

“Unseen ”

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Part of a series on Being a Neighbour

Jeremiah 29:1-14

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You can watch the video clip here. <https://youtu.be/ta42xU2UXLA?t=30>
We started after the intro, and listened about a minute.

Hey cool cats. We're gettin' groovy to Boney M.'s disco cover of a great Jamaican reggae number.¹ They're singing the Bible, Psalm 137. It's about singing, when we've been torn away from our songs.

A God-Send

Those exiles of Israel, they were the best. All the decision-makers, the top-of-the-pile movers-and-shakers. The king! They'd been the centre of things. They'd led God's nation. They'd known the privileges of power. They'd mattered!

They'd defied Babylon's empire, boldly and confidently. Their prophets had encouraged them. Their priests had blessed them. God's People they were! God on their side, he was!

And they'd lost. Crushed. Carted off. Bereft and bewildered, they were torn away. What was there to say? Or sing?

His highness who'd sat David's throne was now taking handouts. Jerusalem's high society was now nothing. Unnoticed in the crowds of Babylon, lost in the biggest city in the world.

Then, they get this letter from back home. From Jeremiah. He'd been one of the few prophets who had not cheered their ambitions. They'd hated Jeremiah. Now he's writing them. Not with "I told you so" taunts, but encouragement. And God's word for them. Maybe now they'd listen.

Please read Jeremiah 29:4-14. You can find it [here](#).

What does God say?

It's not going to end quickly, this exile. You're going to be here a long time. So settle in. Build here. Invest here. Grow here. Survive here.

I will bring you back, someday (God says). Count on that! I'm not leaving you. My future for you continues.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rivers_of_Babylon

But for now, my future for you is here. So . . . bless. Be a blessing. Work for the shalom, the peace, the well-being of this city that doesn't feel like home. Because it is to here that I have sent you (God says).

How Will We Sing?

The songs we know, they don't sound right here.

Friends, I'm tempted to ask the same question in our days. Actually, I have been.

You've heard the word, that we're not going to be getting together for worship, not in-person, not this Advent, not this Christmas. I'd hoped otherwise. We'd been working on otherwise. But it's just not wise.

Even if we could have, though, there would have been no singing. Advent without song? Christmas without carols? And many could not have participated. Could I sing "O Come, All Ye Faithful," knowing they could not?

So I'm a bit glad, because all that would have made me sad.

We'll be online, something like this. It's not ideal. It's not what any of us want. We'll make it work, though. We'll find ways to make it good. More important, we know God loves it when God's people are celebrating, delighting in the Lord. So God will give us what we need.

And yes, we'll sing. We'll all be muted; Zoom doesn't work well for congregational song. Still, even when it's only your voice you're hearing, you'll know we're all singing together. That will be good.

But it wasn't just literal "singing" those exiled Jews in Babylon were struggling with. *If this is going to go on longer than we expected, even if there is hope for us sometime, what do we do in the meantime? How do we be faithful? How do we remain true to who God has made us to be?*

Sounds familiar. These are our questions too. How do we keep attuned to the rhythms and melodies of Jesus' grace? How do we live the good news and share it, behind a mask?

Hidden Honey

Maybe bees can help us again.

A few times this fall I've talked about what honeybees can teach us when it comes to loving our neighbours.

For instance, honeybees are a keystone species. They are small, but as pollinators they are vital for their whole ecosystem to thrive. So as Jesus' people in our neighbourhoods, can we be keystones? We can contribute to the health and vitality

of our communities, so they thrive.

Another lesson. In the Middle Ages, folks paid careful attention to God's creatures, like the bee, to learn what God might be saying through them. I invited you to see your neighbourhood. Take a slow walk through it. Pay careful attention. Ask God to show you what God wants you to notice.

Here's another bee lesson.

Rosslyn Chapel lies a bit south of Edinburgh. It was built in the mid-1400s, and is considered among the finest architecture in Scotland.²

About 10 years ago, they were doing major restoration work. A high-up pinnacle needed to be taken apart and repaired. When they did, inside they found a hollowed space. It held the remains of beehives. On the outside, medieval stonemasons had carved a flower, only on this pinnacle, with a hole in the middle, to allow the bees to go in and out. This decision meant that for five centuries, colonies of bees have thrived there, in this space purposely created for them. They'd left when the recent work began. Now it's finished, and they've come back.³

Medieval people made beehives and harvested honey. They valued it as a medicine and, of course, to eat. But this beehive they built far out of human reach. It was only for the bees, for their benefit, for their flourishing.

The restoration project's architect said *"As the honey could not be harvested I believe that they provided the hives as an act of kindness. . . ."*⁴

Singing Unseen
What a lesson for us in this?

Jump back to those Jerusalem exiles in Babylon. *"Promote the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile."*

Suppose they do this. Who's going to notice? Sure, back home they were headline makers. Everyone cared what they did. The Christian Church used to be like that too, in our communities. People cared what we did. These days? It's probably better when we stay out the headlines!

Now, we're just part of the crowd. Those Jews in the great multi-cultural metropolis

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosslyn_Chapel

³ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/8594724.stm

<https://www.rosslynchapel.com/news/bees-cause-a-buzz-at-chapel>

⁴ Malcolm Mitchell, quoted in Preston Pouteaux, The Bees of Rainbow Falls: Finding Faith, Imagination, and Delight in Your Neighbourhood (Skyforest, CA: Urban Loft Publishers, 2017) Kindle edition, loc 686.

that was Babylon, were just another bunch of nobodies. No one would notice.

Still, God had sent them. Still, God is sending us, to cultivate life, flourishing, abundance and hope in our neighbourhoods.

Can we have the same imagination as those Rosslyn Chapel builders centuries ago?

What if we, planted where God sends us, have what Preston Pouteaux calls, "*that kind of small, bee-sized vision for making neighbourhoods lush and fruitful, or that long-term vision to realize that generation after generation will benefit from [our] creativity?*"⁵

Can we be humble enough to do small things, hidden away, out of the spotlight, that give life?

We're giving away these Candles of Hope. If people know it is us, fine. If they have no idea Elora United is doing this, if they never even hear of us, fine.

Promote the shalom-peace-wellness of the place where I have sent you.

Our style of singing carols is cramped this year. I'm not happy about that.

But singing our Lords' song? Singing generosity. Yes, singing grief, disappointment, anxiousness. But also, singing hope, singing peace, singing joy, singing love. Singing good news. Singing Jesus.

Singing silently? Sure. Singing unseen? Maybe.

Nothing is stopping us. God is sending us. Thanks be to God!

⁵ Pouteaux, loc 695.