

Jeremiah 29:1-14  
Ellen Crawford True  
November 23, 2025

### Seek the Welfare of the City

This morning's text brings us to the heart of the Exile, a crucial chapter in the story of God's people. The voice we hear today is that of Jeremiah, a prophet who witnesses the first deportation from Jerusalem to Babylon, as well as the destruction of the Temple and the second deportation. In other words, he has a front row seat to the most devastating moment in the history of the Jewish community when all their collective hopes and dreams have been demolished. Jeremiah is not simply an observer, however. In the first part of this book, he calls out the abuses and idolatry of the cultural and political leaders in Jerusalem, vocally holding them responsible for the calamity Jerusalem and her citizens now face. And now, here in chapter 29, in the trying time between deportations, his tone shifts a bit. [Read Jeremiah 29:1-14]

Here, Jeremiah writes to the very ones he lambasted earlier. The same people he railed against before are now living in a foreign land surrounded by unfamiliar and possibly hostile neighbors. Knowing that the exiles are in anguish and grieving what they left behind, through Jeremiah, God calls the people not to spend their days pining for what was or what might have been but to put down roots and build a new life in a foreign land. Through Jeremiah God offers them pragmatic and even mundane instructions: build, live, plant, eat, marry and marry off, and multiply. In other words, live full lives, right where you are. And God's command does not stop there: "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf."<sup>1</sup> While most translations use the word *welfare*, the Hebrew word is *shalom*. Often translated as *peace*, *shalom* is not simply the absence of conflict but

---

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 29:7, NRSVue

a deep sense of wholeness and safety. God declares that the exiles' shalom is inextricably tied up with the shalom of their neighbors. The exiles' task, their holy calling is to seek, work, and pray not only for their own peace but also for the peace of their foreign and possibly hostile neighbors. Not only does God reveal a stunning concern for the exiles who had enraged and disappointed him with their covenant-breaking and idolatrous ways in Jerusalem, but God also displays a concern for the peace and wholeness of Babylon. AND God expects the exiles to embrace and embody that concern as well. There is no extricating the exiles' shalom from the Babylonians'. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once wrote, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."<sup>2</sup> In other words, there is no *them*; there is only *us*.

And it is Jeremiah's job to break the news to the exiles that they are going to be part of this part of this *us* for a long while, a word other self-proclaimed prophets have failed to share. In chapter 28 of Jeremiah, we read about Hananiah who insists that everything is—or soon will be—awesome (to borrow from *The Lego Movie*). He declares that the exile will not last much longer and that those who have been exiled will return to Jerusalem in two short years. Jeremiah warns against false prophets like Hananiah and their false promises that tell the people what they want to hear rather than what they need to know. I have some sympathy for old Hananiah. There are days when I would prefer to proclaim that everything is awesome or that it will be soon. I have hunch that Jeremiah might like that option, too. But Jeremiah is not concerned with selling a shiny, happy tale. Instead, he homes in on what is good and true, even when the news is hard.

Little did I know a few days ago how fitting this text would be this morning. We have not been sent away into exile, and yet, for many of us, the home we have known and loved became

---

<sup>2</sup> Excerpt from *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/588001>

unrecognizable Friday evening, when everything changed in one terrifying instant. There is no papering over the violence and terror that tore through the community in that moment. We cannot deny the fear that held us in its grip then and lurks around the corners even now. It would be unhelpful and unfaithful for a Hananiah type to walk in and pat us on the head and tell us to smile in a sing-songy voice. And blessedly we get Jeremiah instead, Jeremiah who knows what it is to ache for the home we once knew, Jeremiah who urges us to seek the shalom, the peace, the welfare of the city, to pray for her and to pray for every person who calls Concord home, assuring us that our shalom, our peace, our welfare is inextricably wrapped up in theirs.

The healing of this community is a work in progress. Our children—including the ones who wielded the weapons—will need our compassion and faithfulness in the days and months ahead. Parents, too, will need room to rage and heal, as will those working Friday night, the ones who flung wide their doors and comforted strangers even as they shook with terror themselves. In truth, the entire community needs healing. Many of us giggled and craned our necks when Hollywood came to town last week. After years dominated by a pandemic followed by construction delays and businesses lost, it felt like we were riding a new wave of hope and progress. We marveled at this new chapter for our precious Hallmark town. And just a few hours after the trucks carrying sparkly gowns, five-gallon hats, and bright lights rolled out of town, a violent dispute cracked the snow globe, revealing a brokenness we had hoped never to see. The same fear that has upended so many other communities invaded our own. Things look different now. Yes, the parade went on, and we cheered for floats and Santa and everyone carrying homemade signs proclaiming #ConcordStrong. AND our healing is a work in progress. We, too, will need God's help to make our way forward in this unfamiliar landscape.

And that is why Jeremiah's words are so providentially fitting this morning. I'm struck by the fact that God's word to us in these words does not describe astonishing demonstrations of divine power. There is no mention of plagues or a parted Red Sea. Instead, there is a call to a power of a different sort, the power one of you named after witnessing neighbors, friends, and strangers sheltering one another and caring for one another's children: "[Friday] night showed me the power of collective care — and the courage, love, and resilience in my own children and our Concord community."<sup>3</sup>

*The power of collective care* looks like ordinary human beings invested in doing good and choosing compassion and courage when they could lock up their hearts and look out only for themselves. *The power of collective care* is people committed to showing up, putting down roots, planting gardens, building homes, and shaping a good and faithful life for themselves and others when the world is swirling out of control. There are forces bent on planting other things, of course, some who are fixated on sowing division, cynicism, cruelty, and greed, some who would urge us to turn our heads, protect our own hearts, and tend only to our own particular fears. That is not who we are called to be. That is not who we are. Nor is that where our shalom, our peace, our healing will be found. We are people who check in on neighbors and bring them hot meals along with hugs and smiles. We are people who carefully select a baby doll for an incarcerated parent's child. We are people who wrestle with hard questions and harder answers. We are people who lose sleep over a friend's medical test and rally to protect a stranger at risk of being taken from his children. We are people who empty our pockets to fill noisy buckets and feed hungry neighbors. That is who we were on Friday morning. That is who we are even now. Like the exiles, we may not live to see the end of cruelty, division, cynicism, or greed, but even in our grief and shock, with the Spirit's guidance, I know we will continue to do

---

<sup>3</sup> Thank you, Logan Barrier for your words.

everything we can to sow seeds of love, hope, justice, and shalom for the sake of the generations who follow us. Because at our core we dare to believe that somehow God is still present amid all that threatens to undo us. By the grace of God, we will find a way to trust that the God who met our ancestors in the wilderness, the God who comforted the exiles far from home, the God who was born among us in Jesus Christ is the same God who sheltered with us on Friday evening. We were God's own; we are still God's own. And that God calls us even now to plant something good and to build something holy, to seek and pray for and work for the welfare, the peace, and the healing of our city, for in that work and in those prayers, we are promised that we will know God's healing too.

In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.