

"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you odd." The great American novelist Flannery O'Connor wrote those words sometime in the middle of the 20th century from the American South, a place soaked in Christian language, Christian assumptions, and Christian habits. Even there, she insisted that an encounter with the truth of Christ doesn't smooth you out but actually makes you odd. Because the way of Jesus has always cut against the grain of the world. And typically, if you go against the grain, you get a splinter or two.

What O'Connor saw with the eyes of a novelist, we now feel with the weight of an entire cultural shift. We live in the Bay Area on the West Coast of California, which has likely meant that the oddity in which we feel for gathering together to worship Jesus is not anything new. For many of us, we've been born into this shift. I don't know if you've had that experience. I have it all the time when people ask me that question, "What do you do for a living?" I say that I'm a pastor, and they look at me like they have never seen one before.

The scaffolding of Christendom, the assumed Sunday rhythms of worship, the shared moral vocabulary, and the cultural memories of the gospel, most of that is gone. And what it means is that the oddness of following Jesus is fully exposed. We are an odd people. To follow Jesus is to be odd. Not for the sake of just being strange, nor contrarian, but odd in the way that the gospel has always been odd.

Consider some of the rhythms and habits that we do. Take something like the practice of Sabbath, where we set aside an entire day for rest and delight, not striving to accomplish or accumulate. Think of the way we regularly give away part of our finances in a way that genuinely costs us. It's a counter-liturgy to the world of consumption that we live in. Think about the way that we speak of staying within our commitments of relationships and marriage, even when it's easy to walk away. That's an oddity. Think of raising children whose worth isn't measured by their accomplishments. Think of the forgiveness ethic in a world that says you have the right to hate the other. Think of the oddity of praying for the genuine wholeness of our enemies, to welcome strangers around our table, to tell the truth when a lie would serve us better. All of it seems increasingly odd.

The oddness of living the way of Jesus places us in contrast to the world around us. That's always been true of the people of God. This oddness is the way that God works through his people to find and save the world around us. Listen to what G.K. Chesterton said in his biography of St. Thomas Aquinas, "It is the paradox of history that each generation is converted by the saint who contradicts it most." Chesterton's point is that the saints who actually shifts a generation is not the one who echos it back to itself, merely holding up a mirror to itself, but rather those

who stand at the right angle in which culture cannot see them. The saint, by living as they do, contradicts, and it's in that contradiction that God works to convert the generation in which they live.

The language we've used for the past four or five years around here is that we want to be a transformed people transforming the Peninsula. You could say it differently. We want to be odd people. We want to know the truth and allow the truth to make us odd. For the past four weeks, we've been looking at this idea, the habit of contribution, one that I would argue stands in the sharpest contrast to the world around us. We live in a culture organized by consumption, where the deepest liturgies of the moment train us to worship at the altars of accumulation and accomplishment. So the oddest of all of these is the idea to flip the script, to be people who contribute rather than consume.

We're in the last part of a series on the habit of contribution. But really, we stand at the end of a much larger project we've been working on in this community. Going back almost five years, we've said we want to reorganize around a shared rule of life, a set of practices and habits that help us live into this odd existence of what it means to follow Jesus.

But we are bringing to a close this habit of contribution, which we have defined as partnering with God in the renewal of all things through the continual integration of our inner and our outer lives. We've talked about what it means to give ourselves away, to not be people who consume but contribute. We've talked about going on the inner journey of allowing the love of Christ to dwell at the center of who we are, and from there, our outer life finds its existence. It radically reshapes all of what it is to be a Christ follower. But one of the questions we haven't asked, and what we're going to look at this morning, is what does it mean, and how do we do that in the moment and context in which we live?

Jeremiah 29 is this image of exile, one of the richest metaphors throughout the scriptures. We talked a lot about this in the Lamentation series this past Lent, because that was the context in which the poet poured his heart out in lament. But we return to it here because it has something to speak to us about how we go about this oddity in a place where faithfulness will cause us to stick out. How do we go about living this life of contribution in a place where it feels quite odd?

