

Time after Pentecost – Lectionary 28
The Reverend John H. Brock

8:30 a.m. Sunday, October 10, 2010
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7; Luke 17: 11-19

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen

It's finally coming. After lots of rumors and a whole bunch of reports, finally I have heard from a source that I believe, in a move that will make hundreds, or thousands - or maybe even hundreds of thousands - of people happy, I have read an article that the Apple iPhone is coming to Verizon wireless. Now of those hundreds of thousands of people who are going to be very happy, there will be at least one person in the Brock household who will rejoice. (I'm an Android guy, for those of you who know what that means).

There are lots of places I had seen, and places and publications that had written, both online and in print, that they have purported to know. For more than two years folks have been reporting that the iPhone was coming to Verizon Wireless. "Oh, it will be here in the spring of 2010," "it will be here the first quarter of 2010," or "it will be here the Fall of 2010."

Those words and assurances came from people and publications that I generally trust, but not until I read it that epitome of veracity, that publication of all things right and true, *The Wall Street Journal*, did I actually, honestly, and truly believe the purported information. All those other articles? Well, they were, maybe, at best hopeful guesses, or wishful thinking. They were overly optimistic. At worst? They were False Prophets.

So I'm using a bit of a facetious example to make the point that dealing with incorrect information, false statements, or even hollow promises, is at the core of our first lesson. That's what Jeremiah is talking about as he writes to the exiles in Babylon.

Here's what's has been going up to and including our lesson this morning. The Northern kingdom of Israel falls to the Assyrians about 721 BC. The Assyrians come down and invade Judah, but they are not able to take it, so they go home. The Assyrians get beaten out by the Babylonians. The Babylonians come into the southern kingdom of Judah, where Jerusalem is, and Jerusalem falls to the armies of Babylonian in 598 B.C. All of Judah falls to Babylon about ten years later in 587 B.C. It is in that in between time, between Jerusalem being taken and all of Judah falling, that Jeremiah begins writing letters to those who are in exile in Babylon. (That's what those missing few verses in our reading are about – not necessary for the plot, but they fill in the detail nicely.) When Jerusalem falls, the leaders and ruling elite are taken away to Babylon, approximately 650 miles to the east.

You also need to remember that at this point in history, the theological point of view concerning deities, is that gods are very much confined to the place where their house of worship is. In other words, gods are geographically restricted. If you

go somewhere you can take your god with you, you can build a shrine and carry it with you, or you can make a little carving of your god and stick your god in your pocket. But if you are going to travel somewhere, such as if you leave Camp Hill, your Camp Hill deity will lose its power when you get to Enola. By the time you cross the river, your deity is not doing too well, and if you make it all the way to Philadelphia, you may as well pack it in and find some local gods to take care of you, because your celestial being just does not have much say, the farther away from home you get.

While Jeremiah is writing to the exiles in Babylon, there are other prophets who are claiming to speak for the Lord God. If you look back in chapter 28, there's a prophet by the name of Hanniah, who openly refutes everything Jeremiah is saying. Hanniah goes around saying, first of all, that Judah is not going to fall, and more importantly, Hanniah says that those folks who are currently in exile, will only be there a couple of years, before the Lord God will empower them, they will rise up, and go marching back home. Hanniah gives them an entirely different time line and sequence of events. And as it turns out, everything that Hanniah tells them . . . is wrong.

Jeremiah is trying to give the news to the people, to wake them up to the reality of their situation. 'You're in exile,' he says. 'You are going to be here awhile, as a matter of fact a *long* while, so make the best of it, because you're not alone. God is not stuck back in Jerusalem; in that stone temple that Solomon built. God is with you there in Babylon.' Jeremiah is trying to bring hope to the people in a time of hopelessness.

Here they are in a foreign city, in a country that is occupying their homeland. They are forced "guests" in a place that they would rather not be in. Yet what does God, through Jeremiah, tell them? "*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.*" In other words, pray for the city or country in which you live, even if, or especially if, it's not the country of your birth. That was a radical concept for that day, and it might still be a radical concept for us today.

In our gospel lesson, the hearers would have been shocked that it was a Samaritan, and *only* a Samaritan, who returned to thank Jesus. Samaritans were looked down upon by the people of Israel. They were the "wannabes." They were not even worthy to be walking on the same streets as someone from Israel. To put in modern day terms, let's say that there is an American doctor treating refugees at a camp in Pakistan. It is a diverse group and they all have the same illness. They recover and go away, but the only person that comes back to thank that doctor, is a former Taliban soldier, or maybe the Iraqi imam. That's how folks in Jesus' day would have heard this story, and maybe be offended by the story of this thankful Samaritan.

But praying for, caring for, the people around us, regardless of their ethnic heritage, regardless of what their faith foundation is, or what their political affiliation might be, that's what Jeremiah is talking about. That is one of the points

that I think Jesus is trying to make. But what is that Jeremiah encourages us to do? To learn about, to care about, and to become a part of, the country in which we live

This past week I helped the book discussion group down at Camp Nawakwa. We reviewed Karen Armstrong's book, *Islam: A Short History*. It was an interesting book, packed full of a lot of information. Took me a little bit to get through it. But it helped me have a new understanding of Islam and those who follow the way of Islam. I have to say that most of the Muslims whom I have met, which admittedly, is not a great number, but those who I have met, who are either citizens, or in the process of becoming citizens of the United States, prayed for the well being of this country. I'm not sure that I could do the same if the situation were reversed. How many of us pray for our own country as it is? How many Republicans pray for the well being of the Democrats? How many Democrats pray for the health of Republicans? This morning we have been encouraged, and we all promise, to pray for Tyler, because of our baptism, we are called to love and support one another. But we are not all the same. Still, we are called to love and care for each other.

"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you in exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

There are a whole lot of "false prophets" out there today, that would have you believe that simply because we bare the sign of the cross on our foreheads, we as believers in Christ are set apart. 'We aren't really called to care for our borough, our city, our government. It is o.k. to use up the resources we have, because Jesus is coming back soon. It is alright to not care about what happens to the underprivileged, those on welfare, and folks dealing with poverty, mental illness or homelessness.' Because according to that way of thinking, God wants us to be rich financially. God will take away all your problems, if only your faith is strong enough. If you are a *real* believer, then you won't ever be sent away into exile. You won't have to experience your own personal Babylon. That way of thinking, my friends, is a false prophet speaking.

A true prophet of God will tell you that God loves you, and that God is always with you. That does not mean that nothing bad will ever happen to you. That does not mean that only good things are going to be part of your life. That does not mean all your problems are going to be solved. Look at the people of Jerusalem - they're stuck in Babylon. But just as God was with the people in Babylon, God is with us, right now. Right now in this place, and when we leave here, wherever we go, wherever we are, whatever we are doing, God is with us. God loves us. God forgives us. God cries and laughs, and hurts and rejoices with us, each and every time.

So beware of false prophets. And know that God is with you. Always. Amen.

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