claims and faith from the realities of public life. Jeremiah makes a real estate purchase based on something that can only be known by faith—that God was going to renew the city and establish the life of his people in it. We also believe God is establishing his people in the city. We are calling people to move into the city and/or stay in the city and raise families here. We should not split off our spiritual lives from our public life. We should invest in the life of the city whether the economy is doing well, or whether terrorism is making people very nervous at the moment. Indeed, Redeemer itself is finally purchasing property and investing in the life of the city. Walter Brueggeman expresses the meaning of Jeremiah 32 well:

"In the exercise of family economic responsibility, the prophet enacts the long-term fidelity of God as well. Jeremiah invests in God's promised future exactly when that future seems completely closed off." (A Commentary on Jeremiah, p.303.)

B) Secondly, Jeremiah is told to buy the land as a sign that God will restore the city and society—even though Jeremiah himself will not live to see it. Jeremiah is to base his economic transactions not on the so-called 'realities' of the present real estate market, but on the hope and promise of God's future. So we here in NYC are laying the ground-work for a city-shaping Christian community 20 times larger and many times more mature and multi-dimensional than it is now. Many of us won't live to see it. But we must get started. Phil Ryken puts the meaning of Jeremiah 32 like this:

"Do you have the faith to act on God's promises, even if some of them will not be fulfilled until the end of history? Jeremiah…made a major life decision based on what God promised to do seven decades later….Some Christians move into the city. On purpose. Some Christians feed the homeless or tutor…Some Christians reach across ethnic and economic barriers to form friendships….Some Christians give away 10 percent of their income—or more….All these behaviors seem strange to the pagan mind. The strongest countercultural movement in twenty-first century America will be the church of Jesus Christ." (Courage to Stand, p.159-160)

Sept 28th

Redeemer's purpose in the city is *'To build a great city for all people through a gospel movement that brings personal conversion, community formation, social justice, and cultural renewal in New York City and, through it, the world.'*

Sounds good—but where in the Bible do we see Christians called to such a purpose? This fall we are looking at Biblical texts every single week that explain different aspects of this mission. However, there is one single Scriptural passage that our entire purpose statement follows idea for idea. That is the letter God sent to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, in Jeremiah 29:

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: *"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."* (verses 4 through 7)

The historical background to this message is important. The Jews had existed in their own nation-state, in which faith in the Biblical God was the official religion. When the Babylonian army sacked Jerusalem, they, as was their policy, carried off Israel's professional classes and leaders to exile in Babylon. It was expected that within a generation or two, the exiles would assimilate culturally and lose their national and religious distinctives.

Their first response to the situation was to stay outside the city of Babylon and form a homogeneous enclave of believers. But to the horror and amazement of the listeners, God commands them in Jeremiah 29 to instead move into the heart of the pagan city, become involved in its cultural and economic life, and seek the common good of the Babylonian oppressors who had destroyed their homeland! God calls them to *increase* in number—they are <u>not</u> to lose their identity as a distinct and different people. Yet they are not allowed separatist withdrawal either. They are to minister to the whole city, to all the people, out of the resources of their spiritual and moral difference. Some have called this 'nonviolent social resistance' to the dominant culture. The Jews were to keep their distinctive beliefs and practices (surely offensive in many ways to the sensibilities of the Babylonians) but were to serve their neighbors and city anyway. This is the best possible way to undermine the themes and practices of the dominant culture. It is a corporate version of *'if your enemies are hungry, feed them…overcome evil with good.'* (Romans 12:20-21.)

This could not be more directly relevant for Redeemer people. We too are mainly professionals. And, as Christians living between the first and second comings of Christ, we are 'exiles.' James 1:1 and 1 Peter 1:1 refer to Christians as 'exiles' and the book of Hebrews repeatedly calls Christians 'resident aliens.' In other words, Christians are dispersed among 'the nations' just as the Jews were during the Babylonian exile. Our relationship to culture is basically the same. Therefore we should apply the call of God to

the Jewish exiles in Babylon to our life in New York City. Our purpose statement is lifted directly out of this challenge:

