

Sermon Text for September 4, 2022

By Guest Minister Rev. Brett Foote

Let us Pray: **God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be worthy and acceptable to you and may we glorify You in their carrying out, for you are our Rock & our Redeemer. Amen**

Hello Straspres! It's been a long time. I bring greetings from Presbyterians on Lake Superior! It's good to be with you all. Truthfully, I didn't know when or if I would have the opportunity to be in this pulpit again. However, Bob and I were texting and when we realized there might be a chance at making today happen, we did. Even though we are now over a thousand miles apart, our calling as Presbyterians, as followers of Christ is very similar. In our text this morning the Israelites receive their call from God as strangers in a strange land to build houses, plant gardens, build families, and to seek the welfare of the city in prayer and action. The Israelites call happens to be our call too. Our Old Testament text comes from the book of Jeremiah Chapter 29: verses 1-7. Listen closely for the Word of God:

"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. This was after King Jeconiah, and the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the artisans, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem. The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom King Zedekiah of Judah sent to Babylon to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It said: Thus says

the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 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. 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.”

You have heard the Word of the Lord: Thanks be to God.

The Israelites in this text are living through what's known as the Babylonian Exile. They've been captured by the Babylonians, and taken to Babylon against their wills to serve under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar. The prophet Jeremiah makes it clear, God caused this situation to take place. The Israelites, since being forced out have become strangers in a strange and somewhat difficult land, foreigners in every sense. Babylon was not their forever home but it was where God put them. It turns out where we live is not our forever home either. Paul, in our NT text is writing to the church in Philippi. Verses 19-20 read **“Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven...”** Here, Paul is comparing two types of citizens, 1st. Citizens of earth, people who believe that their only home is right here, whose concern is primarily for themselves. 2 Citizens of heaven who find the earth as a temporary home before heaven, whose concern is for their community as well as their family. Paul is reminding the followers of Christ in Philippi where their citizenship rests, in heaven. Yes, you live in Philippi, but you have another home, you're a citizen of heaven and that has ramifications for how you

live. Paul's reminder isn't just for the church in Phillipi but for the church in Superior, Strasburg, Lancaster, Cape May, and even portici Italy. You have been placed where you are now, on purpose. Your citizenship is heavenly, you're a temporary resident of this place. That means we have a different culture- we act differently, speak a different language, we are strangers from a strange land. We as the church are just like the Israelites in Babylon. Jeremiah's call is to us as well. Our Babylon is this earth. The main difference between us is that the Israelites mostly have gone through far worse than us. The Israelites were taken captive from their homes out of their country in the midst of war. Some may say we as Christians are persecuted for our faith in America, it's not close to what the Israelites endured. That's an important difference to recognize in our stories. Nevertheless, God had a hand in the Israelites going to Babylon and placing each and everyone of us in in our own specific communities. Turn to the Jeremiah scripture again. In verse four, Jeremiah is speaking as God's mouth piece. God calls the Israelites in Babylon to live in very specific ways. Were they supposed to return home? Get upset at the people who took them captive? Make a separate community apart from the larger Babylonian community? No. God calls the Israelites to **"Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take spouses and have kids; help your kids to find people whom to marry, so that they can care for kids.** Multiply, however you can. God tells the Israelites to commit to truly living in Babylon. Get comfy. God doesn't stop there. Verse seven God calls them to **"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."** God calls the Israelites to not only put down roots, but to seek the welfare of the city and

pray for it because, as God states, when they are supported, you shall be too. This is the Israelite's calling: to seek the welfare of where they've placed, Babylon. This is our calling church. This is our direction we are called to go in. You are called to Strasburg, Pennsylvania to contribute to its welfare, to pray on this town's behalf, to reach out to neighbors and care for them in any way you can. I have witnessed some you contributing as you supported me in my call to ministry. I've seen you feed the community after parades. I was there for the Food banks inception. I served alongside Dottie Smith many times at Water Street. I served at VBS. I just had a zoom call last week with your folks dreaming about how they might do church with dinner and share a message of hope in Christ with the community. I've seen single moms find housing, and I heard you're working with a social worker too! Our calling in Superior is the same as it is in Strasburg. It is to dream with God ways where we can be focused as a church to seek the welfare of our town. Your calling is to do it. A staff member came to me and said we need to do something at the start of the Pandemic and we went from sharing 75 meals a month with the community to 800 meals a month. big things can happen for you too. Share with your Session ways that you feel called to seek the welfare of the community the community. Dream about it. send an email, make a phone call, make it happen. May you become the hub, the place known for making Strasburg a better place to live for all people in the name of Jesus. May Christ nourish each and every person that calls this place home in every way through the church, this holy meal we eat and the power of the Holy Spirit. I am thankful to be a part of this calling with you today. Amen.