

9<sup>th</sup> October 2022

Jeremiah 29; vs 1 and 4-9

2Timothy 2; 8-13

### Not what they hope for

You might have heard the phrase – “When life throws lemons at you, make lemonade.” It is an invitation to try and do something positive with what seems as an extremely negative situation. And I am sure we all know about negative situations in life. Is making lemonade the way we usually respond? I have my doubts; there is a limit to how much lemonade one can drink, but there does not seem to be a limit to negative situations.

In the Bible there are many moments when God’s answer to prayer is not what the people hoped for – even for Jesus – his desperate prayer after the Last Supper “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22;42), the response was not what was hoped for. Which is not too different from the story we heard today from Jeremiah.

We all have turned to God at times, seeking ways through hard times, and sometimes the answer takes longer than we like and sometimes the answers are the opposite of what we are hoping for. When the people are taken to exile what they expect is the instruction to get ready because very soon they would be home – and what do they hear:

- Build and plant
- Marry and have descendants
- Your prosperity is connected to the prosperity of the place you are now.

***Oh God, come off it...that is not what we need.*** We need you to tell us how horrible these people are, how you will obliterate them, how you will wreak their land and set us free. But not this. Yes, yes – true, you do say that we continue to be YOUR people, but we need more than that!

The only warning in this passage is the one which says – *careful with those who will come with false prophecy. Be careful of those who will speak what you want to hear, not what is the truth.* And this continues to be true today.

The people of God will be in this foreign land for quite some time (about 3 generations), but God will be with them during all that time. God is inviting them to trust what God’s calling is. That they may thrive even when it seems a contradiction to them!

And, in a way all this prepares us for the words we find in the Second letter to Timothy. The Good News of Jesus sometimes is tough news. The author of the letter reminds Timothy that **the Risen Christ is the Good News!** Truth be said, the Risen Christ, first is the murdered Christ, only then is he risen. His crucifixion is an expression of solidarity with all the suffering of all times: past, present, future. And the connection between Paul and this Good News is a deep connection, one he is willing to suffer for.

**What then is our faith about?**

**For what were we hoping?**

A life free of all that upsets us? That is not the most common way, is it?

True, we do not expect to die for our faith. It is Christ's Resurrection which is the reason of our hope. But things do happen. But in those things that do happen, we find a way forward:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;  
if we endure, we will also reign with him;  
if we deny him, he will also deny us;  
if we are faithless, he remains faithful—  
for he cannot deny himself.

Even in our darkest places, even in our denial of God's values – ***He remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.*** Reading Fresh from the Word on Wednesday, one statement jumped out full of a new meaning in the light of the readings today: the passage of Solomon with the two women, a dead and a living child, and Solomon's judgement, showing us that even when God is a God of justice, God is also a God of compassion, and when God's people cry out, compassion trumps the law. God may be cross with the people, but they continue to be God's children and God's plans are plans for life, not for destruction. God is God of forgiveness and restoration.

Our connection with Christ, and with each other, is such that life will often have those moments we have not hoped for – life will be different, because God leads us and calls us his children. Whether we are “exiled” in a place we have not chosen or living moments we have tried to avoid – we are not alone, God is with us. And on the way forward we might have to plant or build, or continue life even it seems against all logic, but God will not disown us. And it is on this belief that we live life. And that, I think we would all agree, is one of the most wonderful gifts we can enjoy, even if it is not where, or how, or when we had hoped for. Amen.