

Jeremiah 31: 1 - 7

The Joyful Return of the Exiles

At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.

Thus says the Lord:

The people who survived the sword

found grace in the wilderness;

when Israel sought for rest,

the Lord appeared to him from far away.

I have loved you with an everlasting love;

therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

Again I will build you, and you shall be built,

O virgin Israel!

Again you shall take your tambourines,

and go forth in the dance of the merry-makers.

Again you shall plant vineyards

on the mountains of Samaria;

the planters shall plant,

and shall enjoy the fruit.

For there shall be a day when sentinels will call

in the hill country of Ephraim:

'Come, let us go up to Zion,

to the Lord our God.'

For thus says the Lord:

Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,

and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;

proclaim, give praise, and say,

'Save, O Lord, your people,

the remnant of Israel.'

Matthew 15: 21 - 28

The Canaanite Woman's Faith

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

These are two readings of great contrasts.

In much of the Old Testament, we find the exclusive attitude that God is the God of the people of Israel and cares little about other nations, other peoples.

Here Jeremiah says, "At that time," declares the LORD, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people."

The twelve tribes, scattered across the middle east as the nations of Israel and Judah had been conquered and the people sent into exile.

Jeremiah is seeking to encourage, to help them see God has a future for them as Gods people with agricultural prosperity and Zion (Jerusalem) again a place of rejoicing and worship of God.

There is a way in which, especially in exile, in order to hold true to the heritage of a people, they have to preserve their culture and/or

worship. That's why today, for example, we have a Sierra Leonian society in Milton Keynes, Muslims worship together. If I was living in a foreign country, I would seek out the British expats and the Christian church. The Jewish peoples did this fiercely. They were very distinctive in the laws they observed, both for religious practice and for moral codes and by holding together they preserved that - and still do in many places.

But what they forgot was that God had chosen them to be a blessing to the world.

God said to Abraham

*I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;
I will make your name great.....
I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you,
and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed
because you have obeyed me” (Genesis 22:15 - 18).*

And as a nation often they lost sight of that.

I am sure in exile, there would have been social interaction like women getting together to help with childcare, or men who did business with Non Jews. but they forgot that David's grandmother, Ruth, was a Moabite, that Elijah cured a Syrian commander Naaman of leprosy.

The psalmist wrote

*“All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord,
And all the families of the nations will worship before You.
For the kingdom is the Lord's and He rules over the nations.”*

And Isaiah talks of Israel being a light to the nations. How could this come about if the children of Israel kept themselves to themselves?

That's why, when God sent Jesus, his life, teaching and death were so radical and were for everyone.

The outcasts and the gentiles came to worship him as a baby, his teaching of the love of God working alongside Gods law, to sinners and outcasts, was astonishing and our gospel reading is an example.

In this incident when Jesus having a break from the constant hostility of the religious leaders, in Gentile territory, is shouted at by a Canaanite woman - that is she was anon - jew.

She knows he is special and calls him Son of David - a very Jewish title - but has faith in his merciful willingness to use that power to help her.

The disciples try to shoo her away, but she is persistent. perhaps that is why Jesus has this short dialogue with her – In the translation the Message it sounds like this:

Jesus refused, telling them, "I've got my hands full dealing with the lost sheep of Israel." Then the woman came back to Jesus, dropped to her knees, and begged. "Master, help me." He said, "It's not right to take bread out of children's mouths and throw it to dogs." She was quick: "You're right, Master, but beggar dogs do get scraps from the master's table." Jesus gave in. "Oh, woman, your faith is something else. What you want is what you get!"

Did he also have a twinkle in his eye?

Her persistence and her faith in his power are commended and Jesus heals her daughter.

Faith is the key here. God can move in anyone if they have faith - even as small as a grain of mustard seed. Faith in him and his son Jesus, no matter who or what they are in the eyes of the world or the church.

God's love and his action is for everyone all the time - rejoice in it.

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