

Sermon Text – Sunday, October 12, 2025 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: Luke 17:11-19; 2nd Reading: 2 Timothy 2:8-15

Scripture for Message: Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7 - “Your welfare”

From Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:44-45 “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

Chapter 29 in the book of Jeremiah records a letter that Jeremiah writes and sends to those who were taken in exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. These are words of encouragement and comfort, words from God to give the people hope. In addition, this he writes to counteract the false prophets’ claims that their situation would soon be over, so this exile is inconsequential. This letter can be considered Jeremiah’s “pastoral care” to the exiles, urging realism but encouraging hope that while their “situation” would last at least a generation, exile is not permanent, and God will bring them home.

Jeremiah’s letter was not what the ruling priest and other prophets in Judah wanted the people to hear, they themselves did not want to hear Jeremiah’s words from God. The people did not want to settle in the land where God had sent them, they wanted to come home now. The people wanted what they wanted, when they wanted it – failing to trust that God would provide and protect. They did not want to hear these words, and for that reason they persecuted Jeremiah, but these words are what they needed to hear – for their welfare.

Bloom where you are planted is not a biblical phrase, but a similar message is found in our scriptures; both old and new testaments, it is found in this passage from Jeremiah as well. Psalm 92:12-13 “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God.” and from 1 Corinthians 7:24 “Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.” Granted, these verses are taken out of context, but they do support a message of thriving and surviving in the situations you find yourself in. Do this for your own welfare.

Jeremiah is writing this letter to people who are suffering. Taken into captivity, they were torn away from the only homes they had known. They were carried away to live in a foreign land, a land with people whose customs were completely foreign to them. We can read in some of the Psalms how they felt

Sermon Text – Sunday, October 12, 2025 – Pastor Paula Kraus

about this, the depth of their grief and sadness comes through in Psalm 137, “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for 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 songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?” They mourned, and they needed to hear Jeremiah’s words of comfort and encouragement – for their welfare.

Jeremiah tells the people to prepare for the long haul. God is doing something new, yes for them it was painful but “surrendering the treasures of the past makes room for the newness of God”¹ and it is often painful to put aside everything we have known. Taking an example from my own life when I left Louisville. I took a tremendous cut in salary; I left a cute little two-story brick cottage on a cute little tree lined avenue near Churchill Downs and moved into a mobile home in rural Athens. I mourned the loss of everything I had known, but then a cousin sent me a message – it does not matter where you live, live where you are! That is what Jeremiah is telling the exiles. Just love God and live as best as you can even when you find yourself in undesirable circumstances.

When we turn to the New Testament reading from Luke’s gospel there is a similar message. Jesus had mercy on the ten people with leprosy who approached him, and they were made clean, he told them to show themselves to the priests as was the custom before Jewish people could rejoin normal society after a period of illness or uncleanness. However, one, a Samaritan, turned around and praised Jesus for his healing. This foreigner was the only one who thought to thank Jesus for the mercy and stopped to give praise. I wonder if that reinforces the message to praise God in all life’s circumstances. Maybe the other nine praised God in the temple we don’t know but it was the foreigner who recognized that because Jesus saw him and gave him mercy and acceptance, he was made clean.

Something in me, when I hear these words, wants to push back. Is Jeremiah telling these people to “suck it up.” That what is happening is for their own good and they should grin and bear it; or quit complaining? Is Jesus sending the message that if you are mourning or suffering then you lack faith in God? Is that how we respond to someone who is suffering? Are our first words to those who mourn or suffer a scolding for being sad? Is this a message to us that rejoicing in our

¹ Louis Stulman. *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries: Jeremiah*. Abingdon Press. 2005. Print. 257

Sermon Text – Sunday, October 12, 2025 – Pastor Paula Kraus

suffering is God's will and that lament is contrary to God's will? Certainly, anyone who reads Psalms knows that is not the case. We know there is a place for lament and mourning in our Christian journey – but we also know that through all of life's circumstances good and bad God is present. Suffering will come, but God's presence makes our suffering more tolerable.

In our culture today it seems for some that things are deteriorating, morally and financially. Christians sometimes feel like exiles in a foreign land – in fact, we are living in the “already and not yet.” It is hard to focus on God's kingdom while living with the temptations and appeal of this world. According to biblical scholar Walter Bruggemann, “The Exile is the place where God's faithful promises work a profound newness.”² Jeremiah's words then bring comfort to those who are struggling to shed the old and accept God's profound newness. These words serve to remind us that even when it seems foolish and futile, have faith that God can and will bring God's promises to pass, your faith will make you well.

Further in this same letter to the exiles, Jeremiah writes “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” This clearly indicates to those in exile, and to us, that God wants God's people to thrive. Suffering is not God's will for God's people. God, because God experienced the human condition through Jesus, knows humans will suffer, but God is present with us. These words remind us to make clever use of your circumstances for the good of God's kingdom, for your welfare.

What is God really asking of those in exile? One answer is, “By telling the exiled Israelites to build houses, go to work, marry, and pray for their new communities, God is, in fact, telling the Israelites to resist succumbing to the pull of feelings of despair, dismay, depression, and numbness. God is telling them to make the best of a bad situation, try to move forward, and survive.”³ In the broader view of things living this way illustrates for the world the peace and promise of God's presence in the lives of believers. This is a divine reminder to turn the other cheek and do not give in to the temptation to seek vengeance.

² Walter Bruggemann. *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile & Homecoming*. Eerdmans. 1998. Print. 256

³ Song-Mi Suzie Park. “Proper 23 Jeremiah 19:1, 4-7 and 2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c.-Connecting the Reading with the World” *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship Year c*, Vol. 3. eds. Green, Long, Powery, & Rigby. WJK. 2019. Print. 377

Sermon Text – Sunday, October 12, 2025 – Pastor Paula Kraus

The message for believers today is that God will do what God will do but always, in the end, with caring fidelity. All throughout our scriptures we learn of God's love for God's people, calling and waiting for God's people to turn toward God's self. God waits for God's people and God's people must wait for God – whose actions may seem slow according to our concepts of time, but we know God always acts. So, in the meantime, build your houses, plant your gardens, marry and have children – go on living, but live as if you are already in God's kingdom, your eternal homes. Be kind, be loving, be respectful of others and your own selves, hold back your bitterness – show the world what it means to live with Christ. Live as if you know you are a beloved child of God, present yourself as one approved by God with no need for shame.

The message we can take home with us today is that God desires wholeness and restoration – that is why God came to us in the human form of Jesus, to reconcile all of creation to God. God protects all of God's people even when it seems like things are all twisted around, and the world is operating contrary to God's wishes this is not a permanent situation trust that God's will is working in all circumstances. Know that God does not desire suffering, but God knows that humanity is subject to suffering, sometimes tremendous suffering at the hands of other humans and in the circumstances of life in a broken world. Through all our suffering God is present, waiting for us to call out and pray to God – God will hear, and God's mercy will come in God's own time. While you are suffering, whether it is illness, loneliness, grief, anger, bitterness, or confusion – know that God is present, turn to God and lay your burdens at God's feet and God's mercy, compassion, and grace will fill you with strength to get through what you are going through. God does not waste suffering. Through the Spirit, seasons of exhaustion can become seasons of transformation, equipping believers to serve with wisdom, compassion, and resilience. For your own welfare, bloom where you are planted.