

The One in Ten
October 13, 2013
By Pastor Laura Hehner

I heard a saying the other day, for the first time.

One of those old ones that a lot of people know,
but that hadn't yet made its way into any of my own conversations.

“Bloom where you're planted.”

... When I heard it, I thought. Hm. I like that.

Piece by piece, the meaning of the statement kept repeating in my mind.

And each time, I sank a little further into the depth of the words.

“Bloom where you're planted.”

A lot of times people remember random gems of wisdom,
and accidentally ascribe them to the bible.

I did a little research on this one, and found that this is one of those.

---One people will throw out, from time to time,
as a verse from Proverbs, or the writings of Paul.

Nope. Just a plain old saying... but words that share a powerful truth, all the same.

As I was thinking about it, the obvious meaning popped out first, of course.

‘Be okay with where you are. Make the best of what you've got.’

But then the words kept coming back, letting me see a little more.

Now, I'm an over-thinker, which means my mind

goes into a lot of detail all at once.

A lot of times *uselessly*, but sometimes for the better.

And hopefully this is one of those times for the better, so please just bear with me.

As I thought about the words, I realized there are two important parts to the statement.

--No, actually three important parts, to the statement!

The first, is the word BLOOM.

A request, implying something about *you*. An action within you. About your own abilities, your own will to grow.

The second part of the phrase, "Where you are,"

Talking about something you can't control, right?

Where your life takes place. Where you *exist*.

All of the things which surround us, each day---the good and the bad,

that we had no part in choosing.

And the last word of the phrase: "Planted."

This was the part that really caught hold of me, and gave the most interesting twist, I think.

This last part... what does it imply?

....Something *intentional*, doesn't it?

Not just some growth springing wild from the side of a mountain,

left and abandoned by the random movements of the wind...

But in just that one word, "planted," it implies Something outside of ourselves,

purposely placing us where we are, right?

Something which has *planted* us in the place we find ourselves standing in the world.

...*Planting*...Something different from the process of natural germination...

...being an act that requires a lot of *care*.

A lot of *thought*.

And lot of *hope*, right? for how this seed will grow,

in what the planter believes will be the perfect place for this hidden,

non-descript little capsules of life, to blossom into the world, as something bigger.
Something beautiful.

“Bloom where you are planted.”

Our scripture reading from the Hebrew Bible today

actually brings the truth of this non-biblical quote to light in our own relationship with God.

From Jeremiah chapter 29:

(Jeremiah 29) These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ...4 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But 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.

What are Jeremiah's words to the people of Jerusalem, here,

as they're adjusting to the reality of exile at the hands of the Babylonians?

In this moment, God's people are stranded in a foreign place. Their temple destroyed. Their sacred space in ruins.

Their lives in a place they'd never expected.

And Jeremiah says what to them, here?

In this passage, does he deny where they are?

Does he glaze over the rough spot they've found themselves?

Does he say"---No! Get out of there! Stay away from the place.

Get yourself as far away as you can, and shun those who've brought you here
and keep you here against your will?"

God's people have experienced some souls shaking things.

And their lives are so far from perfect.

So far from the abundance they'd hoped for themselves, from the comfort they'd found
for themselves,

In living in God, and following God's call in their lives.

They're not safe. But shaken. ---Taken from their original homes,

the homes of their family, the home of their ancestors,

And now find themselves plopped down in this strange place.

A foreign place. A place of struggle.

But Jeremiah does not mention withering or dying away, here.

Instead, speaking as a prophet---as a person charged with the task
of shouting out the thoughts of God Itself---

---He tells them not to shrink down, and fade away, being in this frightening place,

But to thrive where they are.

To continue on living, doing their best to be all God has created them to be.

He speaks on behalf of God, letting them know that though this place
is different than what they'd hoped for their lives,

That it is exactly where they're supposed to be,

And that not only should they not be afraid of where they are, or moan about where they are,

But that they should help that place thrive, in all they do.

That they should live fruitfully in that seemingly barren place,

and spread the goodness they can make of their lives, into the life around them.

And something else is said here, too, right?

From verse 7:

7 But 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 exile. This place of seeming misfortune, Jeremiah's voice carries God voice,

Which tells them not that the Babylonians put them there.

Not that *Nebuchadnezzar* put them there,

But that *God*---himself, *Itself*---placed them where they are.

And that everything they see, everything they touch,

all things they have to work with to build their lives into the future,

Is not in any way an accident. It's not in anyway

a result of the seemingly random directions the winds of life sometimes take us,

But the direct result of the will of God

for the lives of each of the people finding themselves standing in that place.

“Bloom where you are planted.”

Jeremiah tells us, ‘You’ve been placed here, in the middle of all the muck and all of the beauty you see---

---In the middle of all of the troubles, and hard times, and good times, around you---

---with a lot of *thought*. ...With a lot of *care*.

And with a lot of *hope*, for what you will become,

for how you will *grow*, here in the place,

the *planter* believes will be just perfect in all of its faults, for this tiny, hidden,

soul inside of us to blossom into the world, as something bigger than what it was.