This theme of exile is a common one, maybe one of the most common metaphors throughout the entire scripture from Genesis to Revelation. We're going to pick up first in the New Testament, just to see the way that the apostles were building the identity of the church based on that Old Testament experience of exile. Here is a letter from the Apostle Peter, who's writing to a litany of different people.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. 1 Peter 1:1-2

Notice that at the beginning, he addresses this letter to God's elect, the exiles scattered throughout. They aren't experiencing a unique exilic moment here, but Peter is picking up on this theme of exile. A little bit later in verse 17, he says, "*Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear*" (v. 17). A chapter later, he says, "*Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles,*" (1 Peter 2:11a). I just point this out to say that this is a common theme in the New Testament in which the church is trying to work out its identity as followers of Jesus in the place they found themselves. This imagery of exile is central to what it means for the first-century church to understand its identity, and it's central to us as well.

Exile in the broadest sense is the experience that we all feel in the world. When we leave the womb, that's an exile. When you walk through the seasons of life, such as leaving the home to enter elementary school, that is an exile. Launching a child into college, that's an exile. Life could be defined as a series of exiles in which we launch into new places and struggle to find our identity, where everything feels new. Can you remember the disorientation of moving to a new city, or landing at that college, or retiring from your work, and waking up the next morning? Exile is this sense of disorientation where everything you knew seems to be shifting.

Of course, Peter's speaking about this oddity of what it means to follow Jesus, that to follow Jesus in a host culture that is quite different than that described in the New Testament has the same disorienting effect. The exile experienced by the Hebrews in the Old Testament that we'll look at in Jeremiah is a dramatic instance of what we all experience by just being alive in the world and trying to follow Jesus.

Exile, in a narrow sense, is the condition of being God's people in a place that is not shaped by God. It's trying to be a people of contribution in a culture of consumption. That is an exilic type of experience. And often, what happens in the believer is that when we feel the sharp edge of exile, we want to recede. We want to either escape away and move towards our Christian enclaves, or we abandon our faithfulness to Jesus to try to blend in and just have a veneer of Jesus.

Now we're going back to the Old Testament. You see the people of God reflecting on their exile. This is a poem written either in the middle of exile, the story we just talked about in Jeremiah, or immediately after. In Psalm 137, they've been ripped from their homeland, and now they're reflecting similarly to the poet in Lamentations. This is a lament Psalm in which they're saying, "We're on the shores of Babylon." That's where they were taken to.

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung

our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? Psalm 137:1-4

That's the question of exile. How do we sing the songs of the Lord in a place where it makes no sense? It's the question we come to this morning, which is homed in on this particular moment, but I'd like to extrapolate it a bit larger. How do we, as followers of Jesus, walk the way of Jesus, sing the songs of the Lord, in a place that seems like it doesn't quite fit? The question before us is: How do we sing the Lord's songs while in a foreign land? Here are two ways not to do it.

Posture of Separatism

First, we cannot do this by having the posture of separatism. One way to live in exile is not through separatism. What I mean by this is simply isolation. This is the posture where we refuse to integrate with the world around us. Rather than seeking a life of contribution for the common good, we insulate. It's when your whole life becomes inwardly faced towards what the church is doing.

I've heard it described as a turtle posture. You stick your head out, look around, but it looks a little scary, so you just duck your head back in and insulate yourself from the world around you. It's where we get that old adage "They were so heavenly-minded that they were of no earthly good." It's where your whole existence as a follower of Jesus becomes about the inward journey in which you say, "I'll let the world do the world, but I want nothing to do with it." So they look inward and spend their time focused on how they can maintain their own faithfulness with no connection to the outside world, out of fear of what it may do to them.

Often, but not always, this is driven by fear. It's seeking to avoid reality because you're concerned about what the influences in the world may do to you. But the problem with this is that it lacks any connection to the other. How do you love your neighbors well if you never experience life with them? How do you do all of the "one anothers" in Scripture if you just turn inward?

One way to live in exile is not separatism. It is not the call of the church to just stay insular. Usually, this will lead to legalism, which ultimately leads to death because it becomes about the rules to maintain holiness. So we set all of these barriers and markers and fences on who can get in and who can go out, and we hold inward, and that ultimately leads to death.

People who grow up in this environment tend to just throw the whole thing away and eventually want nothing to do with the church because they realize it's all just about how they're self-serving one another. The answer is not separatism, but it leads us to the second posture on the other end of the spectrum, which is syncretism.

