

Sermon Starter – Seek the Peace of the City

Jeremiah 29:4-7

The Israelites, at least a big number of the so called Jerusalem upper-class, had lost their home. They had lost Jerusalem, their hometown, and the temple, the place where they were sure of the closeness of God. And now they sit by the rivers of Babylon and cry. They cry because they aren't allowed anymore to live and to pray at those places which had been their home.

When I visit elderly persons in my congregation I sometimes listen to their stories of displacements at the end of World War II. The pictures of their native places are still vivid in their memories: The wavy cornfields, the farms, and the sea. Concrete places, from which there were driven off with only what they were able to carry in their hands.

The pictures of the homeless of our days on TV are pictures of the refugee camps in Jordan, Turkey, Sudan and so on. For all of them home is first of all a place. The place where they were raised, where they lived and worked. The place where they were not able to remain because of war and rebellion.

And there are those who leave their home because they don't see any perspective for living anymore. We find them on unseaworthy boats, in custody pending deportation, in poor dwellings in the big cities. For them home wasn't a worthy living place anymore. They left to find a new and better life.

And finally there are those who left their hometown by choice, without emergency. Because they were curious for new places.
Home – what is it about home?

The letter of Jeremiah must have been a provocation for the Israelites, displaced, complaining, and homesick. Jeremiah requests them to take roots in the outland and to pray for the place of their exile, to stop thinking about the former home. There in the outland, at the inhospitable place, they listen and read the appeal of the prophet.

Similar sounding are the words of Jesus in the sermon of the mount: "Love your enemies. Pray for those, who are tracking you." Don't quarrel with your situation. Come to terms with it. Rethink. Think forward. Don't think back.

Was this not just asking too much for the Israelites crying by the rivers of Babylon? Isn't this too cruel a message in the face of the Syrian in their refugee camps in the heat? Wasn't

it nearly the same for those expelled Germans who wanted to go back years after their escape?

Babylon, symbol for the exile, for loss of home, for uprooting and alienation, has many names. In the situation of exile the prophet Jeremiah gives the message:

“And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace” (Jer. 29:7).

In other words: Don't be overwhelmed by the brokenness of the world, be somebody standing with, be a shaper, be a peace-seeker.

What does it mean in your context: “And seek the peace of the city”?

What does it mean to make room for those seeking the “welfare of the city”?

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