

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## *Between Samaria and Galilee*

## Sermon Reflection Notes

This week we heard from both the Old Testament and the Gospel. The Jeremiah text is one that precedes a more familiar passage, one that reassures us that God is in charge, that there is a plan, that the future is hopeful. But the text we heard is different. The Jews are in exile, Babylon rules over them, and their very existence seems hopeless. Some leaders and preachers were telling the people of God that things would return to normal shortly. But Jeremiah tells a different truth. Jeremiah tells the people that *this* is the new normal, to get used to being in exile, an outsider. Jeremiah says to get used to feeling unsafe and even suggests that they pray for Babylonians because when God brings peace, it will be for *both* the Jews and the Babylonians together. Jeremiah lived in the real world, the one that is messy and broken and yet full of the wonder of faith that trusts in the middle of hard truths.

The Gospel text begins with the phrase, "Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee." We sometimes brush past little phrases like this to get to the 'important' parts of the scripture, but every word and phrase was chosen with intent. The fact that Jesus was between two places is significant, just as the fact that he healed ten people who were outcasts. The healing happened not in the comfort of friend's home or familiar temple. It happened *in between* two towns, in a border area where life existed but no one claimed the land as their own.

Listening to these texts, Pastor Andy suggested that while we may not be in literally exile ourselves, we do know what exile feels like. When relationships break, when bad news arrives, when all seems lost, we recognize exile. We empathize with those in our world who are in exile. Our hearts hurt with and for the brokenness in the world. When we are displaced, we suddenly recognize what home and comfort and safety felt like. When life breaks, when we break, we move into the "in between" space, the wilderness that is unfamiliar and uncomfortable and unwanted. And yet, being unsettled wakes us up. We grow most when there is space, new space, to discover more about ourselves, our neighbors, and about God. For where is God in the midst of exile? With us, of course. Faith is the thing we carry with us always and that carries us through the in between times. The heart can hold both pain and hope together. Even in exile, we can plant gardens of beauty and awe. For God is with us. We are not alone.

## Scriptures

*Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7*

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup> Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce.

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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.

Luke 17:11-19

<sup>11</sup> On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup> As he entered a village, ten men with a skin disease approached him. Keeping their distance, <sup>13</sup> they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" <sup>14</sup> When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. <sup>15</sup> Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. <sup>16</sup> He prostrated himself at Jesus's feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? So where are the other nine?" <sup>18</sup> Did none of them return to give glory to God except this foreigner?" <sup>19</sup> Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

## Discussion Questions

1. This sermon series is titled **Whatever Befall**. What hymn incorporates this phrase and what are other hymns/songs that have a similar phrase? What does the phrase mean?
2. Pastor Andy pointed out that another prophet, Hanaiah, was telling the people that within two years, the Jews would return home and all the vessels of the Lord's house would be restored. Jeremiah was having none of it, and said " 'Listen, the Lord has not sent you, and you made this people trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the Lord: I am going to send you off the face of the earth. Within a year you will be dead, because you have spoken rebellion against the Lord.' In that same year, in the seventh month, the prophet Hananiah died." Other than acknowledging that Jeremiah should not be messed with, what is the difference in the messages these two prophets give to the people?
3. Hanaiah's message might have seemed more hopeful, but Jeremiah's was more truthful. How and why is the truth more helpful during 'in between' times?
4. Anne Lamott said in *Help, Thanks, Wow*: "There's freedom in hitting bottom...relief in admitting you've reached the place of great unknowing. This is where restoration can begin, because when you're still in the state of trying to fix the unfixable, everything bad is engaged....It's exhausting, crazy-making" (14). What 'freedom' comes with exile? How can we cultivate 'gardens of beauty' in the unknown?
5. Last week we discussed lament. This week we are talking about 'settling in' during exile. What do the two topics have to do with each other as well as a sermon series titled **Whatever Befall**?

## Closing Prayer

Holy God, the world is filled with threat and danger. There is so much to fear, so much we do not understand, so much beyond our control. But we remember the bold, defiant "yet" of faith that is grounded in God's extraordinary capacity for life. And you have put us, O God, into a place that is spacious enough for joy and freedom and obedience. Even now. Teach us to hold both pain and hope tenderly. Help us cultivate beauty in the midst of exile. We pray in the name of Jesus who knew even in Jerusalem you were there. Amen.

*"Cultivate beauty in the 'in between' spaces"*