



Reflections & Prayers for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity
20 September 2020



In our reading today, Jeremiah tells the exiles taken into captivity that they should settle down and try to lead normal lives. In this season of creationtide, James reflects on God's gift to us of the land and how we should look after it.

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Reading for this Sunday

Jeremiah 29.1, 4-7

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

Reflection from Revd James Brown

We are thinking today about the land, maybe one of those things we take for granted and just don't notice. During this pandemic we've probably all been aware of things we've taken for granted just by not noticing... like how much we communicate with a smile walking round a shop. Or a simple touch as we talk in the street.

And just the same is the ground beneath our feet. It is just there but we ignore it at our peril.

The land is a not often mentioned but hugely significant theme in the bible. It is mentioned 2000 times in the Old Testament alone. And a further 250 in the New Testament.

It was a crucial feature of the understanding of the people of Israel. Remember they were enslaved without a land to call their own. Then liberated from this Egyptian slavery with the promise that they would have somewhere to call home.

The ground became then some sort of signifier of God's presence and protection. It even became a kind of barometer for spiritual health in the nation of Israel. The sickness of the land or the abundance and health of the land became a running metaphor for the faith of the people.

But our reading today is from a fascinating period in the life of the people. Over the centuries they had been enslaved, then freed, then finally dwelt within a land they could call their own. And now they had been ransacked by Babylon, and taken away from their land as political prisoners. This period is known as the exile, as they were exiled from their land.

So what do you do? How do you think of God when your understanding of God is wrapped up with the place that you live in which you know longer live?

Is that God no longer powerful? Is it your fault for unfaithfulness? Does God not care? All these are explored but the theologians and artists of that time, much of the Old Testament is about that. But prophet Jeremiah... a kind of holy performance artist of this period of the exile... has a fascinating insight from God.

Away from their land, he says, build houses, plant gardens, have families. Seek the good of where you are and pray for it. For in its welfare you will find your welfare.

It is not so much about where you are but how you are.

It is all a gift anyway. This whole idea of owning the land is mad when you step back. As the great theologian Crocodile Dundee said, 'For people to argue about who owns the land they live in is a bit like two fleas arguing about who owns the dog they're on!'

This is all God's and all a gift... love it. And it not just a gift to you and me but to all life, including all human life made in the image of God so we'd better treat it well.

Sadly, it takes only the tiniest bit of research to realise that we are not.

Jeremiah was extraordinary. This reading from him is an instructive one... put roots down wherever you are; God is always God, this gift is always a gift, love the land.

But beyond this consoling, instructive message, his greatest gift was grief. In the face of widespread disaster... all around people were clinging on to the old ways, trying to make excuses and find hope where there was none, and Jeremiah was courageously public with his tears and his criticism. The vast majority of us, myself included, are not taking climate disaster seriously enough. We need to grieve a little.

We need to bewail government subsidies and our fossil fuel addictions. We need to be angry about habitat destruction. We need to mourn the mass species extinction and decline that we are collectively responsible for.

That is the way of the prophet.

We will also very soon be witnessing mass climate migration. A report this week from the Institute for Economics and Peace predicts that in the next

30 years there will probably be 1.2 billion people living in countries unable to sufficiently withstand ecological threats.

And as they flee, Jeremiah's message to them will be the same as we read today... when you are displaced be where you are, build houses, plant gardens, have families. Seek the good of where you are and pray for it. For in its welfare you will find yours.

Let us note this early. Pray for the world, grieve for it, change your ways, and let your voice be heard by those with even more power than you. Amen.

Each week of creationtide the Eco Church team at St John's is offering a small suggestion of lifestyle changes we can make and this week's relates to the land in that it is about our food sourcing. There is a helpful guide to sustainable food production. LOAF

Local

Organic

Animal friendly

Fairtrade

Prayers

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever.
Amen.

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Colossians 1: 16-17

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

As our saviour taught us, so we pray
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen

Parish Prayers for the week ahead

In the Anglican cycle of prayer:

Sunday	The Province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan
Monday	Kiteto (Tanzania); Kitgum (Uganda); Kitui (Kenya)
Tuesday	Panama (Central America); Central Pennsylvania (The Episcopal Church); Kivu (Rwanda)
Wednesday	Pankshin (Nigeria); Central Philippines (Philippines)
Thursday	Panyana (South Sudan); Central Solomons (Melanesia); Central Tanganyika (Tanzania)

Friday Central Zambia (Central Africa)
Saturday Paraguay (South America); Central Zimbabwe (Central Africa); Kobe (Japan)

In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday Parish of Croxley Green, All Saints (Deanery of Rickmansworth)
Monday Parish of Croxley Green, St Oswald (Deanery of Rickmansworth)
Tuesday Parish of Mill End and Heronsgate with West Hyde (Deanery of Rickmansworth)
Wednesday Parish of Rickmansworth (Deanery of Rickmansworth)
Thursday Parish of Sarratt (Deanery of Rickmansworth)
Friday Parish of Bletsoe (Deanery of Sharnbrook)
Saturday Parish of Bolnhurst (Deanery of Sharnbrook)

For the homes and families in:

Sunday Fairway Close, Field Close
Monday Fovant Close, Gordon's Walk
Tuesday Gorselands, Grange Court Road
Wednesday Green Lane Close, Greenway
Thursday Grove Avenue, Grove Road
Friday Hadleigh Court, Hammondswick
Saturday Hatching Green, Hatching Green Close

The Sick:

Berkeley, Emily, Amy Smart, Claire, Jo, Sue, Christine Strohm, Hermione, Karen, Sue Holt, Enid Giles, Jo Young, Shambu Mitra and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

For the recently deceased:

Hien Bagott, Pat Morris

In their year's mind:

Mary Sketchley, Moray McMillin, David Freeman, Vera Millard,
Patricia Morris, Kathleen O'Dell, Michael Hopper, Betty Warltier

[A reminder... of this phone service:](#)

Daily Hope – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.