

- I. Advanced organizer: **look at map of Bay Area**
  - A. What do you see?
  - B. **Take a moment and think about what you're looking at.** Is this your home or just the place you happen to be living now? Do you feel a sense of connection to the places on this map? Is there fondness or frustration? Or both? Think about the places you locate yourself on the map. Where do you live? Where do you work? Where do you spend your time? Are you grateful to be in those places? Are you resentful? Just surviving? Indifferent?
  - C. **We're on our third week of a teaching series on what it means to connect with folks from all kinds of backgrounds, and how Jesus might inform those kind of connections.** We've talked about group-on-group dynamics and how Jesus seems to want us to move out of that kind of trap of "us" against "them". Last week we focused specifically on what that looks like with other Jesus-followers in the movement we call the church. We considered how Paul's words to the church impact our thinking about our own communities as well as the broader global church. **This week, I want to think more local, and beyond our community of faith.** How might our faith open up helpful connection with our neighbors, with folks we encounter in our neighborhood, in our workplaces, in the places we inhabit? How might it help us think about our connection to our local community?
- II. **For inspiration, we're gonna look to a unique part of the story of God's people the the Bible tells.** It has to do with this sense of connecting to place and people in a particular place, in a time in the story in which the people weren't particularly thrilled to be in the place they found themselves. It was the time of the **Babylonian exile**.
  - A. **Perhaps a refresher of the setup is helpful.** For a long time, the people of God have connected God's favor with dwelling in a particular place.
    1. It started with **Abraham**, as God made a contract with him to bring him to a particular land that eventually his heirs would inherit. He invited him to leave his homeland and venture off to this promised land, that would eventually be known as Israel. A few generations later, the Hebrew people would love their promised land and head to Egypt to find food in the famine. Their time there would turn into enslavement.
    2. And then God through **Moses** liberated his people, **returning them eventually to the land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey.**
    3. **But after centuries of ups and downs in their land**, after kingdoms formed and split, Yahweh worshiped and then neglected, prophets warning of impending doom if God's people did not properly remember him, and the people refusing, **disaster struck.** The Babylonian army invaded what was left of Israel, the southern kingdom called Judah. They desecrated the temple. They carried off the best and brightest, the leaders of the community, and they exiled them from their land, the place that represented home. The place of God's favor. They took them off to resettlement in Babylon. **These former leaders of Israel, found themselves as forced refugees, immigrants, living in a community they had not chosen.** A place they didn't long for. A home they likely resented. And it was to these refugees, that **God sent a message in how they were to live**, now that they had lost everything and been separated from the place they considered home. He sent it through the prophet Jeremiah, and we see it in Jeremiah 29.
  - B. **Jeremiah wrote a letter from Jerusalem to the elders, priests, prophets, and all the people who had been exiled to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar...**  
***"This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem: 5 "Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. 6 Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! 7 And work***

***for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.” (Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7)***

- C. **Probably not what any of these exiles wanted to hear.** Likely were hoping for a word that this nightmare would be short lived. That God had their back and was gonna return them soon to Israel. That they could get the lives they envisioned for themselves back on track. And in fact, it sounds like there were other prophets who were telling them these things, prophecies that Jeremiah says are not from God.
- D. Instead, God is telling them to **get comfortable. Settle down.** You are here to stay. Sure eventually, in 70 years, your people will return, but your generation isn't gonna be part of that. **Your call, your invitation from God is to live in Babylon, and to live well.**
- E. **Not an insurgency counter-cultural life.** Often the way that Christians have understood themselves at times: at war with surrounding culture they perceive to be hostile to them. But here, the Jews were being sent to a place that was certainly hostile in ways, they were taken there against their wishes. Sure, there were worship practices and rituals they wouldn't not have agreed with, would have found blasphemous. **And yet, God wasn't calling them to wage a culture war.** To get into the us vs. them mentality. He seemed to be encouraging something very different, and I think it has interesting resonance for us as well.
- F. **Some of us may feel like this is the promised land God has brought us to.** Honestly, there are certainly ways I feel that. Sure, for me, it's connected to a very specific journey Jason and I have been on for a long time...now that we're here, we regularly feel amazed and thankful to be doing life here. **Yet even we feel the real challenges.** The cost of living is beyond crazy. It's a real challenge for all of us. Who knows if we'll ever own a home, or if that's something that we should even want? But we certainly feel the tension around it.
- G. **Others may feel like this might not be the promised land, but some job or school, or life circumstance brought you here.** Maybe you resent it. Maybe you are more in touch with how this isn't what you saw for yourself; you feel more like exile. Wherever you're at, God's call through Jeremiah presents some interesting invitations.

### III. Get Invested.

- A. ***“Build homes and plan to stay. Plant Gardens, and eat the food.”***
  - 1. **A sense of investment in this location** in which they have come to be. Not just a temporal, migrant existence, but to put down roots.
  - 2. Images of putting their resources into this land, building homes, planting gardens, and also being nourished by the community: eating the food they produce here. Evocative image of physical nourishment.
  - 3. **Not minimal investments of time, energy, resources.** Building a house is in small thing. Took several seasons to cultivate a farm or garden that would properly supply them nutritionally. This was the primary food source, and God is inviting them to invest in this space, to cultivating it as their own and depending on it for their physical needs.
  - 4. For us: **how do we allow ourselves to invest and be nourished by our local communities?** However long we may be here. It can be tempting not to do this, particularly if you see yourself as “just passing through” or only here for a season.
  - 5. **Doesn't have to be home ownership.** But as long as we are here, let's practically invest in the ways we can to contributing to our local communities.
    - a) **Parish movement** - a new movement of faith communities thinking small and local. How can they partner with God's bigger kingdom work of redeeming all things through the very practical investments in their own community?
    - b) **Berkeley Food and Housing Project** - attending volunteer evening and being recognized for what we do. Reminded that it makes an impact. People care.

