



Abundant Life Lutheran Church
Where ALL are welcome!

WORSHIP RESOURCES
First Sunday of Advent
Sunday, November 28, 2021

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PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of all wisdom, our hearts yearn for the warmth of your love, and our minds search for the light of your Word. Increase our longing for Christ our Saviour, and strengthen us to grow in love, that at the dawn of his coming we may rejoice in his presence and welcome the light of his truth. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Sermon – 1st Sunday in Advent

Jeremiah 29:1-14

*O Come, O Come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
Who mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear...*

We sing this Advent carol every year, but how often do we pause to consider what it means? Come, O come, God-with-us. Ransom captive Israel; free your people, Israel, from captivity. They are mourning in lonely exile.

A song about exile. The Exile. Specifically, the exile of the people of Judah in Babylon.

The Exile was a national tragedy so great, it would have been unimaginable. In 597 BCE, King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Babylonian Empire, brought his armies to the gates of Jerusalem, and he besieged the city. The young king of Judah, King Jehoiachin, saw the writing on the wall. He surrendered the city to King Nebuchadnezzar, and he was carried off to Babylon, along with his mother, his servants and officers, to live in exile in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar also took captive the soldiers of Judah, and the artisans, and the elites, and these too were taken to Babylon to live in exile. Only the peasants remained in the land of Judah.

It was a national tragedy beyond imagination.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel...

Who mourns in lonely exile here...

So the people of Judah were now in exile in Babylon. Babylon was a great capital city, on the banks of the Euphrates River, in the middle of what is now Iraq, not too far from the modern day city of Baghdad. They were in a foreign city. They were surrounded by a foreign people, speaking a foreign language they did not understand. The food was foreign, the customs were foreign. Worst of all, the gods were foreign, and they were everywhere – temples and statues on every corner. The God of Israel – the God who lived in the Temple in Jerusalem – must have felt very far away.

The prophet Jeremiah writes a letter from Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon. Jeremiah could have encouraged them to resist the Babylonians! To fight for their freedom! To try to find a way to escape their captivity! He could have said, “The God who parted the Red Sea and led you out of Egypt will also lead you out of Babylon!” But he doesn’t. Because that is not the word that God has given him.

Instead, God has given Jeremiah a different word for God’s people living in exile. Perhaps a surprising word. Jeremiah writes to the people in exile and says, “Thus says the Lord...

“Build houses...

“Plant gardens...

“Have families...

“Multiply in the land, and do not decrease.”

Can you imagine?? You are in exile, in a foreign land, among a foreign people, surrounded by foreign gods, and all you want to do is go home... and God says, “Build a house. Plant a garden. Start a family.”

What God is saying, is “I am with you, even in this foreign land. And I will teach you how to thrive, even in this foreign land.”

And God’s word to the exiles is not done yet. Jeremiah writes, “Seek the welfare of the city to which I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf.”

Seek the welfare of Babylon?? Pray for Babylon? Pray for these people that attacked our homeland, and besieged our city, and took us captive? How can you say that?

“Seek the welfare of the city, and pray for it,” says the LORD, “for in its welfare, you shall find *your* welfare.”

Now the word translated as “welfare” in this passage is a Hebrew word that you know. *Shalom*. Welfare, wholeness, peace. *Shalom*.

Seek the *shalom* of the city, for in its *shalom* you shall find your *shalom*.

Seek the *shalom* of your neighbours... seek the *shalom* of this community... seek the *shalom* of this place... for in their *shalom* you will find your *shalom*.

Powerful words, for a people in exile.

For the past two years, perhaps our world has also felt like a place of exile. We have not been taken away from our homes, yet our world seems so different than it did two years ago – so unfamiliar – that perhaps in some ways it feels like we have been living in a foreign country.

