

18th Sunday after the Pentecost
October 9, 2022
Southampton, MA

Scripture: Jeremiah 29: 4-14

Several years ago the adult Bible study group studied an overview of Jeremiah. It is an interesting book as Jeremiah seemed to spend his life telling the people that they needed to change their ways and turn to God, and for that he was beaten and thrown into wells. It is similar to the lives of the early disciples. Following God is not always easy, but then we are not promised prosperity but “the peace of God that passes all understanding.”

The Israelites did not listen to Jeremiah and ended up going into exile. The deportation was approximately 597 BC. The book of Daniel happened during this time, as Daniel was one of the exiles. The first few verses of this chapter tell you that this letter is from Jeremiah to the people who were captured and sent to Babylon. The problem was that there was tension between those that remained in Jerusalem and those that were exiled to Babylon. The people who remained in Jerusalem thought that they were special and better in the sight of God. Jeremiah is writing this letter to correct this misunderstanding and to let the exiled people know that they have a key role in determining Judah’s future. It was not to be a short stay, as the false prophets predicted, but it was to be 70 years, which compared to the 400 in Egypt, that is relatively short.

When Jerusalem fell the residents were divided into 3 groups: those left behind in Jerusalem, those who fled to Egypt, and the 12 to 16,000 who were deported by Nebuchadnezzar. This number was key to help maintain the Jewish nation. They needed to settle down, start families, so there would be the hope of the future generations.

Jeremiah is acting as a true shepherd, he is advising the exiles to settle down, build a life there and work to see that the city/country where they were sent prospers. Pray for Babylon, in other words pray for your enemies, for there is hope that is coming. In Romans 5 “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope and hope does not disappoint.” He is also telling the Israelites to be a blessing to the world around them, this command goes back to Abraham in Genesis 12 vs 2 & 3.” All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Are we being a blessing to the world around us? Our little corner?

Jeremiah wrote to 3 kinds of people, the first are those who thought that they had no hope. These people had just been uprooted from the world that they knew. Some came with their family, they probably had few possessions, and Jeremiah is telling them to trust God and let God have His way. They

should accept the situation and put themselves in the hands of a loving God. How often do we rebel against a situation that we are in or think that we have no hope. In the Ruth Bible study, we talked about Ruth's mother – in- law, Naomi, who left Bethlehem with a husband and 2 sons. She returned with one daughter-in-law and said call me Mara which means bitter. She thought that she was in a hopeless situation, but in a few short months her situation was changed, Ruth was married to a true gentleman, as our Bible study group called him, Boaz. She realized there was hope, there had always been hope, it just took awhile to see it.

The second kind of people are those with false hopes. They were clinging to the false prophets who claimed 2 years and not 70. Put your faith in God. It does no good to hang our harps on the willow trees (Psalm 137) . Adjust, turn to God and His word, and rely on what God is telling you, not what you wish could be. Look at what God is providing, the exiles were told to live there, create homes, start families. Deal with the reality that God is giving you. There is hope, there is always hope with God.

The third type of people are those who know that they have true hope. All the exiles should have fallen in this group, true hope. This hope is based on the revealed word of God. God gives them a gracious promise to deliver the exiles, good plans to bring them hope and peace. God will hear their prayers; He will be available to them, to us. When we read verses 10 – 14, and we are reading YOU, think that God is talking to us and means me/us. We have no need for fear. God has plans to prosper us, He will listen to us when we pray to Him, we will find Him when we seek Him. We must do the seeking though. How many of these verses have something similar in the New Testament, hear our prayers, seek with all our heart and soul, gather us together.

Verses 10 – 14 are words of encouragement. They stress God's covenantal relationship with us. It is real in trying times. These verses can be found in the New Testament. Call upon me, I will hear you, seek me. God doesn't change, He does respond differently in different situations, as do we, but He is always there for us.

We are a people with hope. We have Jesus as a guide, a friend, a shield, a Savior. We as a Church have gone through our own sort of exile and dark days. We can look forward to a new hope, and a new life for our Church and its role in our community. Things might be different, but different isn't bad, it is just not the way we once did it. It is God showing us a new way to spread His love and His word, to reach out to our little corner. We need to continue to pray for our Church, our town, and our government. If we seek the Lord with all our heart and soul, He will answer us and give us a future

filled with hope. It may be different than what we are thinking about, but if it is God's future for us, then it is blessed. Amen

- Candy Iwanicki