

Week Beginning: 10th September, 2017

Worship Series: #6 in series



living sharing growing



Theme Verse

‘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.’

Jeremiah 29:7

Remember This Week

Whatever the circumstances we find ourselves in today as the people of God, we can trust God to change our tomorrow. So embrace the moment, even if it not what we would choose, put down roots, flourish, pray and let his grace flow through us, transforming communities. For where we are now is where God wants us and needs us to be, so others may have a hope and a future.



**By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.**

There on the poplars we hung our harps,

**for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”**

How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?

Psalms 137:1-4

Gracious Father, as you have created us to live in community, fill us with your grace that it may flow out of our lives into every encounter we have with others. Help us to put down roots in our local communities, being your hands and feet that work together with you to build living communities that are bound together by love and joy, filled with peace and immersed in your grace and mercy. When we feel that we are in exile, in a place that we don't want to be and maybe even among people we don't want to be with, fill us with your grace, that we may see what you are doing in the community in which we live. Teach us through your Word tonight and give us ears to hear what you are calling us to. We ask this in the name of the one who has given us a hope and a future, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



1. *Highs and lows for the week.*
2. *Accountability time. How did you go with your living purposefully from last time?*
3. *Share a time in your life when you just wanted to get 'home'.*
4. *If you could make one place "home" in the world, where would you choose to live?*

A few weeks ago some of the staff attended a 'Thriving Communities Workshop' with local community and business leaders that asked the question, "What would a thriving community look like?" Suggestions included flourishing businesses with local employment, great schools as they connect the community, good healthcare services". What was interesting is that no-one mentioned "growing churches!" Has the church become a stranger in the communities it is placed? What role do we as the body of Christ have in building grace-immersed communities that thrive? How do we engage with a community that is rapidly changing around us? In those moments, where we feel alienated or like strangers in the communities in which we live, God through the prophet Jeremiah shows us how to develop grace immersed communities that flourish, communities in which our very presence offers hope and peace and brings renewal.

Read Jeremiah 29:1-14

5. *What do you find challenging/confusing/confronting about this text?*





Here's the context: the Israelites were in exile, a punishment from God as result of their disobedience. The great Babylonian power had come to Israel, invaded, and taken Israel as exiles of Babylon. In Babylon, they found a huge, hostile, brutal city filled with all of these different people groups with radically different visions of nature, morality, and the nature of the world. Not much has changed in our communities today. When you wake up in the morning, you are often not surrounded by the language of love, grace, and self-sacrifice for the good of the neighbour. You hear works righteousness, self-fulfillment through consumption, how to promote your own self-interests. Individualism. Narcissism. Feel good religion. So how do we live in a community in which we feel we are in exile. Francois Fenelon used to say that **there are two kinds of people: some look at life and complain about what is not there; others look at life and rejoice in what is there.**

6. *How do you tend to live? On the basis of what you don't have or what you do have?*

7. What did Jeremiah tell the people to do in the letter he wrote to them?

☐ V. 4-6

☐ V. 7

☐ V. 8-9

☐ V. 10-14

8. *How do these commands echo what God said in Genesis 1:27-31. What does it tell us about God and his desire for his people?*

The exiles had listened to the lies of the false prophets. They wanted to believe that they would soon return to Jerusalem and everything would be okay again. So they had no need to develop relationships, or care about Babylon at all. Jeremiah's letter was a reminder to them that God was not going to rescue them immediately and that they needed to get on with their lives.

Exile: being in a place you don't want to be among people that you don't want to be with?

9. *What things in your life or past stop you from getting on with your life or putting down roots?*

10. *Share a time when you have felt in exile in your life. It could be geographical, emotional, intellectual or spiritual.*

11. *How did your relationship with God change during this time?*

12. *What obstacles might prevent us from loving and taking responsibility for our community?*

When we read Jeremiah 29:11 carefully, we notice that God's "plans for good" are not for Jeremiah or any other individual, including me or you. The word "you"--in "the plans I have for you"--is plural. The future, the hope God gives "you" is for a crowd, it's for the community, it's for the nation.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God advises the people to settle down, to take the long-term view; God will not sweep down in the next 70 minutes to rescue the people. They have not 70 minutes or 70 days, but 70 years to wait before God acts decisively to redeem the people of Israel which would mean that no adult reading his letter would actually be alive once the plan came to fruition. The 'you' here refers to the Church. No matter how much we read that the Church is declining, struggling, dying, or irrelevant, God is not through with the Church. God has plans for the Church. It may take another 70 years for us to see that plan; for the fulfilment of that plan to be realised. And many of us, will not be around then.

13. *Re-read verse 10-14. How do the words of 10-14 encourage you not only to remain faithful to God in a strange and change-filled society but to invest in it?*

14. *Think of three ways that you can be more open to being used by God in the situation you find yourself in.*

a.

b.

c.

15. *How will you act on them this week?*



- Praise God for your highs, Thank Jesus for embracing you with his love, especially those times what you have felt in exile. Ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen you in your lows and to put down roots in your community as a witness to the Gospel.
- What is one thing your LifeGroup can pray for you this week? Spend time praying for that.
- Pray that we as a Church listen to God and find ways where we can partner with God and invest in our communities to immerse them in his grace.



Turn to the person next to you and make the sign of the cross on the palm of their hand or forehead as you say:
Name, may you live with Christ's hope in your community. Amen.