



“Dear exiles, living far from home in a foreign land,
defeated political leaders and displaced religious leaders ...
“Dear rulers and priests I’ve warned and exhorted to do better,
to avoid this disaster which has come to pass
“Here is God’s word to you, now that the worst has happened ...

The first reading today is a letter written by the prophet Jeremiah
to the exiles of Judah in Babylon.

It must have taken everything he had not to start with,

“I told you so.

“If you’d listened to me, this never would have happened.”

But he doesn’t say that.

Instead, he offers a message from God which is both difficult
and filled with hope and promise.

Now that you are in Babylon, Jeremiah tells them, you need to settle in,
because you will be there for a while.

Build homes. Marry and have children. Invest in life.

God has not forgotten you.

God will bring you home.

But not soon. Not for generations.



So your work now, in a hostile, foreign place far from home,
is to engage in the work of life and love and community.
Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you, God says,
for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

The word translated here as welfare is the word *shalom*.

A word full of meaning, without a good English equivalent.

Shalom means peace and well-being and wholeness.

And God says that that is God’s wish for the Israelites in exile –

as well as for the community in Babylon where they are living.

The shalom of the exiles is now bound to the shalom of their new community.

The work of the exiles now is to continue to live as God's shalom people,
even in a foreign place, among those they consider enemies.

The people of Judah had turned their back on God's blessing,
and now they were living the consequences.

But God has not given up on them.

Surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord –
and it's a plural you.

God has plans for all ya'll, the whole community of exiles.

God says, I have plans for your welfare – your shalom – your hope.

And even now – even in exile, even in suffering –
if you seek me, you will find me.

I will be with you, as you give yourselves to new life and love and community
in the faraway land where you now dwell.



It's a gutsy letter for Jeremiah to write to the elders of Judah in exile.

He has never been their favorite person,

in all the years he called out their unfaithfulness
and warned them of the consequences God would bring.

And even as he writes, he knows there are other prophets saying
just what the people want to hear.

Don't worry, they say.

Everything will be ok, this will pass, we'll go home soon.

Don't look at that man behind the curtain, they say.

But Jeremiah has never shied away from the truth.

And now that the worst has happened, Jeremiah has new truth to offer.

The exile will be long.

The struggle won't be easy.

But even in the struggle, even in the grief,
there is promise and hope.

Because that is the truth of our God – the God of shalom and love and promise.

Jeremiah offers the elders in exile a different vision
than either the hopelessness of despair
or the too simple hope of a quick happy ending.

He offers a vision of community, of work and commitment to a common good
which will bring shalom to the Israelites in exile
even as it brings shalom to their new home.
Remember, it has always been God's plan that the ones God has chosen and
blessed will serve as a blessing to the whole world.



Last Saturday I attended the Lutheran Advocacy Ministry – NM fall conference.

We always have good speakers at these conferences –
speakers who can explain the issues at stake for people in NM
speakers who inspire with their commitment to serve the community.
This year, two of the speakers made reference to renowned OT professor
Walter Brueggemann and his writing about the prophetic imagination.
Brueggemann defined a prophet as one who intentionally nourishes a perspective
different than the dominant culture.
Lifting up the parts of culture which are contrary to God's will and vision,
the prophet imagines and offers an alternative way of living,
a way which encompasses God's shalom for the community.

Such a prophetic imagination is an imagination we need now.
Like Jeremiah, we need to see and speak words against the political leaders
who personify callous indifference to suffering.
Leaders who encourage racial profiling and turn a blind eye to illegal detention
of legal immigrants and citizens.

We are not in exile,
and let me be clear that I do not in any way think what is happening now
is a consequence of anything other than our own poor choices.
But there are days I feel like an exile in my own country.
The speed with which so many protections and compassionate structures
have been dismantled has been shocking.
In this midst of grief and anxiety, I need to be drawn in
by a prophetic imagination such as that of Jeremiah.
The words of Jeremiah remind me – remind all of us –
that our work as God's people is still the same –
the work of building, planting and harvesting
the work of creating community and caring for all God's people
the work of nurturing the common good.

One of the speakers last weekend was Representative Angel Charley.
She is a member of the Laguna pueblo,
and her district includes Laguna pueblo and the city of Gallup.
She spoke of justice, as rooted in her indigenous perspective,
as a matter of balance.
She raised the question – why is there imbalance such that some people have
more than they need and others don't have enough?
To bring justice, Rep Charley said, means to move from a place of charity –
I have more so I will share what I have with you who have less –
to a place of balance, of right relationship, where all have what they need.
To me, that sounds like prophetic imagination.
To question the imbalance, the injustice, in the status quo,
and dare to imagine and speak a different vision –
of justice and safety, food and health care and adequate housing, for all.



Jeremiah said, in the midst of your difficult situation,
as strangers in a strange land,
seek the shalom of the city in which you live –
for your shalom is connected to their shalom.
That is the prophetic vision for us as well.
In a culture that thrives on individualism and getting ahead,
we are called to seek balance and justice,
to work for shalom for all the neighbors in our city and state,
in our nation and in the world.
We can't change it all – but we can make our small difference,
as God's people, beloved and chosen, in this time and place.
And God promises that through the work,
through the seeking and hoping and praying,
God will be with us and give us peace.

Thanks be to God.
Amen