Posture of Syncretism

The posture of syncretism is actually a much larger issue in emerging generations because it's the posture of a chameleon. It's where you just

want to blend in. It's the posture that absorbs the flow of culture around you, and you disappear within the larger cultural trends because you don't want to be odd. You don't want to stick out. You want to blend in, and hopefully someone asks you about Jesus sometime.

This is the drift towards looking like everyone else to claim the name of Jesus in belief only. Syncretism means that our lives look nearly identical to the world around us. It's the experience of, when they find out you're a Christian; they are shocked even though they've known you for quite some time. That might be a little problematic.

For the exiles in biblical times, it would mean to take on the life from the worldview, the beliefs, and the habits of the Babylonians around them. This may bend toward an outward life where you're just trying to fit in, but it leaves little regard for how Christ is transforming your inward life, and it actually, in a weird way, shuts God off from that inward being because it never produces the life that flows out of that. This was a deep temptation for the exiles in Jeremiah's time, and it's a deep temptation for us as well.

Posture of Faithful Presence

If it isn't separatism or syncretism, what should the posture in exile be? It's what we learn in Jeremiah, and it's what I would say is "faithful presence." How do we faithfully follow the way of Jesus yet remain rooted and present in the world around us? Faithful presence is the way of integrating the inner and the outer life so that we find our faithfulness to Jesus while we also find presence in the world around us.

Faithful presence is about seeing your life as a gift of contribution, which means you don't insulate, you don't blend in, but rather you pour your life out in the same way that Christ has done so for us. This is, I believe, the exact charter that Jeremiah, the prophet, gives to the exiles in chapter 29. They've been taken from their land. They've marched seven hundred miles across the desert into Babylon, and now they are trying to figure out how to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land. This is where we arrive at in Jeremiah 29.

This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) vv. 1-2

Now, notice the diversity of people who are mentioned here, the priests and the prophets. So that's typically who we would like to think of as the separatist group, the ones that are the insulated ones, the professional Christians if you will. But also notice it talks about the artisans and the skilled workers, those who are more focused on the outer life.

If you remember last week, we looked at that character Bezalel. Think of both the priests and those under Bezalel, all of us, every single one of us included. That's essentially what that list portrays. The text goes on in verse 3. "He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah

son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:" (v. 3).

That's really a biblical way of saying he sent a letter to the exiles. It just changed hands a few times. "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:" (v. 4). Notice the one interesting phrase in there in which God says, "Those who I carried into exile." That should stand out to us because exile isn't typically the experience we all desire. It's not the one you wake up wanting to have. But here, God says this is the strategic plan that he has done.

You may be in the Bay Area today. You may live in this place and think, "Why has God planted me here?" I can't definitively say that God carried you here, but it does beg the question. So often, the church in this area gets so concerned about what it means to follow Jesus in a place that is difficult and challenging to follow Jesus in. But could it be that we are the church that's been carried here by God? Rather than separating or syncretizing, what if you were the faithful presence right in the midst of this place because God deeply loves the Peninsula? What if he was fostering a community that deeply loves this place, which has come to see that we are called to be here, rooted and present? Well, that's exactly what Jeremiah's going to challenge them with.

"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. vv. 5-6

The basic premise for Jeremiah's message to the exiles is, "You're going to be there for a while. So go ahead and unpack your bags and make yourself at home." Remember, this is the same lineage of people who spent many years wandering through the wilderness looking for a place. They were used to that vagabond type of life. But here Jeremiah says that they will be here, for what we find out later is at a minimum of 70 years. But he's beginning to paint this picture, this image of how you live out the way of Jesus in this unique place.

The first thing he says is, "Build houses." That means a rootedness in place. This is one of the unique areas where many of you are transplanted here, or maybe you've been here for many decades. But one of the things I've learned in my decade of living in the Bay Area is that this can often be a very transient place. That may be the story God has for you. You're passing through, and that's beautiful. I love that. I'm glad that you are here.

