

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

5:30 p.m. Saturday, October 9, 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.

So I think, I am almost positive, that I believe that it's finally going to happen. There's been lots of rumors, a lot of false reports, but I finally heard it from a source that I believe, that the Apple I-phone is going to be coming to Verizon Wireless. It's going to make a lot of people, especially my spouse, very happy. (For those of you that understand the difference, you need to know that I am an android guy. But if you don't know, it doesn't matter.) There have been lots of places and people and publications, both online and in print that have been reporting for at least two years that I can think of, that the I-Phone is coming to Verizon Wireless. "Oh, it will be here in the spring," an article said, "oh, it's coming the first quarter of 2010" I can remember reading. "Oh, it will be on Verizon by the fall of 2010." And those words and assurances came from writers and publications that I generally trust. But, it was not until I read about it in the epitome of truth, the publication of all things right, *The Wall Street Journal*, that I actually honestly and truly believed this important information. Now the rest of those writers and articles were maybe at best hopeful guesses, wishful thinking, overly optimistic, at worst we can call them false profits.

What's the big deal about making some false, incorrect or flat out wrong stories you might ask? Because dealing with incorrect information, false statements, hollow promises even, is at the core of what Jeremiah is talking about to the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Babylon. Because that's whom Jeremiah is writing to in our first lesson tonight. Now we need to remember that the Northern kingdom of Israel had fallen around 721 BC. The Assyrians came down, they invaded the Southern kingdom of Judah, but they didn't take it over. As a matter of fact, they left and life in the South goes on. It's not until the 590's, after the Babylonians have displaced the Assyrians. The Babylonians are now the power in control. The Babylonians come into the country of Judah, which is where Jerusalem is. They take over the city of Jerusalem. They gather up all of the leading elite and they hike them 650 plus miles east to Babylon. About ten years after Jerusalem falls the entire country will eventually succumb to the will of the Babylonians. But it's in that in between time, the time when Jerusalem is invaded and Judah falls completely that Jeremiah begins writing to the exiles in Jerusalem. We're not exactly sure where Jeremiah is. We're guessing he's still back in the country of Judah.

We also need to remember that at this time the theological point of view is that your god is stuck in whatever country you live in. Your god is geographically restricted. You can maybe carry your god around with you. You can maybe make a portable shrine and carry your god if you go from Camp Hill over to Enola, maybe you can take your god along with you. Maybe you can even have a small copy that you can put your god in your pocket. But regardless if you do either one of those,

as soon as you leave the confines, the restrictions of where you live, as soon as you get out of Camp Hill, your god's power and authority is going to begin to diminish. And here the people 600 miles plus away in Babylon, nowhere close to where their god lives in the stone temple that Solomon built in the city of Jerusalem.

There are also other prophets there in Judah, not just Jeremiah. As a matter of fact, if you open up your Bible and look back at chapter 28 you'd find out that there's a guy names Hanniah who goes around telling the people that well, first of all, just because Jerusalem fell doesn't mean that Judah's not going to fall to the Babylonians. And then he goes on to tell them that the folks who are currently in exile in Babylon, well they are just going to be there a couple of years before the Lord God gives them the power, gives them the courage, gives them the military might to break free from the Babylonians and return back to Jerusalem.

Except that the people stay there for another seventy years. But, while they are living there in exile in Babylon, the people begin to understand as Jeremiah preaches and writes to them that the Lord God is not stuck back in the ruins of the temple back in Jerusalem. As a matter of fact, the Lord God is there with them, in Babylon giving them hope, encouraging them in all that they do. So, Jeremiah is striving to bring hope in a time of hopelessness to the people. As there in a foreign city in a country that's occupying their homeland they are forced "guests" in an establishment they'd rather not be. What does Jeremiah tell them that the Lord God is saying to 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" v7. Pray for the city / country in which you are exiled.

This last week I spent three days down at Camp Nawakwa helping to lead a book study group. It was on the book called *Islam: A Short History* by Karen Armstrong. It was a very good book and a good discussion group. The Camp director of Kawakwa shared with us that earlier in the week the camping office had received a call from an individual who did not identify himself, but the conversation went something along the lines like this: 'Why is the camp promoting Islam? They shouldn't be teaching about that religion.' 'Well, sir, we're not really teaching about Islam. We're doing a book study and the group is talking about Islam.' 'Why would anyone want to do THAT?' 'Well, it is very obvious sir that you don't want to,' and at which point the fellow hung up the phone. But why wouldn't we want to learn about Islam? Because isn't that along the lines of what Jeremiah is directing the people to do? To learn what it is like to live in another country. To be a part of the country in which we live. Now, it is admittedly different for Jeremiah to be talking to the exiles who are being forced to live in another country, and us living in the land of our birth. So why would we want to learn about another religion? If we had more and more people either becoming citizens who are Muslim, or we have to deal with folks throughout the world who are Muslims, why wouldn't we want to understand what their faith is about?

One of the things that surprised me during our three-day discussion is learning more about Islam myself, is that how the faith itself and the overwhelming majority of practitioners of that faith are indeed peaceful and promote peace. It's only a

very small amount who go forth causing terrorism and destruction. We can think of it in terms of how much of the world learned about the congregation in Florida at the beginning of September who wanted to burn the Koran. Yet, that individual and that congregation don't represent the majority of Christians that I know.

"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" v7. There are too many "false prophets" who would have you believe that we, as believers, are set apart that we are not really called upon to care for our borough, or our city, our government, our country, our planet. That it's okay to use up all of our resources. It's alright to not care about what happens to those who are not believers, to those who are underprivileged, to those who are on welfare, to folks dealing with poverty or mental illness or homelessness. According to this kind of thinking, *God wants us to be Rich, financially and God will take away all of your problems if only your faith is strong enough. If you're a REAL believer, then you won't ever be sent away into exile. You won't ever have to experience your own personal Babylon.* That's a False Prophet way of thinking. The True Prophet of God will tell you that God loves you, that God is ALWAYS with you. That does NOT mean that only good things are only going to happen to you. That does NOT mean that all of 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. God is with us. God is with you, right here, right now, and when you go from here where ever you go, God continues to go with you. You don't need a shrine; you don't need to have a little god in your pocket. God, our God, is not confined to stone temples or brick and mortar buildings. God lives in our hearts. God loves us and forgives us and cries, and laughs, and hurts and rejoices with each and every one of us, whenever that happens. Let us go forth tonight remembering, that God is with us, always.

Amen.