

Lent Devotional April 12, 2019

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 29:1-14

¹These 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. ²This 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. ³The 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: ⁴Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶Take 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. ⁷But 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. ⁸For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, ⁹for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the LORD. ¹⁰For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ¹²Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

DEVOTIONAL

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Jeremiah's letter is written to a people who are lost, bewildered, and far from their home and their God. They are searching for guidance and answers. False prophets are telling them that their stay in Babylon will be short. The true word from God is that the people should settle in for the long haul. They are to make Babylon their new home. They are to seek God and pray for peace. But what kind of peace?

It seems the people of Israel have prayed for their own peace, as they do in Psalm 122. Now God, through Jeremiah, calls for the people to change their world view. Their *shalom*, their peace, rests not within themselves but through the world around them. They will find God not in seeking only their peace, but in seeking the peace of Babylon. They will find their peace in the welfare of the non-Israelite, the outsider—their oppressor. And so they will find God.

In a similar sense, Jesus attains his great *shalom* by offering forgiveness to all—even to those seeking his crucifixion. He invites everyone into the kingdom of God. During this Lenten season, pray for the capacity to love and forgive all others—both within and outside the Church. Pray for their *shalom*, and so seek God. May we approach Easter with hearts full of love and forgiveness not only for those we love, but also for those who oppress us.

PRAYER

Loving Father, we live in a world with many defined boundaries. We view people on opposite sides of those boundaries as our enemies, our oppressors. Purge our feelings of hate, enmity, and bitterness, and replace them with humility, patience, understanding, strength, and courage. In our difficult world, help us to live with your eyes and your heart in the sure knowledge of our future hope in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.