

## **“These Seventy Years: Making a Home in Exile”**

Biblical Responses to Crisis, Online Bible Study -Sunday, April 5, 2020

**To prepare for this session**, take time to read slowly through Jeremiah 29:1-14. Imagine how these words would have felt during Israel’s time of crisis. (If you like, read Psalm 137 to get a taste of their frame of mind.) Then, think about our own situation, and your current approach to this pandemic. What are you learning? In what ways has your life been put on “pause”? In what ways does life continue, even now?

### **Session Outline:**

#### **Read Jeremiah 29:1-14**

#### **Imagining the historical context (see vv. 1-4):**

- How did it feel to be in exile? (see Psalm 137)
- What were the exiles in Babylon hoping for?
- (How does this relate to our situation right now?)

#### **Jeremiah’s message to the exiles:**

My paraphrase of Jeremiah’s/God’s message:

- Make a life for yourself here in this undesirable, hard situation. (vv. 5-7)
- Ignore those who offer false promises that things are about to get better. (vv. 8-9)
- Settle in and wait; it’s going to be this way for a long time. (v. 10)
- But eventually, exile will end and life will be restored, as I have promised. (vv. 11-14)

As a comparison, consider “illness narratives”: restitution, chaos, quest (from Arthur Frank)

“Quest stories meet suffering head on; they accept illness and seek to *use* it. ... The quest narrative affords the ill person a voice as teller of her own story...” (p. 115, Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*)

#### **Discussion questions:**

1. Was Jeremiah’s message to the exiles “good news”? Was it hopeful?
2. In what ways have you been waiting for this to be over with, so you can get back to living your life? What would it look like to live fully here, now? How do you build a life in “exile”?
3. What might the Israelites have learned during the exile?
4. For us, what lessons will we take with us from this pandemic? What might we learn about ourselves? About our church? About God? (see Barbara Brown Taylor quote below)

“Curiosity pokes its green head up through the asphalt of grief, and fear of the unknown takes on an element of wonder as the disillusioned turn away from the God who was supposed to be in order to seek the God who is. Every letdown becomes a lesson and a lure. Did God fail to come when I called? Then perhaps God is not a minion. So who is God? Did God fail to punish my adversary? Then perhaps God is not a policeman. So who is God? Did God fail to make everything turn out all right? Then perhaps God is not a fixer. So who is God? Over and over, my disappointments draw me deeper into the mystery of God’s being and doing. Every time God declines to meet my expectations, another of my idols is exposed.” [Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*]