

Dear Northfield

I hope and pray that you are all well.

I'm not sure about you, but I know for me one of the things that I've been wrestling with in this season is the constant change. Living life waiting for the next level, then waiting for what the next level means, then as soon as I'm used to what life means living with certain restrictions and regulations, things change. Living life waiting to hear what we may and may not do has left many of us with feelings of uncertainty.

Living life like this reminds me of the many struggles the people of God faced throughout the Bible. One of the struggles that is at the forefront of my mind, is the time when the Judeans were sent into Exile. They were all worshipping God in the Temple, they had rituals and routines, a way of life. The one minute they were living in the city of Jerusalem with a sense of security and safety because of the great walls. The next minute, life changed. The Temple was destroyed and the city captured. Suddenly some people, the leaders particularly, were taken from the city and sent into Exile in Babylon. I can only imagine a sense of hopelessness and helplessness must have filled the people. Everything they once knew and relied on has changed. Their way of worship has been shattered, their homes and livelihoods threatened and destroyed. I think of those left behind and those taken away, for them life was completely different.

To a large degree I look at what has happened to us in South Africa and even the world, and I have a sense that now we understand something of what that must have felt like. When all of life is suddenly different, when the way we worship has been destroyed and changed, there is a sense of mourning and dis-ease. In the midst of all of this uncertainty that plagued the Jews during the Exile, Jeremiah writes to those taken away. He writes them a letter with the promise that God has a plan for them; a plan to prosper them and not to harm them (Jeremiah 29:11). I believe that is a promise we need to be holding on to in this season as well. God has a plan for us; a plan to prosper and not to harm us, a plan to give us a hope and a future, and God knows those plans for us. Having said this though, there was a temptation for those who were living in exile to do nothing, to simply become stagnant and wait. There was a temptation for them to be frozen in the past and longing for the future, and forgetting how to live in the present. There was a temptation for them to live life in Babylon mourning the loss of the Temple, and looking only towards the day when they can return to Jerusalem. Jeremiah warns them against this. Jeremiah encourages the people in Babylon to live life in their present reality. Jeremiah tells the people stuck in Babylon that God has a message for them, and this is God's message for them:

*"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, 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 29:4-7).*

In the midst of the exile Jeremiah tells the people that they need to find a way of living life in this new reality. They shouldn't just be in limbo mourning over yesterday and longing for tomorrow, they need to find a way of living in today's reality. They are encouraged to establish a home, invest in their future by planting a garden, they are encouraged to live healthy lives by eating the fruit of their gardens, they are encouraged to invest in their families. They are challenged to look out for the good of their neighbourhoods, even though they now lived among their enemies. God says that is how they will live lives in such a way that they will discover His purposes for them. God promises that in the midst of this, if they seek Him, they WILL find him.

Perhaps this is the message for us in South Africa in this season. We are living in a new reality, we don't know how long we will live with Covid-19 or in different stages of lockdown. We don't know when everything will be back to normal. What we do know though is this: we cannot live suspended by a longing for what is in the past and the way life "used to be", we also cannot stop living and wait for when things return to normal. We cannot stop living life today. So what are we to do? Perhaps we are called to do what Jeremiah told those in exile: settle into this new life to the best of our ability, focus on our families and the wellbeing of those around us. Live life in such a way that it is good for the rest of the community. Perhaps it is time that we learned to live in this new way of life in a way that is good for all of the community, knowing that God has a plan for us, and it isn't a plan to harm us. Knowing that when we seek God, with all of our heart, we will find God.

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding settle in our hearts and minds forever.

Love and blessings,  
Louise Wernich