

Advent Devotional December 23, 2019

Scripture

Jeremiah 31:10-14

*10 Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock."*

*11 For the LORD has ransomed Jacob,
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.*

*12 They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.*

*13 Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.
I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.*

*14 I will give the priests their fill of fatness,
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the LORD.*

Devotional

The Rev. Tanta Luckhardt Hendricks '82

Exile is dislocation, a yanking out of the socket of home, identity, security, and hope. Exile is despair and desperation, pain and hopelessness.

Restoration puts all back in place. It is a homecoming dance—a medical test that says you're okay, not dying; a song of joy that comes from the heart and tummy; toes in the sand and a sigh of relaxation; a relocation of self in wholeness and hope. Jeremiah offers a vision of what will be when the time of exile is over, and the long journey home is complete.

Jesus of Bethlehem offers himself to share with us our time of exile, of dislocation. But Jesus also offers himself as the restoration of our wholeness and hope. At the same time, that restoration is yet to come. The long journey home is not yet finished. We continue to live in brokenness and despair.

But exile does not have the last word. The Lord who has come to be born in us, with us, and for us will bring us to our ultimate home, where joy breaks out in a dance, and songs cannot be silenced, and tears are no more. Jesus' birth looks beyond dislocation as the Lord brings hope in the midst of exile, the whisper of the song, the shadow of the dance, the whiff of joy. Exile does not have the last word. Ever.

Prayer

Holy Child of Bethlehem, you come to us when we hurt with the pain of dislocation, so we are not alone in our despair. You come to us offering hope—the assurance that joy will prevail. As we grasp that hope, you restore our soul. How grateful we are for you. Amen.