Some of us are constantly looking over the horizon to something better, thinking that there's greener grass over the horizon. I wonder if, as you intersect life here, and it can be challenging and hard but beautiful, God is saying, "Could you consider that maybe I carried you into exile, and the call here is to root yourself?" I wonder about a vow of stability, of just being connected to this place to build houses and live in them.

This dates all the way back in our DNA in the Bay Area to the Gold Rush, in which people constantly came and moved here to take from this

place, to gather and take its resources. To build the resume, to have the company go public and take the funds from that and then go off and live elsewhere. I wonder if to the exiles in the church in the Bay Area, God is saying, "Unpack your bags. Build a house here. Root yourself in this place."

Then he goes on, and he says, "Plant gardens." What he's speaking to here is that you will do work that will have a component of longevity, because he doesn't just say, "Plant gardens and run." He says, "Plant gardens and eat the produce that they produce." That takes time to cultivate. He's speaking here of contributing to the economic life of the place in which you're rooted. Pour your life out into that skilled work, artisan work, priests, and the prophets, and all of that work. Plant gardens here. Enjoy the fruit of your labor. Contribute to the life of this area. Do work that will seemingly outlive you. Plant something that's inherent to pursue its future good. This is all the work we talked about in the outer life. How are you uniquely called to contribute to the flourishing of the world around us? What has God gifted you with to bring this place and plant? He says, "Build houses," he says, "Plant gardens."

Then he says, "Marry and have children, and have your children have children." He's speaking here about pouring your life into the next generation, investing in the social life around you. Develop love and understanding for the people around you. Find your life wrapped up in those around you. Don't insulate. Don't just turn inward but invest in the next generation and the generation to come.

See, it's the general posture of pouring into those who are coming behind us, younger than us. There's something beautiful here for those of you who've crossed that threshold of retirement, who now have a lot of available time in ways that maybe other generations don't. What if the call on you who have reached that stage of retirement isn't just to kick back and enjoy, but to invest, to pour back into younger generations?

One of the beautiful things about this church is the diversity of generations that we have. It is such a beautiful gift. We attend something like practice labs as we are tonight, where we'll come back into this room and sit around tables. One of my joys is looking out and watching the different generations interacting around the table, talking and sharing life, learning from one another. If you are in that phase of life past retirement, please, I implore you, we need your voice. We need your wisdom. Find ways to plug in and pour back into this community to help shape the lives of your children and your children's children.

The image that Jeremiah has of this life of contribution and exile is about this idea of rootedness, of falling in love with the place in which you live. How has God wired you and called you to love this place? Verse 7 becomes the summary statement of all those practical steps he gives. *"Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (v. 7).*

The posture Jeremiah was communicating this idea of faithful presence, and he gives two distinctives that I would name as "meta" claims. He says, "Seek the peace of the city and its prosperity, because our well-being is rooted in this place." Notice the connection of not separating, of

saying, "You be prosperous over here while we let the big bad world do its thing," or just syncretizing and blending in, but rather he says to find a way to contribute that brings the flourishing of all, the common grace, to the people around us, so that their flourishing and our flourishing begin to meld together.

Seek the Peace of the City

Jeremiah gives two instructions in this idea of being faithfully present within Babylon. He says first, "Seek the peace of the city." This is the word *shalom* in Hebrew. We've talked a lot about this word, because it's one of the most important Old Testament words in all of Scripture. It means peace, welfare, and well-being. It isn't just the absence of conflict, a flattened way that we talk about peace; instead, it's this concept of flourishing, of everyone finding and elevating their lives, and everyone having their proper dimension or way of living. It's dynamic. It's the vibrant health of a society that pulses with divinely directed purpose. It's the surge of a life-transforming love that's working itself out in all the places around us.

To seek the *shalom* of the city is to throw ourselves into the work of faithful presence, of owning that we are an odd people living in a place we want to see thrive. It's to commit to the place where God has placed you and work to bring about its flourishing. It's to wake up tomorrow morning and realize that God has given us the raw materials that we are called to rearrange for the flourishing of others.

Faithful presence looks a whole lot like it did for Daniel in the Old Testament. Daniel was in exile. He was the recipient of this letter from Jeremiah. He would've read this letter, and what did Daniel do but find a way not to separate or to syncretize, but to remain faithful and deeply present to where he was placed. He was working for Nebuchadnezzar. The very one responsible for Daniel's exile. Can you imagine that? The way in which his heart had been transformed to seek the flourishing of the very place that had destroyed his known life. Seek the *shalom* of the city. Seek its prosperity.

