

Re-read text: Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

These 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.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take 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. But 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.

INTRO/OT CONTEXT

- God's Word to God's People---first challenging, then liberating
- Exiles wanted to hear--"you're going home soon!"
- Jeremiah says: No such luck. God says settle in for the long haul!
 - Build houses, plant gardens, get married, look forward to welcoming children and grandchildren in this place...and above all, "seek the welfare of the city where you are in exile. Pray for that city. In its welfare you will find your welfare."

How often do we--like those exiles in Babylon-- imagine that our lives, our joy, our future, our faithfulness are contingent on our external circumstances...or contingent on God doing what we want God to do first.

The exiles are saying to themselves...

As soon as God delivers us back home to Jerusalem, I will finally be able plant a garden and share its fruits.

As soon as God delivers us back home to Jerusalem, you will finally be able to consider getting married & starting a family.

As soon as God delivers us back home to Jerusalem, we will finally be able to pray and praise God as we ought to.

God says...what are you waiting for? Make your home HERE! Plant that garden NOW. Start that family NOW. Pray and praise me NOW!

I wonder if and when YOU have put off responding with faithfulness to God's call in the present, in the hopes that circumstances will be more favorable for faithfulness sometime down the road?

I know I've done it (and not only in the past tense; I continue to do it all the time!)

Surely, I will finally be able to live and give more generously...

As soon as I've paid off these darn student loans...

As soon as the kids are through college...

As soon as I start making a little more money...

Surely, I will finally be able to get more involved in my community...

Once I get my feet underneath me at work...

After I graduate...

Once we have elected more sympathetic leadership...

Surely, I will finally be able to devote more time to prayer and my spiritual life...

Once these other major projects are behind me...

Once the kids are grown...

Once I've retired....

Sometimes the stakes don't seem all that high...

I would certainly be closer to my siblings

If only they would be a little less judgmental

If only they would respond in kind when I try to reach out

If only they would make some effort to pull their weight in the family

Other times the stakes are a matter of life and death...

I will certainly be overflowing with thanksgiving...

If I find a job...

If I can get housing...

If the treatment is successful...

GOSPEL

In today's Gospel 10 lepers approach Jesus, begging for mercy. Jesus commands them to go and show themselves to the priests. And as they go, they are made clean. Then one of them--the godless Samaritan in the group--seeing that he is healed, begins to praise God in a loud voice and turns back immediately to throw himself at the feet of Jesus and thank him. What about the other 9? No one knows for sure. I'm willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. I imagine they are thinking to themselves. "As soon as I've finished this errand on which I was sent--as soon as I've gone to see the priests and get the official, "clean bill of health" from the proper ritual authorities I will have to return and thank Jesus. Well, after I see the priests *and* tell my family the good news, that is. And of course, I have all this business in the community to catch up on, that I haven't been able to do on account of my illness. But once I'm all caught up and all my affairs are in order, I will have to make time to go back and thank Jesus.

CONCLUSION

It is the actions of the "double outcast" --a leper AND a Samaritan-- in Luke's Gospel that remind us:

The time to do the most important thing is always NOW. The time to respond to God's Call to Faithful Living is always NOW. NOW is always the time to stop and praise God. NOW is always the time to turn around and give thanks.

Just as the words of the unpopular Prophet Jeremiah to the Babylonian exiles remind us:

NOW is the time to get busy building the home, the family, the church, the community you long for. NOW is the time to sow the seeds that will nourish you and your community in the future. NOW is the time to connect, to love, to commit. NOW is the time to welcome new life. NOW is the time to seek the welfare of the city--the church, the neighborhood, the nation, the planet--in which you find yourself. For "*for in its welfare you will find your welfare*". And, above all, NOW is the time to pray. To pray for whatever people, and places, and circumstances surround you. Those you welcome and those you don't. Those you enjoy and those you don't. Even those that might seem, at times, to assault and oppress and hold you captive.

This is true, hard Gospel. The Good News that usually sounds like bad news at first. The bad news is that God might not give us exactly what we want...maybe not right away...maybe not ever. The good news is that, God gives us the freedom to live and love fully and faithfully-- even in the midst of circumstances we don't prefer. The Good News is that neither our adverse circumstances nor our adversaries themselves can strip us of our agency; our power to choose generosity, community, prayer, connection, and gratitude.

Now is the time. Wherever you find yourself--that is the place. To live and love fully and faithfully. To pray without ceasing. And to give thanks.