

It's a Beautiful Life: Living In, Living Out

“Scattered”

Text: Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

11-13-16



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

“Have you ever found yourself in a place/situation that you would never have gone voluntarily? Have you ever felt that you were the passive victim of another’s foolishness? What might it look like to see the place that you already are as the place that you have been sent?”

“What are some of the rhythms of our own community in which you might invest time and energy? How might you contribute tangibly to the good of our local economy?”

“God, where are you ‘presently’ at work? Where are there signs of life? Signs of death? Would you help me notice one person this week that I have been ignoring for months while awaiting my missional assignment?”

“Where are there opportunities in your life, right now, for you to utilize the resources presently available to you in order to do good in concrete and socially benevolent ways?” How might another’s experience of peace contribute to your own?”

“As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” John 20:21

“Who are the people and where are the places God is sending you to accomplish his lovingly-restorative mission?”

“How might you be able to connect the ‘ordinariness’ of your day with something deeper, something sacred, in order to awaken the imaginative spirit and participate more creatively in mission?”

“Do our lives together encourage outsiders to become insiders; does it help those who are far away come home?”

“Do our lives together create the potential for authentic, healing community right in the midst of brokenness and dysfunctionality?”

“How might you respond differently to your present, often unfavorable circumstances, if you knew that God knew and if you dared believe that he meant it for good?” [Joseph: Genesis 50:20]

“How does our transient nature (unsettledness) limit our ability to experience authentic community? Why does the Kingdom-mission require a commitment to longevity and community?”

Teaching Notes...

We are the people of God, “coming” and “going”--- “gathered” and “scattered”.

We are convinced that the Story is all about “mission” (missio-Dei): God’s love for all that he has created, his relentless determination to restore order, and his irrevocable commitment to partnering with humanity in the process.

There is a strong, biblical theme which permeates the Story: the people of God exist in the world to carry the Presence of God into every facet of society until *“the whole earth is filled with his glory”* (Habakkuk 2:14). We are to “be” blessing; good for our world.

Blessing is not just something we say or declare, but something we establish: an environment of goodness.

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon (“sovereign du jour”) storms into Jerusalem, displaces a people, strips them of everything they hold onto for their identity and security. He tears down their church, empties their bank accounts and carries them away to Babylon, leaving all of the trappings of their former life in a pile of rubble.

Their reliable existence was gone and now they had to decide to either become “good *Babylonians*” or figure out what it means to be the people of God in such unfamiliar and unsettling surroundings.

It’s an interesting and easily overlooked phrase: *“... from Jerusalem to Babylon...”* (1, 4). It is an ominous departure from the intent of the Story. It had started with God calling Abram ‘out of Babylon’ (Genesis 11-12), identifying himself and identifying them as his unique people, then establishing them in their own land... Israel (Jerusalem). It seems that the restoration project is unravelling right before their eyes.

Inquiring minds want to know: *“Who’s responsible?”* In one phrase, Jeremiah says that Nebuchadnezzar carried them into exile. A few sentences later, God is the one said to have exiled them. Which is it: Nebuchadnezzar or God? The answer of course? “Yes”.

It’s a surprising amalgamation of corrective and redemptive action. God, for whatever reason, has allowed you to be there (in this place).

The purpose was not the exile itself, but the repentance and restoration that the exile was meant to produce.

Jeremiah wanted the people of God to know that exile had not necessarily forfeited their identity and partnership with God, but that it would actually provide the context for mission. *“Downtown Babylon”* would actually be the place that they might become more distinguishable... recognizable as the unique people of God.

But, it would not be until they could “accept” that they were there because God has allowed them to be there, that they could stop resisting and experience the peace/shalom that God desired to offer them there.

“*Dear exiles...*” Jeremiah’s exhortation to the people suggested some form of decisive action on our part which signals our commitment to participate:

‘build homes and plan to say’- develop homes which are informed and formed by the story of God. Know that mission will require a commitment to longevity and community. Often our ‘transient nature’ (tendency to roam) seems to limit our ability to experience authentic community.

‘plant gardens and eat the food they produce’- become part of the rhythm of the culture; invest time and energy in your community; contribute to the welfare of the local economy.

‘marry and have children... don’t dwindle away’-

Don’t lose your influence; flourish. Don’t become ineffective as a result of failing to multiply [not just about biological reproduction, but reproducing the story].

‘work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare’.

We pray for people because we love them and we pray for people until we are able to love them rightly. It’s hard to keep “*talkin’ smack*” to God about those he loves.

When we work for peace without praying for it, we survey our surroundings, determine the most fitting course of action, and then ask God to endorse it. In prayer, we join God in what he is already doing, which means, most often, that we are the ones who must adjust/adapt (repent). Conversely, if we pray for peace without working toward it, our faith loses its incarnational value; it becomes irrelevant.

“*Build homes, plant, eat, marry, have children, pray.*” It sounds like creation rhythms being lived out right in the middle of Babylon.

When you get ‘up close’, the Babylonians aren’t so scary.

Babylonia is full of people who are equally disillusioned with their lives, their relationships, their jobs, the toxic pace of their schedules, their government. They are simply a people who can’t envision another way. A better way. “*You got any ideas?*”

God’s hope is that exile might actually awaken us to his concern for the Babylonians (prevailing culture); that we might actually notice the people that we have been ignoring for years.

Know that true, storied-mission is only possible if you are willing to see your faith as “indigenous” [local; homegrown]

A bona-fide faith must be formed deeply in the mystery of incarnation. When God took on flesh, he entered culture, as well. The mystery, which is God en-fleshed and emplaced, transpired in a specific time and specific place.

The only peace that we can know, as the people of God, is the peace that God desires for our entire community... his world.

Jeremiah wanted the people to know that their restoration--- their renewed identity experience of blessing--- would not come at the expense of the Babylonians without portraying for them (embodying) a different vision and ethic for their life. A viable alternative.

Mission is not about being sent “into all the world”, but being sent into “our worlds”.

All the world is ambiguous and indefinable. It's a one-dimensional expression on a refrigerator magnet. *My world* is more tangible: it involves people with names and faces and local mailing addresses... the ones with whom I interact in personal ways every day.

You can't rightly love and care for a people whom you hope to one day encounter. As we project mission to another place, we paralyze ourselves and dismiss any number of very real possibilities in exchange for our “*virtual mission*”.

The church, living with a relational encounter of their God, with a compelling vision of life, and with restorative rhythms and practices which are good for the world is the best thing we could do for the culture.

Every follower of Jesus has the DNA of God within them and the full potential to realize transformation for themselves and become the agents of that transformation to the world, even if that potential is lying 'dormant' or 'latent'.