There have been times when we have been separated from our family, and those we love. There have been times of isolation. Times of fear and anxiety. Times of disorientation. Even now, things are not as they once were. Perhaps many of us find ourselves asking, “When will all this end? When will the time come when we won’t have to wear masks in public, or show proof of vaccination, or feel separated from those we love because of vaccination status? When will our schools be safe from outbreaks? When will we no longer live in fear of this virus?”

*O Come, O Come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel...
Who mourns in lonely exile here...*

To many of us, the past twenty months have often felt like a lonely exile. And as we see lockdowns returning in Europe and Australia, and cases surging in developing countries, and global deaths exceeding 5.1 million and counting, we are reminded that this is a global exile. In the midst of this global pandemic, our world is mourning in lonely exile. And we don’t know how long this will last.

In the midst of this exile, is Jeremiah’s message to the exiles also a message for us?

Build houses. Plant gardens. Have families. Trust in God.

Don’t dig a bunker to hide in, and wait for this all to pass. But rather, seek the *shalom* of the place in which you find yourself. Seek the *shalom* of your neighbours, of your community, of the planet. For in their *shalom* you shall find your *shalom*.

In the early days of the pandemic, in the middle of the first lockdown, I remember walking down a sidewalk in my neighbourhood, and seeing signs in windows. Hearts and rainbows with the words, “Be Well” and “Thank you, front line workers.” I remember people reaching out on social media and asking their neighbours, “Do you need groceries?”

People were seeking the *shalom* of their community.

How is God calling us to seek the *shalom* of those around us today?

And in what ways do we see God working for our *shalom*, and the *shalom* of our neighbours, and the *shalom* of our planet, even in this time of global exile?

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

In this season of watching and waiting, let us pray for all people and places that yearn for God's presence.

A brief silence.

Faithful God, we give you thanks for our congregations, Abundant Life and Prince of Peace, and our partnership together as Spirit of Life Ministry. Continue to pour out your Holy Spirit upon us as we grow together in community and partnership in the gospel of Jesus. God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of creation, we pray for the entire province of British Columbia, and especially for everyone who has been affected by the flooding and landslides. Comfort those who have lost loved ones, bring healing to those who have experienced injury and trauma. Be with those who have lost homes, livestock, and farmland, and those who remain under evacuation. Be with emergency response workers, the armed forces, and all those working to restore essential infrastructure. We also pray for those around the world who have been affected by extreme weather: especially communities in Southern India who have been affected by torrential rains and heavy flooding. God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of peace, bring healing to those affected by the migrant crisis in Belarus, and at its borders with Poland and the Baltic states. Especially, be with migrants and refugees, including those fleeing conflicts and crises in Iraq and Syria. We pray for a peaceful resolution to this crisis, and that all migrants and refugees would be able to find a safe home and a welcoming community. We pray for peace in all countries affected by war and oppression: especially Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Sudan. God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God our hope, be with all those affected by violence, both near and far away. Be present in the community of Waukesha, Wisconsin in the aftermath of an SUV crashing into a parade there. Comfort those who have lost loved ones, heal those who are injured, and restore those who have been affected by fear and trauma. We also pray for all those affected by the verdict in the trial of Kyle Rittenhouse, we pray for an end to gun violence in all its forms, in the United States, in Canada, and around the world. God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of healing, we pray for all who continue to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Give wisdom to our leaders and public health officials to help them make the right decisions in ever-changing situations. We pray for healing in places where COVID is surging and where health care systems have been overwhelmed by this fourth wave. We pray for our own province, as more people are being hospitalized because of the virus. Bring healing to our world, and bring a merciful end to this pandemic. God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of love, we pray for all in our faith family who are in need of your healing and protection, especially *Brett, Irene, Bill, Lorraine, Chris, Karen & Rolf, Becky, Jon, Michelle, Lynne, Ben, Zarah, Eleanor, Pastor Bruce Gelhorn, Makenzie, the family and friends of Steffie Mykita, Mike*, and those we name in our hearts or out loud before you. *(A brief silence)*. God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of new life, you come among us in the places we least expect. Receive these prayers and those of our hearts, in the name of Jesus.

Amen.