We all have a unique position and a place within our world in which we can seek the *shalom* of this place. This is where our outer journey intersects with the call of God in this place. Where is God already active in seeking the redemption of the Bay Area, and how are you uniquely qualified to intersect with that work? How are you called to partner with God in that reconciliation? It means that we code software, and we teach third graders, and volunteer at the local food bank, and raise our kids and grandkids, and we leverage those retirement years for the younger generations. It means we have a new vision for this area, where it's not bent on what we can take, but on what we can give. We seek the *shalom* of the city. That's the first task of faithful presence.

Pray for the City

The Hebrew word here for pray is *palal*, and it means to pray, to make supplication, or a better translation is to intercede. This has to do with that inner journey. If to seek *shalom* is the outer journey, to intercede is the inner journey. We pray to the Lord for its flourishing. We come

and intercede, similarly to the role of a priest. That's often what the role of a pastor or priest is to simply mediate between God and the people.

Not that it's needed. We have direct access to God. It's not that you must channel through someone like me, but it's someone uniquely set aside to pay attention to your life and the life of God, and to call things out at those intersections. That's what it means to be a pastor, and all of us, in some sense, as the priesthood of all believers, are called to do that with the world around us. To take a posture of prayer for the city around us, to intercede is to begin to not just see your role as the output, it's that as well, but also to pastor the people that you intersect with.

What does it look like for you to be on the particular team you are on, the street where God has placed you? How are you uniquely situated to intercede between God and the people? One of the things that prayer does is it fundamentally de-centers the self. It reminds us that God is the one at the center of all things. Prayer is always listening and looking to be attentive to what God is doing and then responding in kind. Prayer begins by looking to God, and that creates a filter for us to see the world around us. Where can we then be permeated with the presence of God?

These two tasks, prayer and seeking shalom of the city, combine and integrate the inner and the outer journeys that we go on together, constantly at work in our workplaces, but doing so through a spirit of prayer and attentiveness to God. That dance between prayer and seeking shalom is the call of us in exile. That's the work of being faithfully present. But it won't be without its struggles.

Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the Lord. vv. 8-9

The response from most of the Israelites was acceptance of this voice of Jeremiah, but there were other prophets at the time who couldn't fathom what he was describing. You want us to seek the flourishing of Babylon? Are you crazy? So there were prophets that rose up, Ahab, Zedekiah, Shemaiah, who were giving a different voice, what Eugene Peterson called false dreams.

Rather than preaching about rootedness, they would get up and espouse the name of Yahweh and say, "God said we're actually going to go back soon, so just hold back." Who wouldn't say to build houses and plant gardens but would say quite the opposite. Just live and let live. Find a particular way to survive. They gave these false images of the grass always being greener, of God doing something different, other than rooting them in the place that they were.

These so-called prophets often made a good living fomenting discontent, selling a nostalgia about a fabled golden age that they would one day return to. But these are simply false dreams. What they were selling was that there was a good chance that they would soon be going back to all that they had lost. If so, then there was no need to develop a life of richness and texture and depth there. If their relationships were going back to Jerusalem, they could be casual and irresponsible in their

relationships in exile because they weren't going to see these people for very long. Why rearrange the chairs on the deck of the Titanic if it's going down?

It's a posture we often take. We'll just hold out until one glad morning, we'll fly away to some other place. But here Jeremiah says, "Don't listen to those prophets. They're liars. They're deceivers." It's also here where that spirit of consumerism can creep back in. Because if the ultimate goal is to get out of this place, if it isn't about being rooted here, then why not just live and let live? Why not go out and get yours? Consumerism takes root when we fail to see our lives wrapped up in the larger story of God's rootedness in this place.

This is why I constantly come back to what God is doing from Genesis to Revelation, that the story ends on this Earth, not in some distant, disembodied place. God is redeeming and reconciling this material world, and he's invited each and every one of us to be a part of it. Because if you buy the myth that some glad morning we will fly away, the problem with that is, why root ourselves here? But what if the work you are doing now is actually tied up in that larger story of God's redemption, and he's enlisting you to partner in that cosmic drama? That's the invitation. God does the heavy lifting, but don't let that squelch your own movement in this story.