1. **We are to *build a great city*** just as God called the believers to seek the *"prosperity of the city—and pray for it."* (v7) God did not tell the exiles to just use the city to build up their own community, but rather to use the resources of the community to build up the city.
2. **We are to *be a gospel movement.*** Just as God called the exiles to *"increase, do not decrease,"* so we want to plant hundreds of churches, so that the Christian community in New York's center city increases 15-20-fold over the next generation.
3. **We are to *bring personal conversion, community formation, social justice, and cultural renewal.*** God does not only call the exiles to seek the prosperity of Babylon, but also its 'peace'—its *shalom*. The Hebrew word *shalom* is an extremely rich concept—it means full human flourishing in every aspect. When the prophets (like Isaiah) describe shalom, they assume it means spiritual conversion and true worship but also social justice for the poor and cultural products that glorify God, not 'man.' So God is calling believers to seek the full range of human renewal in the city—individual, spiritual, communal, social, cultural.
4. **We are to *influence the world through New York City.*** Notice that God ends by saying, that *'if [Babylon] prospers, you too will prosper.'* Cities have enormous cultural influence. Trends that capture the life of the city tend to flow out into the whole society. But God does not call the exiles to try a political or military takeover of Babylon. They are not to do to Babylon what Babylon did to them. Rather, they are to seek the prosperity and common good of the whole city. Yet, God says, ironically, this *will* give the community a great deal of cultural power and clout. Through their service to the city they will become attractive. Their ideas will matter. Their God will be honored. And whatever influences the city influences the whole culture. God here lays down an important principle: the way to power and influence is not to seek power and influence, but to seek to serve.

   This is urban ministry—changing the world through serving. And this means that the ultimate urban missionary was Jesus. He did not commute in from heaven but moved into our neighborhood. And instead of taking power he gave it up and sacrificially loved and died for us. And as a result he is now the most influential figure in the history of the world—and this power-through-service will only grow until the world is completely mended and made new.

Joel Garver recently preached on Jeremiah 29. His thoughts further underscore some the themes in my sermon, so I have pasted them in here (see http://sacradoctrina.blogspot.com/2007/10/homily-for-proper-23c.html for the full sermon):

Here in chapter 29, the prophet Jeremiah sends a letter from Jerusalem to the Jewish community in Babylon, delivering a word from the Lord addressing their situation.

From the content of the message, it appears that the exile community had been stirred up by unfounded hopes of imminent deliverance, particularly by false prophecies of Babylon's defeat (narrated in the previous chapters and alluded to later in chapter 29). Moreover, these prophecies seemed to be stirring up unrest in both Jerusalem and among the exiles, perhaps even inspiring thoughts of rebellion against their foreign rulers.

With our knowledge of the larger story of Israel, and from our historical distance, we may be puzzled by these hopes for a freedom soon-at-hand or these plots of political non-cooperation with imperial power. In the face of exile, did Israel *still* doubt the word of the Lord? Had the Lord not been clear that their exile would last 70 years, more than a generation?

I suspect, however, that few of us really have much sense of how traumatic the experience of the Jewish people must have been as they suffered through forced migration to a distant land – or what a sense of grief, anger, and hopelessness such exile might generate. And yet our present world is full of such stories of exile and mass deportation or displacement, from political oppression of Buddhists in Tibet to the civil war in Sudan, down to the after effects of hurricane Katrina in our own country or those victims brought here as part of global human trafficking.

In his novel *Gate of the Sun*, Lebanese Christian author Elias Khoury weaves a fictional account of Palestinians driven into Lebanon by the creation of the state of Israel and the 1948 war. The story is told as a series of flashbacks narrated by the main character, Yunes Al-Asadi, as he lies in bed, weak and broken after four decades of exile and struggle, dying in a dilapidated hospice in a refugee camp.

It is a story of ongoing armed struggle against irretrievable loss, of love tested and stretched thin over the distances generated by geography and political unrest, of the pain and daily struggle living as a refugee carrying keys to a family home now occupied by others, of unflagging passion for the restoration of what has been lost and a passion for a renewed justice and peace that never comes, of the inevitable passing away of a generation that remembered a previous way of life for their people.

Many of these contemporary stories of exile echo the experience of God's people in Babylon and help illuminate all they must have gone through and lost.

Moreover, we find ourselves drawn into such stories of exile and are moved by the human suffering and costs they involve. We recognize that exile is not an experience peculiar to Israel. We do not remain untouched by tales of unrest, distress, and tumult among the nations of our present world. Rather they resonate with our own lives, our own losses, our own struggles, unbelief, and failure in the midst of a broken world.

And why is this? It's because our personal stories, and the human story as a whole, are a

story of exile and return, expulsion from the God's garden of delight and the promise of redemption, of profound loss and the hope of restoration.

So let's look at today's Old Testament and Epistle readings a bit more closely. I want to draw out three main themes: first, seeking peace; second, enduring hardship; and third, speaking truth.

Seeking Peace

As the Lord addresses the exiles through Jeremiah, he confronts their false hopes with an extraordinary message, challenging the deceptions of the prophets. He urges them to set aside their expectations of imminent release and their plots of political unrest.

