

## **Plant Yourself, Pray and Prosper      Jeremiah 29:1-11**

This week 9 years ago the Potters became a part of DPC's 164 year old story. I, KJ with our family had sensed the call and been sent or should I say carried by the LORD to South Auckland. A place that I had stated to the LORD that, "I would never go."

And after 9 years it is almost like we have been planted and beginning to be established. It has been difficult to put down roots in a place that was not our home but it has begun to happen. Initially moving from rental property to rental property the manse was built and we've been there 6 years come late September.

The year after we moved in to the manse the trees, plants and shrubs were put in by Joy Plants. The Potters added their own fruiting trees beginning with Feijoas, which are now producing major crops, along with a Lemon Tree. Later came Chilean Guava and then a very special Tahitian lime. This was an incredibly symbolic planting for me because this was at one of the most challenging and difficult times in my own walk with the LORD and ministry here. And I chose to face these circumstances by planting this Lime tree in the poor soil and hard clay of our subdivision where we are affected by wind and winter climate including frosts. Limes are certainly better suited to grow where they come from - Tahiti. It has been touch and go over the last nearly 3 years but this fruit tree planted in faith has this year produced a bumper crop - 6 Limes - I am over joyed!

It is hard to believe, after so many feijoas having been consumed or given away just how time has flown, our children have grown into teenagers, next thing we know we'll be having to marry them off starting more than likely with the oldest.

When we arrived we truly wondered what is it that we had come to and as I've read the account of Rev Thomas Norrie that was something we both had in common as first impressions of Drury. Norrie came from Scotland and myself from Dunedin via KJ's Mount Maunganui and our kid's Papamoa Beach. And like Norrie it has taken a bit of time but we have settled down in this foreign place having planted ourselves, and are now praying and fully expecting to prosper in all ways as a result, because I am praying for the church and our community and beyond to prosper, just as

the LORD desired of his people the Jews who were exiled to Babylon from Judah in 598BC

Jeremiah amongst the small number left behind in Jerusalem wrote what is a pastoral letter to the exiles the following year, 597BC. What had happened was this. Some naughty priests and false prophets were saying to the people "Don't you worry, we'll be home and dry within two years." So as a result of this no one is focused on making a life for themselves in Babylon, neither did they believe the LORD's word that they had received from the true prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah stating they were going to be there for a long time. One of the false prophets dropped dead a couple of months after his prophecy. And I think some of them started to mope and began gathering by the rivers of Babylon where they sat down, yea they wept as they remembered Zion and the Temple of the LORD where they used to worship and presence of God dwelt. That place that they were now separated from and believed that they just had to get back there to reconnect with God.

So it wasn't necessarily the news that they wanted to hear when Jeremiah writes to them, seventy years is your sentence, the time that you'll spend in captivity. As the exiles were going to be there for what was a lifetime or two generations, they would have to find ways to live faithfully and hopefully in the midst of exile.

It is Jeremiah's job in his own caring way to let them know that realistically and intentionally 'you must embrace the exile as the place where you must now be and where God is calling you to obedience.' But never fear because there is a long-term hope for return and restoration that you need to both affirm and accept because after all, you exiled ones are the bearers of Judah's hope for the future, and although not in Jerusalem, you are the special object of God's Love and concern. So this is the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel's word to you [vv5-7] with...

### **The Key Pastoral advice of this letter:**

First on the list being- Build houses. The act of building brings hope because it speaks against the ultimate despair of not knowing what to do, which in this case they did. They are to settle down and live their life in Babylon. There is more to settling down than just building. What do you do after you build? You establish your gardens. In the exiles case;

Plant gardens and eat what you produce. Planting your garden with seeding plants that will eventually produce a harvest for you to eat is a sign of settling down, working the land and living off it, including selling the excess of starting your business or practicing your trade.

Next piece of pastoral advice was to Marry, and have children. Then find spouses for them, and have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away!’ These were challenging times for the Israelites. They could have easily given up on life, including marriage and parenting, and allowed their community to die off. But they did not, even in a place and culture that was very different and challenging to their values and beliefs.

The final piece of advice in these verse is Seek the Peace and Prosperity of the place, the city where you’ve been exiled. And by the way, while you’re there, since the LORD has sent you you’re to submit to your captors and not rebel against them. In fact you’re to do the opposite. The Hebrew word for peace and prosperity used here is *Shalom*. The Israelites were to work for the shalom, the well-being of this city and nation.

The Shalom comes from being with God in a covenant relationship and the peace, completeness, soundness, welfare, safety, health, prosperity, tranquillity, contentment, and the friendship of human relationships that flows out of it. They were to embody and live the shalom. But more than that they were to...

