



May 27, 2020

FAITH DURING EXILE

Their lives looked completely different. The important dates on the calendar came and went without the usual celebrations, feasts, or parades. They could no longer gather together in the Temple. They were in a strange country. Many had been lost. They lived in exile.

I've been thinking more and more about the exile of Hebrew people in Babylon. When they were conquered and taken into exile, the Hebrews were a small people and relatively lacking in regional influence compared to the kingdoms of Babylon and Assyria. Indeed, the exile was designed to eliminate the Hebrews as a separate people with their own culture and religion. Over two generations in Babylon, they should have lost their language, their practices, and their religion as they slowly adapted to the dominant culture around them.

Their faith should have died in exile. Instead, their faith became stronger than ever. When the Temple was destroyed and they suffered terrible losses, their faith was challenged and their faith grew stronger. The loss of some faith practices served to heighten others, in the way that a person's sense of hearing is heightened during the darkness.

If exile is a metaphor for our experience of this pandemic, then I wonder what hard-won gifts of faith might emerge for us? What will happen while we are unable to safely gather for worship indoors? What new gifts might emerge?

The gifts of faith may not be noticed at the time when they are growing, like a seed that begins to grow below ground. But I can imagine the day when we are able to safely gather in the sanctuary again. When we no longer need to maintain six feet of distance, and we can exchange handshakes and hugs. On that day, we will be different.

It is never God's will to cause suffering. God does not cause illness, viruses, or invasion and exile. But God is always at work to strengthen our faith, to sustain our spirits, and to wring good from bad.

So I'm paying attention.

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Matthew Wooster
Senior Minister