

Seek the Peace of the City
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October 3, 2010

Psalm 137
Lamentations 1:1-6
Jeremiah 29:4-7

The concept of “home” is a difficult one for me. My family moved several times while I was growing up. I’ve lived in 11 different houses and apartments, not including various dorms and houses during college. My roots are in western Pennsylvania, and I’m an Oregonian at heart. I hate to admit it, but 12 years in Indiana really did make me partially Hoosier. Though it would seem that I shouldn’t have an inordinate attraction to one particular place, when it comes to discussions of “Home” I’m most likely to think of something other than here. I suspect that tendency is true for most of the adults here. Among the post-college set we have very few natives of the Washington area. We have Kansans aplenty, Californians, Pennsylvanians, Dakotans (South and North), Buckeyes, Hoosiers, Michiganders, New Yorkers, Iowans, Illinoisans and that’s just a few examples from within the United States. We also have Canadians, Kenyans, Indonesians, French, Taiwanese and at least two from the Republic of Texas.

I would assume that most of us came to this area by choice — for a career, a change of pace, a relationship. Many here are “just passing through” — for school or a short term work or service assignment. Though we have chosen Washington, many of us still see somewhere else as “home.”

How must that feeling be magnified for exiles and refugees? For those who come not by choice, but because they had no choice? For strangers in a

strange land? And how much more for those who depart a homeland destroyed and savaged — sometimes by the very government of the country they are now supposed to call home? In this context we read the shocking rage of Psalm 137 and the deep groaning of Lamentation. When in Babylon, it is natural to long for Jerusalem. And when in Washington, it is natural to long for Newton.

But God offers counterintuitive advice for the homesick, the wanderer, the exile, the refugee. Those exiled to Babylon are urged to make a home of the city and seek its welfare.

⁴Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶Take 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. ⁷But 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.

Some of you will remember those verses as a theme for the church's 50th anniversary celebration. For me, they are a reminder that wherever we find ourselves planted we are called to make a home. Making a home means seeking peace and welfare; settling in; making your new city a good place to live. Doing this allows us to live in the here-and-now, rather than in the memory of another place we love. It permits the next generation of our church — those raised in this area — to recognize this as a place worthy of our love and affection.

I especially like that these verses make a tangible link between the concept of "home" and peace. Home is not just somewhere that we happen to live — it is somewhere that we make better. And peace is not just an absence of warfare or conflict between nations — it is a state of being; a way of living. Peace grows where it is planted and flourishes where it is tended to.

By making our home here, we also make it a more hospitable place for refugees, immigrants and exiles. If we see this as a home — if we cultivate peace here — then it will be that much more hospitable for refugees. How could we be hospitable if we do not love the place to which we welcome? On this World Communion Sunday we celebrate an act of solidarity with Christians far and near. In sharing this communion we declare that as Christians, we are united with people of all nationalities that take the bread and cup with us. We claim that the body of Christ is one without borders. We call the entire world our home, and we call all peoples our neighbors. And before we make those claims we must first call this city our home, and those who live on our streets our neighbors.