This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. 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 hope and a future. vv. 10-11

This anchor promise that God is moving in the midst of the exile is what will propel the exiles forward. It is what should anchor us in this particular moment. But don't take it as an escape, that we will someday get out of this place, but rather, see it as the promise of God in the midst of whatever you're walking through.

God knows the plans he has for us, and that plan is through the exile. He knows it will be challenging. He knows it will be hard, but that's the exact thing that he is carrying us into, and he says that he will not abandon us. He will have us prosper. The plans that God had for his people was the experience of exile, 70 years of disorientation that would eventually lead to the fulfillment of God's promises. He would never leave them or forsake them, but they would have to walk through this season.

What I find so beautiful about the season of exile is that the majority of the Old Testament was written while the people of God were in exile? It was some of the most creative, generative times for the people of God, because all of the comforts were stripped away, and all they found was that they had to be rooted in life with God. And so much of the Hebrew Bible came out of this time, because the exile forced the people of God to go on both the inner and the outer journey, to seek the peace of the city in which it was found, and to intercede on its behalf. When we experience and give ourselves to exilic moments it will have the most formative impact on our lives. When we lay our lives out before the

Lord, we come to that place where we have nothing else but to depend on God.

Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile." vv. 12-14

God will be faithful to his promise. The invitation is for us to seek him with all of our heart, which, remember, the heart isn't the emotional center; it's the center of the whole human in the ancient world. It's the inner and the outer journey. In everything you do, pursue the Lord. He's not hiding, He's not trying to avoid you. The promise is clear: "You will find me when you seek me with all your heart." It can be a challenge to do that, but nonetheless, it is in fact true.

The exiles were those who took this letter seriously. They became the oddest people in Babylon, if you will. They came to know the truth, and the truth shaped them and made them odd. It's the invitation before every one of us. Eugene Peterson, in his book *Run With The Horses*, a commentary about the Book of Jeremiah, rewrote this letter to the exiles that I want to read to you, because it's quite profound.

Quit sitting around feeling sorry for yourselves. The aim of the person of faith is not to be as comfortable as possible but to live as deeply and thoroughly as possible—to deal with the reality of life, discover truth, create beauty, and act out of love. You didn't do it when you were in Jerusalem. Why don't you try doing it here, in Babylon? Don't listen to the lying prophets who make an irresponsible living by selling you false hopes. You have been in Babylon for a long time. You'd better make the best of it. Don't just get along, waiting for some miraculous intervention. Build houses, plant gardens, marry husbands, marry wives, have children, pray for the wholeness of Babylon, and do everything you can to develop that wholeness. The only place you have to be human is where you are right now. The only opportunity you will ever have to live by faith is in the circumstances you are provided this very day: this house you live in, this family you find yourself in, this job you have been given, the weather conditions that prevail at this moment. Peterson, *Run With The Horses*

I love that line, "The only opportunity you will ever have to live by faith is in the circumstances you are provided with this very day." We often avoid that. We often think that when this season's over, then I'll finally get to that peace or faith. I have found myself saying that at about every

stage of parenting that's been offered. When my girls get a little older, then I'll have time for this or that. If they just did this, if we just had that.

One of the disorientations of exile is that it constantly shifts our focus to looking elsewhere. But the wisdom that Jeremiah's trying to get us to see, the wisdom that Peterson's tapping into, is that the very real conditions that your life is comprised of right now are, in fact, the place in which God wants to meet you. Nowhere else. He wants to meet you in the circumstances of your life right now. It's the only place that God can meet you.

The invitation for us is to build houses and live in them, plant gardens, and eat what they produce. Give ourselves to the relationships and the context in which we live. Church, that's the invitation for all of us in exile, to find our life wrapped up in that work. To quit looking over the horizon, but to recognize this moment, time, and place is the context in which God has placed us, and he wants to meet us, and he wants to work through us. It's where all of this has been building, Christ in us so that Christ can flow through us. That's the invitation.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No.1501-4FC