

**Seeking the Welfare**  
**Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7**  
**October 9, 2022**  
**NOC Sunday**

Most of you sitting here or watching online are exiles. I know that is a strange thing for me to say. I don't mean in the sense of forced to live somewhere or not having a home. What I mean is that most of you are not from here. It is very rare when I meet someone who was born in Tucson. Every once in a while, I will meet some of you who have been here since the 1970s or 80, and call this place home. But most of you have not been here that long.

I grew up in Minnesota and I still call it home even though I have been gone for 23 years. I still get the digital version of the Minneapolis Star/Tribune newspaper and read it every morning so I have a taste of "home." I guess I am an exile, too. Not from here.

Then there are the winter residents, who live here part time which is a large portion of this church. As we head into Fall, our numbers are slowly increasing as the winter residents make their way to Green Valley. By January, this place will be pretty full. They are exiles, too. Not from here.

Our passage today speaks to us "exiles."

The Israelites have lost their home, and forced into exile by their enemy, Babylon. They have been taken from their beloved city of Jerusalem and forced to live with the Babylonians. Jeremiah is a prophet sent by God to speak to the people during this horrendous time of being in a strange place and wondering: How long, O Lord, how long will this last? When will this end?

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God speaks to them: I will bring you back someday; meanwhile I am with you. I am with you now even as I was in Jerusalem. In the midst of these encouraging words are these famous words said a bit later in the chapter. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future." (Jer 29:11)

Words of hope in the midst of exile.

However, God says, you will be here 70 years. You will have a future and a hope, but for now, you will remain in exile. Therefore, build homes. Settle down. Plant gardens. Marry and have children. Marry off your children because you are going to be here for the long haul. In fact, most of those listening to those words will never see their home city of Jerusalem again.

This must have been devastating to hear because they are living with foreigners, living with their enemy, living in a situation they hate. And then it gets worse. Jeremiah says, "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it..." Another version says "seek the welfare of the city in which you live. "

What extraordinary, challenging words. They had no choice to live in the foreign land, yet they began to learn something. That God was in Babylon, too. God works in exile, too. They learned that worship could happen anywhere not just in the Temple in Jerusalem.

They learned that God cared for the people of Babylon. We are learning in the class *The Book*, as we go through the Bible book by book that Israel was to be a blessing to other nations. What an amazing way to be a light for God to other nations by living with them, praying for them, seeking their welfare.

And the final surprise? If you seek their welfare, if you pray for them, God says, their well-being is also your well-being. Their peace will be your peace. Their prosperity will be your prosperity. Rather than longing and fretting for the past or for a different situation, Jeremiah called them to live as God's people where they find themselves in the present. As they seek the welfare of Babylon, their enemy, they will find that they open themselves up to their own peace and welfare and future.

What does this this say to us today? We aren't in forced exile to live in another country. We do, however, have other kinds of exiles that are forced on us: Cancer, divorce, death of a loved one, loss of finances, loss of health, an aging body, a move to a care facility.

When we encounter such things, we drop out of the life we knew. Until Jeremiah slips a letter inside your mailbox that says, "Build. Plant. Pray." We are people of God who are called to work in whatever exile we find ourselves.

Some people use the term “Bloom where you are planted.” Mary Lee Haas is in a care facility: Silver Springs. Not too long ago, she wrote an email blast on the phrase “bloom where you are planted.” She has taken it upon herself to minister to those in facility.

I worked with one pastor who had what he called “a theology of place.” You work for God wherever you are, in whatever situation you find yourself.

This church is placed on a hill in Green Valley. Do you see what this calls us to do in this place that is really not “home”? We are to pray for this community of Green Valley and Tucson. We are to establish roots as best as we can. We are to seek its well-being, its welfare.

And this church does that! Think of our ministries: the Patio Sale which provides low cost items to those who cannot afford them otherwise. And the proceeds are given to the Mission Committee which supports charities in our community. Seeking the welfare of those where we live.

Stephen Ministry and the Grief Class seek the welfare of those in the exile of grief and stress.

The Parkinson’s exercise class seeks the welfare of those in the exile of that disease. Supper Clusters and Fellowship events seek the welfare of those in the exile of loneliness.

The flower ministry cheers those in exile of being homebound. Seeking the welfare of those where we live.

Network of Caring or NOC works for the welfare of this community. It is a ministry you do not hear much about because it works quietly in the background by contacting each family/person associated with this Body of Christ, this neighborhood.

Network of Caring has been around almost as long as this church. How many of you here worked in or are in NOC? Raise your hands. Thank you for your faithfulness.

We have redesigned NOC, freshened it up, so to speak. As a result, we are looking for at least 20 more contactors. Contactors are given a list of people of about 8-10 households within this Body of Christ to contact about once a month, to seek the welfare of the people, whether by phone or email or text or a hello at church.

I want to call up Sylvia Landry. Sylvia is one of our contactors, and I asked her to share with you her experience as a contactor and what it has meant to her.

Sylvia.....

Thank you, Sylvia. If God is tugging at your heart to be a part of this ministry, or you want to find out more about it, we have a table set up in Charter Hall where all the other ministry tables are. You can sign up to be a contactor. You can come to our training class to find out if this is a good fit for you. The people at the table can answer your questions. If you are watching this online, you can contact me at the church.

Seek the welfare of your community, pray for it, for when it prospers, you too will prosper.

Having heard these words, let us stand and profess what we believe as followers of Christ by saying the Apostle's Creed written in your bulletin.