Instead, the Lord encourages the exiles to settle down and lead normal lives: "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce." The God of Israel goes on to encourage parents to seek the marriage of their children and to look forward to the birth of a new generation, there in Babylon, a generation who would never know what it was like to have once lived in the land of promise.

In the face of being uprooted from their homes, perhaps torn from their families, oppressed by a foreign political regime, and forcibly deported to a distant land – in the face of all of this, the Lord tells the exiles to settle in for a lengthy stay, to put down roots and embrace the situation into which he had sent them at this time.

After all, living in constant turmoil and unhappiness would not resolve or change their situation. Impatience could not end the exile any sooner.

Furthermore, instead of the exiles seeing their situation as wholly negative or as an unmitigated evil, the Lord encourages his people to find in it a new opportunity and a new calling or vocation within God's larger purposes for his people. He says to them, "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."

"Seek the welfare," that is, the peace or *shalom* of Babylon. What does this mean? This notion of "peace" is not simply a desire for the Jewish exiles to live quiet lives in their new situation, unmolested by their Babylonian neighbors. Rather, within the larger scope of the biblical narrative this peace, God's *shalom*, is the overflow of God's effective presence and rule in the world. It is the new, hope-filled future that God promised to his people, when he himself would come into their midst and establish his kingdom, when Israel's oppressors would receive judgment, and the entire created order would be renewed and made whole.

And this – this peace, this *shalom* – is what the Lord calls Israel to seek in the midst of her exile in Babylon. And the exiles are to seek this peace not just for themselves, but also for Babylon. They are to intercede in prayer for their enemies and oppressors. They are to seek the salvation and renewal of those into whose land they had been deported and

among whom they live as strangers and even enemies.

Furthermore, it is in seeking this peace and welfare of Babylon that the exiles would find their own peace and know their God to be faithful. While the Lord continued to hold out the hope and promise of an eventual return from exile, in *this* place and at *this* time, he called his people to seek the salvation of their enemies and to pursue wholeness in the midst of exile. And, what is more, the Lord connects and binds together Israel's own peace and renewal with that of their new home.

What can we learn from this for our own situations and contexts?

We ourselves continue to live as exiles in the midst of a broken world. While God's promise of a hope-filled future and the establishment of his kingdom and *shalom* are certain, we do not yet experience their full reality.

We find that projects we undertake lie unfinished, almost forgotten. Or that career hopes and vocational dreams we held to when we were younger have been pushed aside by obligations of family or the difficulties of our workplace.

Various relationships we had once entered into and in which we found joy and fulfillment may end up stretched thin by distance or neglect or sometimes broken apart entirely.

Perhaps our finances are unexpectedly tight or the car is falling apart and we don't have the means to replace it right now. Or maybe our next door neighbors are not the ones we had hoped for. Or perhaps we are more lonely than we ever imagined we'd be or we've experienced the loss of a loved one, or infertility, or the miscarriage of an unborn child.

Whatever the case, in our daily lives we encounter constant reminders – large and small – that this present age is not our final destination and that our hearts long and ache for the future that God has in store for us, for the establishment of his kingdom, and for the restoration of our world.

And we are tempted, like the exiles in Babylon, to seek immediate solutions, to listen to voices that offer false promises of quick results; we are tempted to rise up against the difficulties facing us in ways that are likely to harm us and those around us.

So what are God's words through the prophet Jeremiah calling us to do?

Seek peace – seek the welfare of the city – to embrace the situations into which God has sent us, to embrace them as his calling upon our lives here and now.

To regard them as opportunities in which we can make the peace of the Lord known through our response to circumstances and in our service to others, in planting gardens and establishing our homes as places of welcome.

To intercede in prayer on behalf of those around us caught up in the same difficulties or

to pray for them and their salvation even when they are the source of our difficulties.

To acknowledge God's faithfulness to us and to his promises even in the midst of hardship.

And God's promise is that in seeking the peace and welfare of others, we will find our own. By carrying God's salvation – his kingdom and wholeness – into the dark and broken places of our own lives, God's redeeming presence overflows into the lives and situations around us. And in seeking the welfare and *shalom* of those around us, we will find that God remains faithfully among us. The salvation of each of us is inextricably bound up with God's saving purposes for others.

And so, we are to seek peace in all the places of this world into which God sends us.

Finally, for those who would like to pursue the missional aspect of the church's calling further, I would strongly recommend reading the works of Lesslie Newbigin, particularly *Foolishness to the Greeks* and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society.*