As something beautiful to behold.

All of this brings us back into the ideas we've been meditating on, over the past few weeks.

These questions we have of what we feel we can do with the gifts

God's created in our souls to make the world a better place,

As smaller members of the larger body of Christ---as the church.

They bring us back to the fears and hesitations we feel

when we find ourselves not always in the easiest place,

Often experiencing trouble, struggle, hardship, as we live in God,

and answer God's call in our lives.

And reminds us to do our best not to allow ourselves to be frustrated when we find these imperfect situations around us—

---not to allow ourselves to give up, in the face of the challenges

which come to each of us separately,

And all of us together, as the church...

But instead, *wherever* we are---whatever tough stuff falls before us---

---to live and thrive, and grow in the life of God;

And to know, with certainty, that wherever we are,

we are exactly where we're supposed to be.

As we move through the tough questions and God-blessed answers of stewardship season,

Jeremiah's words, here, tell us that we are *Planted People*.

And I think the same applies to us—God's people here, at Deer Park---

---as they did to God's people experiencing both joy in Jerusalem

and worry in Babylon---

---the ups and downs in life. The good and the bad all clumped up together---

And it applies to each of us, too, outside of this place.

Just as we walk outside the sanctuary doors,

In the moments of our own *separate* lives, day-to-day.

When we look around us, we're asked to remember that *God*---

---the very life of the universe... the Thing That Is All Things,

has planted us in this place, in this time, with these people,

and each struggle and joy around us,

To give everything we have from inside for the sake of doing

whatever we can to thrive and to grow.

---Not only within ourselves, or for the sake of ourselves, but out there,

and for the sake of making the world *around* us, a more beautiful place for all.

This weekend, working with our internet ministry,

I stumbled upon a wonderful thought which applied so perfectly
to what we're asked to think about, today.

It was a quote, from Charlotte Beck. She said:

"Life always gives us exactly the teacher we need at every moment. This includes every mosquito, every misfortune, every red light, every traffic jam, every obnoxious supervisor (or employee), every illness, every loss, every moment of joy or depression, every addiction, every piece of garbage, every breath. ...Every moment is a teacher."

It holds the very heart of the words of God in Jeremiah.

In our *joys*, do all we can to thrive. In our *pains*, do all we can to thrive.

To learn. To grow. To become all we can be to the world.

"Bloom where you are planted."

Now, there's something else I should mention

before we close up the Contemporary Word, this morning.

All of this hopefully opens each of us up, in our time outside of the sanctuary,

into more conversation with God over the things we've considered here, together;

But we're asked not only to look at Jeremiah's words, today,

but something that happened in the gospel of Luke.

What happened on those pages, to tie all of this together

with God's word spoken in Jeremiah?

What was that moment the liturgist read to us, from Jesus' life.

From Luke 17:

(Luke 17)11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, 13 they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. 15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned

back, praising God with a loud voice. 16 He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18 Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Now we're not going to go into too much detail, here.

This is one of the extremely rare cases in the bible

where the meaning of the message is pretty much straight forward.

Sometimes an apple is just an apple, and this is one of those moments.

Here we see something amazing---something miraculous---occur.

A group of ten folks afflicted with leprosy ask Jesus for help.

And they're sent by Jesus, in all of their pain, all of their suffering,

to a particular place; and there, they are healed.

By the power and strength of God, through their affliction,

they're made well again. Made whole.

But there's something missing, here, isn't there.

Out of those ten people, only *one* comes back to Jesus in joy.

Only one comes back in celebration, thanking God,

stunned by the glory of all that had just happened to him.

And out of all of them, it was the one who had least reason to fall down in praise.

A Samaritan, a stranger to the ways of the mainstream Jewish religion.

Jesus, here, is pretty stunned by the fact that the others just up and left.

No expression of joy. Of thanks.

No praise given to God, for the wonderful things God has just done in their lives.

The message here is clear.

In the midst of whatever struggles we experience in this life God's given us---

---in this place God's planted us---

We're asked to be that One in Ten.

We're asked to remember God in *every* moment,

and to be grateful for the blessings we've been given.

...To be thankful for the work God does in and through our lives---

---wherever we stand, and in whatever we see---

And to give praise to God, every hour we're blessed to be here, in this place.

...Sharing ourselves with God, as God transforms us into who we will be.

While we move through this stewardship season,

and we think on the ways we're called to be in the world,

---On the ways we're called to action within the body of the church---

in the face of the easy things and hard things, we see together,

let's remember those words from Jeremiah, and the beautiful truth that

as followers of Christ, as God's people, we are a *Planted People*.

We are where we are for a reason, with intention, and a purpose.

And wherever we find ourselves, we are called to build and grow, to share ministry and to serve,

to praise and worship, to live and endure whatever circumstances we are given...

...And to be *thankful* for all we see with our eyes

and experience in our souls while we're here,

Because everything we experience has been thoughtfully, and carefully given to us by God,

In the hope that we might thrive and grow into something beautiful to be seen.

Into something that reflects the love and care of the One who's placed us here,

As we bloom where we are planted.

Amen.