

## **Pentecost C21**

**October 9, 2016**

### **“A letter from God”**

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#### ***Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7***

*29*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. *4*Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: *5*Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. *6*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. *7*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.

#### ***2 Timothy 2:3-15***

*8*Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, *9*for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. *10*Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. *11*The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; *12*if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; *13*if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

*14*Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. *15*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

#### ***Luke 17:11-19***

*the 011* On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. *12*As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, *13*they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” *14*When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. *15*Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. *16*He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. *17*Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?” *18*Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” *19*Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

1.

It’s not possible. The people of God, the chosen people, have been conquered and carried into captivity by the Babylonians. This can’t happen. God would never allow it. But there they are, sitting on the banks of the Euphrates River singing their songs of grief and heartache. Far from home. Separated from loved ones left behind. Living in a strange land, the enemy’s land.

God is not coming right away. Rescue is not imminent. They had rebelled against God- worshipped idols and ignored their poor neighbors. Now they wait, and wait.

Should they rebel against their captors? Should they fight? Or maybe they should not cooperate.

Then a letter arrives. A letter from home, from Jerusalem, from Jeremiah, the prophet who repeatedly warned them of their bad behavior and their impending doom. He said the Babylonians are coming--- and they did come. Now Jeremiah’s writing them a letter, probably to say, “I told you so.” Probably to rub it in.

But the letter says “build a house, plant a garden, grow your families. Do the same things there in exile that you would do if you were home in Jerusalem. Find your welfare in your new community, in the land of your enemy.” They are not separate from the world, they are thrust into it. Shocking. And through Jeremiah, God adds one more disturbing detail: find your welfare by working for the welfare of your city, your enemy’s city.”

Take the long view, God is saying.

Have you ever lived in a land you didn't want to be in? --- you receive a doctor's report is upsetting- you don't want to live with that, the election campaign is disturbing-you'd rather live in Canada!, the job didn't come through as you had hoped, or the college acceptance letter turned into a rejection letter This isn't the life you want to live. It isn't what you would choose.

But our lives are intertwined with the lives around us. Our wellbeing with their wellbeing. God cares about each and every one.

Take the long view so you can live in the present moment.<sup>1</sup> Work for the good for those around you, and find your own well-being at the same time. Make friends with the time and place where you are and make friends with the people around you, the ones God is bringing into your life.

*I saw a story this week from Calais, France, where there is a refugee camp called The Jungle. One woman from Calais, named Cordier, joined a group protesting the camp. She'd never been to the camp and asked a reporter if she could go with her to visit it.*

*She was upset by the experience. She said, "We have a life, a roof over our heads, a TV. We get up in the morning and have breakfast." "Where do you sleep?" she asks a young man. He says, "In tents.*

*Cordier, who spent her life working as a nursing assistant, is especially taken with and worried about the children there. She coos at one little girl being held in the arms of a volunteer. She wants to know all of the children's ages and then asks if there's anything they need that she can bring.*

*Cordier says she never imagined The Jungle would be like this. "I imagined a little camp," she says. "Not an immense camp like this one. This is a city."*

*It is a city, whose welfare is inextricably tied to the welfare of Calais. It is a city where Cordier discovers people are tending to children, serving tea and even running little shops. Perhaps those living in "The Jungle" aren't so different than the ones living just outside of it.<sup>2</sup>*

2.

Taking the long view means trusting the future is in good enough hands that we don't worry about it and live contentedly in the present moment, working for the wellbeing of all.

Why can we take the long view of the future? Because we already have the long view of the past. We remember that Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of God and so we know that God will not leave us behind. Our future is in good hands. Our family stories as God's people all point in this direction.

Abraham and Sarah had no hope and no future, but God provided many children, in fact all God's chosen people, through them. These same chosen people were led by God to freedom from captivity in Egypt. They wandered the desert for forty years but came into the Promised Land. They disobeyed God and were taken into exile in Babylon but in time God provided a way home and a new beginning.

Consider the nine lepers who came before Jesus. They knew these stories of God's faithfulness, yet did not remember them and feel moved to thank Jesus for their healing. A tenth leper did, however. Like the others,

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<sup>1</sup> Jill Duffield, *Looking into the Lectionary* for October 9, 2016 from the Presbyterian Outlook.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Jesus healed him of his disease and sent him to the priests so he could leave his exile and rejoin society. But this one leper, a Samaritan, recognized God's goodness, turned around, and thanked Jesus and worshiped him.

We have been saved. Perhaps we have been healed. And maybe we have been released from one exile or another. Having that long view of God's presence and help, we too can thank Jesus, thank God, for all that has been done for us. We can stop and use the present moment to give thanks and to worship.

In a way, Jesus was a letter from God to those lepers. Their separation from society, their exile from everyday life, was the place Jesus chose to work. It was as if Jesus was living out that letter Jeremiah had written so many generations before. He settled down among those who were suffering. He talked with those he met. He heard their stories and then he acted to make a future possible with them. He worked with them for mutual wellbeing.

3.

I'm excited about the time we are sharing now. Knowing that God has pulled us through before, allows us to take the long view. We can trust that there is a future and that we are freed now to share wellbeing with our community.

We can dive into our community now to meet young families and children and learn their names as we have been hoping to do. I really look forward to that. It's part of settling into a community, making our home where God has put us, making friends with those God has put around us.

And along with learning their names we can begin to hear their stories. We can listen to their hopes and dreams and share their setbacks and concerns. Our work with children and their families will be successful if we make ourselves present to them in a way that builds friendships.

Maybe we will also connect with many others of all ages as well. Hopes, dreams, concerns, stories, friendships are all involved with whomever we meet in the days and years ahead.

And as individuals, the truth of God's dependable love gives us a long view to the future, and allows us to address whatever we may be confronting today. God is here, no matter what. If you are walking a long dark valley, God is there. If you are yearning for a better life, a fuller life, that you may have lost along the way, God is there with you. Wherever we are we have the gospel, the gift of the cross and the promise of the resurrection, and the whole history of God's reliable presence with God's people.

Now, did you notice how Jeremiah's letter didn't tell God's people in exile to minister to the community? They weren't there to bestow their wisdom and charity on their neighbors. They were there to make connections, to make friends, to work alongside their Babylonian neighbors for the good of all. To be with them. And Jeremiah makes a point to say everyone's welfare is connected to everyone else's. It's called *mutuality*.

Jeremiah's letter was good news, it was gospel, to people living in exile. Jesus was God's letter of good news, in a way, to those lepers who were out of sight in their own community. I think we too can be letters of good news from God to our community as we plant our gardens of hope and future and new beginnings.

Let's take the long view of God's great acts of grace and mercy, and use the present moment to create wellbeing with our neighbors and for ourselves.