Pray to the LORD for the well-being or shalom of the place they lived so that it might truly prosper and they too with it. God blesses His people while they were still in exile. God was with them in Babylon. And that’s what’s the LORD wanted his people to know. Where you are I am there too!

### **So what can we take from this Letter?**

#### **God will prosper you where you are!**

We do not need a change of the circumstances in order to be blessed. Our hope is not for things to turn around.

God blesses us where we are. He is with us even in difficult times. Are we waiting for the economy to pick up in a certain area before God can bless us? Are we waiting for our children to grow up, or for when we get a new job, a new house, a promotion, or for some things to change, before we can be blessed?

If you care to put your trust in God,  
 you will experience His blessings where you are.  
 We don't have to wait for another time, or another place.  
 Perhaps, you may have been looking for God's blessings in the  
 wrong places. We are longing for a special something to happen in  
 order to see God's blessings? Somehow, we think that the  
 grass on the other side is greener. We keep searching for  
 greener grass, and end up not eating the grass we have at our feet  
 where God has planted us to prosper us.

**Living out God's plan for us does not mean...  
 everything will be easy**

The exiles have to settle down in a foreign land, build their homes,  
 plant their crops, and raise their family in a different culture and  
 environment. It will take hard work. It will mean a lot of  
 adjustments. God's blessing does not remove us from the normal  
 routines or struggles of life. For instance, we need to remember  
 that the Israelites were one, probably of many, ethnic minorities in  
 Babylon. These minorities were likely representative groups of the  
 other nations that had been conquered as well.

Now, what sometimes happens when an organisation or nation or  
 community that has been stable experiences an influx of new  
 people? There are problems, right? And who gets blamed for  
 those problems? The new person or the new people right?  
 You're often made the scapegoat. But...

God says we are to find His blessings in the challenges of life.  
 You do not have to go somewhere else. He is with you to bless  
 you, even in the midst of hardship.

**So what can we take from this Letter? Like God told the Exiles:  
 Plant Yourself, Live, Pray and Prosper**

Just like the Jewish exiles over their 70 year existence or one life  
 span in Babylonia, we too over the span of our lives must find  
 ways to live faithfully and hopefully through this one life we've  
 been given on earth.

Earth is not our home, as God's children we are here for such a  
 short time, as citizens of heaven. Our promise is the assurance of  
 eternal life and a home with Jesus in the new Heaven and the new  
 earth... in the meantime as followers of Christ in this day and age  
 as a small and even what you might consider vulnerable  
 community like the Jews in Babylon initially considered  
 themselves, we just like them are a small church community with a  
 large missional responsibility. We are the little church that can!

We can be involved in the life of the community in which we live serving it in many ways just as a good number of people associated with DPC have done over the years.

Why does God call us and plant us in our lives to be and do this? Just like that Jewish exile community in Babylon for whom God's desire was to prevent them from withdrawing from society to live and exist in its own safe environment. God has work for us to do along with the responsibility for the larger community in which we live. When churches and Christian Groups do withdraw like this, even in NZ, they tend to stick out for all the wrong reasons.

Lastly, if you are praying for the Shalom to be there – then God lives there. The Jews were separated they thought from the presence of God because they were in Babylon and not near Jerusalem with the Temple where the presence of God dwelt. But where his Shalom is - there God is. It is the same for us to today when we pray for our homes, community, our city, for the Peace and Prosperity. When we do, we can be assured that, *God lives there!* A Vision for this place that we can each believe and hold on to is ***Drury – God Lives Here!***

Because we actively pray for the well-being of one and all, for the Blessed Shalom of Safety - Protection – Prosperity – Peace ...

The favour of the presence of God experienced knowingly or unknowingly in this place by residents, visitors or passers by! Out on the streets, roads, in households, schools and Child care facilities and places where community groups meet or businesses and commercial interests operate...

A place where people know one another and care for one another, Where workers work in safety and there's no serious accidents and a lack of crime because those who have been planted by God here are working for the good of the community, praying for the peace and prosperity – God's living presence to be manifest here.

Prayer is a vital tool and practice for helping us live in our society for the Lord and to see the kingdom of God ushered in as we look to the horizon around here, all the way to the hills and the hinterland surrounding us. And as we remain planted in this church in this place, prayer and faithfulness will cultivate an Intergenerational Church reflecting the people of our growing community, where everyone wants to come to live and work because of the blessing associated with Drury, 'God Lives here!' including his church where this vision, along with the presence of God emanates from.