



St. Luke's East Hampton

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

October 12, 2025: Proper 23C: Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; [Luke 17:11-19](#)

Moving to a foreign country sounds like a wonderful, exotic and romantic adventure. It can be all of that. But living in a place where you don't speak the language can also be hard. For a following spouse who can't get a work permit, has to give up a job, an income and an identity, and is forced to live far away from friends and family, living abroad can also be an experience of grief and loss. When we lived in France, Shari and I participated in a program called "Bloom where you are planted." Designed primarily for spouses of people who had come overseas to work, "Bloom where you are planted" helped people work through their struggles and begin to get a foothold in a new place. Though it was primarily a secular program, "Bloom where you are planted" was held in a church and had an underlying message that God puts people in places for a reason. Yes, adapting to a new place can be a challenge. God, however, is calling us to bloom – and blossom – where we are.

This is the message of Jeremiah to the people of Israel today. The last time we heard from Jeremiah, the Babylonians were at the gates of Jerusalem, ready to take the people into exile. Today they are there. It hasn't been easy. The psalmist described this in Psalm 137, saying, "by the waters of Babylon, we sat down and wept" and then asking "how shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" Jeremiah felt this grief himself and wrote a whole book of Lamentations. Today, however, he is in a different place. Today, he is giving the people of Israel a reality check. Yes, you are in Babylon. It is time to make the best of it. Build your homes. Plant your fields. Let your children get married. Stop wishing you were somewhere else. Delete the word "survive" from your vocabulary. Help one another to thrive. Don't just do that but do that for Babylon itself. In verse 29:7, Jeremiah says, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." This verse has been my theme of my ministry for almost 30 years. As embodied in our community conversation last week, it continues to inspire my ministry today.

When I lived in Maine, I had a custom of periodically traveling to Boston for a time of retreat and spiritual direction with the monks of the Society of St. John the Evangelist. The last time I was there, one of the brothers asked me how I was doing. I told him that I have been struggling with a question of where God was calling me, whether or not to move, and what to do next. After listening, he was quiet for a while.

Then he told me how he had noticed that during in chapel services I was always putting my hymnal down before the end of the last verse. I said that was because I was getting ready for the next thing in the prayer book. He said, “That’s what you have been doing in your life. You are focused on the future. Stop. Breathe. Be where you are. God isn’t in the future or in the past. God is right here, right now. That’s what Jeremiah was telling the people of Israel in Babylon. Jeremiah, however, was not just saying “Be where you are.” Jeremiah was also saying “be a blessing where you are,” “be beacons of hope where you are,” and “be people of hope and Good News” where you are. Yes, the people of Israel were in exile. They were in exile in one of the greatest, most beautiful and advanced cities of the ancient world. They were in the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, close to the place from which Abraham himself had come. Jeremiah was telling them to make that new place their home. He was asking them to turn the narrative in their heads around, to see things of beauty, of good, and of God around them, to realize they were blessed, and to give thanks.

It’s not as easy as it sounds. In this morning’s gospel ten lepers were healed. The only one who returned to give thanks was the foreigner, the Samaritan, the person from away. Could it be that the others just assumed that healing and wholeness was their due? Was Jesus’ presence so familiar that they took him for granted? Did they look at the world through the lens of their own grief and suffering so much that they thought that what happened to them was deserved? Notice that the text tells us something about the leper who returned to give thanks. While the other lepers were “made clean” the one who returned was “made well.” While the healing of the others was only skin deep, the one who paused to give thanks experienced the deep inner healing and that took all his dis-ease away.

The world around us is full of dis-ease, people who spend their time wrangling over words, people who are angry and scared, and people who are tired, frustrated, and worn out by it all. Many of them have been touched by Jesus but were too busy to even notice what happened or even to let real healing begin. They may even think that the blessings they have received are because of something they have done and may never have considered the idea of pausing to give thanks.

We have just begun our annual stewardship campaign. During this time, my job is to ask you to pledge, reminding people that participation is part of what it means to be a member of the church, and that giving of time, talent, and treasure are part of all that. Stewardship, however, is not about balancing our budget. It is about balancing our lives. It is about recognizing that we have been blessed and remembering where those blessings have come from. It is about changing the narrative in our heads and changing a story of suffering and scarcity into a story of healing, abundance and hope. Isn’t that what we want for Halsey, the baby getting baptized today? Isn’t that what we want for us? Stewardship challenges us to be where we are, to dive in, build homes and vineyards, and make this church’s mission our own. The fact that nine lepers never came back shows just how countercultural this kind of living - and that kind of giving - can be. The one leper who returned shows that it is possible anyway. That leper shows that it is when we dare to be different, when we pause to recognize the blessings we have received, and when we give thanks where thanksgiving is due, that healing – deep healing – actually begins. If we can do those things, we may just find ourselves blooming where we have been planted and blossoming in new and the most wonderful of ways.