

Sunday, October 13, 2013

Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-7

**The God Who Comes: Living in the Presence of God** - by Roland G. Kuhl © 2013

What do you do when you are in a new place, different place, a hard place, a difficult place?

You figured out how to connect with God in familiar places – but how do you connect with God in new, different, difficult places?

It is challenging enough to be a disciple of Jesus in our world  
– with all the cultural influences that seek to dilute our witness as God’s people, but we manage to figure out how to live Christianly in the context of our world.

But then we get sick, we lose our job, we lose a family member to cancer  
– life gets hard, difficult  
– and living as a disciple of Jesus is not as simple as it was before.

We feel lost, at sea, wondering where God is in this new place, this new situation.

These are the same questions that the people of God were asking themselves as they were taken captive and hauled off to Babylon.

Their whole life had been in Jerusalem; their livelihood was in Jerusalem; their support networks were in Jerusalem; God was in Jerusalem!

Now they were in Babylon.  
There were taken away from their whole way of life  
– there were taken away from God  
– God was left behind.

They were asking themselves:  
What do you do when you are in a new land, a strange place, so far from home?

Though you were not always faithful to God, you knew where God was.

But now you wonder where God is, not knowing how you are going to make it?

The realistic and expected response might be one of anxiety and fear, followed by becoming incapacitated, destitute.

The people of Jerusalem, had become so used to finding God in the Temple, and going up to the Temple to meet God, that they forgot what kind of God, God was.

They forgot: that God was I AM WHO I AM.  
They forgot that God was “I will be with you.”  
They forgot their testimony in observing other nations – “What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way Yahweh our God is near us whenever we pray to him?” (Deut. 4:7).

They were in exile.  
God was in Jerusalem.  
And they filled with fear in this new situation – because God was not with them.

Likewise, when life changes on us  
– when tomorrow becomes unknown, we find ourselves filled with similar fears.

We also wonder where God is  
– wondering why God is not in our new situation?

We may also have forgotten who God is?

When what we hoped for does not come about? Is God with us?

When everything we do to be healthy, yet we get sick anyway? Where is God?

When we struggle to find work, to pay the bills, to survive, let alone thrive? Has God abandoned us?

When new opportunity comes, but we are not sure we have the strength to handle it? Can God help us?

Listen, then to Jeremiah's letter to those who were carried off into exile  
– but also for us who are exiled from our familiar places.

This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel says – “to all those I carried into exile . . .”

It is evident that the army of Nebuchadnezzar did the heavy work of taking the people into exile, but God says here – “to all those I carried into exile . . .”

**Is this a way of saying**

- “everything happens for a reason,”
- “this must be the will of God.”

No, I don't think so  
– I hear this statement differently  
– I hear it pastorally, I see it pastorally.

Though they may have been led by Nebuchadnezzar's army,  
**it was God who goes with them, beside them, among them, carrying them.**  
**God was with them.**

Back in the desert during the Exodus, the people pulled up their tent stakes and moved when God moved and the people stopped and camped when God stopped.

But now as God's people are being uprooted, God moves with his people, God uproots himself and walks with his people, supports and carries his people as they are exiled.

This is something I am beginning to understand about God  
– God is one who always comes to us.

God has done this from the beginning.

In the garden, God came to Adam and Eve in the cool of the day to converse with them.

God comes to Moses in the burning bush.

When Daniel's cohorts are thrown into the fiery furnace, God comes to them in the furnace.

God comes taking on our humanity in Jesus – to walk with us, to be with us.

And on the day of Pentecost until today  
– the Spirit of God is always coming to us to lead us, to guide us, to carry us.

And so with us  
– in our struggling in our difficult circumstances, whatever we encounter, God comes to us, to be with us, to journey with us!

### **Can you take hold of that for you?**

And what does God say to the Judeans in exile  
– “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease – flourish, enjoy life, LIVE!.

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city, to which you have been carried into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

In whatever we encounter, whatever we face  
– look for the presence of God, of Life in the midst of it  
– because that is the foundation on which you continue living life to the fullest.

You may be struggling with illness  
– yet every new day is a day in which we are given the opportunity to live

You may be struggling with financial solvency  
– but every day leads to another day and another.

Whatever we face  
– everyday is a day in which God comes to us to be with us!

### **So what does this mean for us? For us being the people of God, of the God who comes?**

The meaning is found in the statement: “seeking the peace and prosperity of the city.”

**It means that in being a community of the God who comes,  
That we are to be the kind of community in the world that comes as God comes**  
– for one another who are experiencing times of difficulty  
– for others who are seeking peace in their lives in the midst of their struggles in life.

In living as God's people among all who are struggling, in difficult places, in hard places, where God's presence is not seen, **we are to be the community that comes as God comes.**

**We not only give witness to God coming, but by our coming – we reveal the God who comes!**

Our calling is to “come” much more than it is to “go.”

Presented are two different postures; two different ways of being present.

We often misinterpret our mission in the world as God's people as the call to “Go.”

But that is to get it wrong for in “going” we are always on the move, never settling down;  
We have an agenda!

Actually, our call to mission is not “Go,” but “as you go, as you go about living your life, as you go about building houses, settling down, planting gardens, eating what they produce, marrying and having sons and daughters, etc. . . .” be about being the community who comes  
– revealing and making known the presence of the coming God, to be among the people to whom we've been sent.

As we find comfort in our lives when God comes to us.

We are, likewise, as the people of God, to bring hope and comfort to those to whom we are called to minister – not as a people who are “going” but as a people who come!

To be present – not just to come in, Do, and Leave

It is in participating with God in God's mission of God coming  
– that we make visible God's presence, made visible in our communities over the long haul  
– in our circumstances  
– in the circumstances of others  
– so that they we all might live, all might prosper

This is what Jesus had in mind when he talked about his coming to bring life, abundant life!

The reality in which we are called to live  
– is to live our lives in the presence of the coming God – over the duration of our lives (and for NSMC – for over 28 years.)

No matter what we encounter  
– and what we encounter often knocks us down  
– we are lifted up by the God who comes  
– and we lift others up by being the community that comes

In my own life  
– following Jesus was always about my coming to him  
– and I could never quite get to him . . .

But since I received God's coming to me, embracing me, no matter what I encounter and have encountered in life

- my reaching out to the hand of Jesus, as the One who always comes
- has enabled me to walk and to thrive.

And what enables us to walk as the community of God's people

- as NSMC
- is for us to always reach out to Christ's hand, as the One who always comes to us in order to walk with him.

Reach out to him and may you and I be open to be led by Jesus **to be the community that comes to whomever God brings to us and we will walk with those God brings into our lives.**