- c) **Project Peace East Bay** - connects local faith with communities with schools and non-profits that need practical help, giving them ways to serve and invest. I think this could be a fun, relatively simple, way for Haven to take another step in this direction. June 3 is next day of service. Could we show up at a school and clean it for a few hours, meeting others who are partnering in this kind of work of investing in the city? Or maybe a few in different neighborhoods, whatever is closest to where we live?
- d) What about you? Are there organizations you are already involved in that **Jesus might invite you to lean in and consider an investment in your community?**

#### IV. Get Intimate.

**A. “Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.”**

1. This is not a “don’t be corrupted by the locals” view. This is about **building alliances, partnerships, falling in love**. An extension of the call to invest - to invest with our most precious resources, our relationships. Our emotional life.
2. This is somewhat controversial - scholars debate whether Jeremiah is advocating for interfaith marriage, but to get too caught up in this question I think is ultimately missing the point for us. **Jeremiah was inviting the exiles to have imagination for the intimate parts of their lives, the most intimate relationships, being lived out in Babylon.** Might we be tasked with the same invitation?
3. **Moving to Iowa City - God encouraging me to be planted, even though we knew it was likely only 5 years.** But if we sensed we were just passing through, didn’t really invest there relationally, financially, emotionally, we wouldn’t get what we needed in that season. Eventually, God would uproot us and plant us elsewhere, but for the season we were there, we were to root ourselves there. Bought our first house. Had more kids. Immersed ourself in the community - church, kids schools, etc.
4. Jesus regularly challenged his followers to focus on loving, truly loving, their neighbors. And lest anyone should think that neighbor was narrowly defined as someone within our particular group, Jesus told a parable, when asked “who is my neighbor?” that challenged a narrow view of neighbor. The Parable of the Good Samaritan reminds
5. Pope Francis this week proved once again he is one of the coolest spiritual leaders many have seen: he gave a Ted Talk. I recommend you watch the whole thing. It’s very resonant with the themes of this series. In it he reflected on the parable of the Good Samaritan as a reminder for us to find solidarity with one another, rather than dismissing others to perish on the side of the road. This led him to call for a **“revolution of tenderness”**.
  - a) Speaking to a conference of Ted attendees, business people, academics, tech entrepreneurs, the pope called for Tenderness. What did he mean?
  - b) (video or read quote) *“It is the love that comes close and becomes real. It is a movement that starts from our heart and reaches the eyes, the ears and the hands. Tenderness means to use our eyes to see the other, our ears to hear the other, to listen to the children, the poor, those who are afraid of the future. To listen also to the silent cry of our common home, of our sick and polluted earth. Tenderness means to use our hands and our heart to comfort the other, to take care of those in need.*

*Tenderness is the language of the young children, of those who need the other. A child’s love for mom and dad grows through their touch, their gaze, their voice, their tenderness. I like when I hear parents talk to their babies, adapting to the little child, sharing the same level of communication. This is tenderness: being on the same level*

*as the other. God himself descended into Jesus to be on our level. This is the same path the Good Samaritan took. This is the path that Jesus himself took. He lowered himself, he lived his entire human existence practicing the real, concrete language of love.*

*Yes, tenderness is the path of choice for the strongest, most courageous men and women. Tenderness is not weakness; it is fortitude. It is the path of solidarity, the path of humility. Please, allow me to say it loud and clear: the more powerful you are, the more your actions will have an impact on people, the more responsible you are to act humbly. If you don't, your power will ruin you, and you will ruin the other. There is a saying in Argentina: "Power is like drinking gin on an empty stomach." You feel dizzy, you get drunk, you lose your balance, and you will end up hurting yourself and those around you, if you don't connect your power with humility and tenderness. Through humility and concrete love, on the other hand, power – the highest, the strongest one – becomes a service, a force for good."*

6. **What would it mean for us to regard those in our immediate community with real tenderness and affection?** To build relationships that communicate that tenderness? To use any power we have, or the power of organizations we're a part of to make concrete impact? To draw close?
7. **Our work with Pacifica Institute, potential to build alliances with other groups, nonprofits, churches, faith communities**

#### V. Get Spiritual.

- A. **"Work for the peace and prosperity of the city...pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare."**
- B. There is a **spiritual power to us inhabiting a place**. There is a power to our practical work, and there's a power to the work of seeking God's presence, and praying for God's blessing on the places we live.
- C. **Not talking about "evangelism" in the narrow sense**. Some of us may feel triggered by an upbringing that emphasized a view of our role in secular culture to be converting the heathen masses, securing notches on our belts for every soul we supposedly saved. **But that kind of agenda can get in the way of the call to freely love, serve, pray for and bless those in our community with tenderness.**
- D. I'm talking about (and Jeremiah seems to be advocating for) is recognizing our mutual shalom, and stewarding that shalom for ourselves and others. (Shalom = peace, well being, holistic wellness, flourishing)
- E. This is about collective flourishing. **Can we be community that promotes and participates in flourishing of all:** flourishing of relationships, flourishing of our connection to the land, flourishing of art and creativity, flourishing of civic engagement?
- F. **This is what we're doing when we "pray for five or six", as may do in Blue Ocean.** Recognizing that our prayers matter and we have people in our lives for who no one may be praying. What if we could pray for them, and invite whatever help that brings?
- G. **Yes, we should certainly always be prepared, as Peter instructed his followers, "to give an answer for the hope we have", but that answer comes when someone is asking a question.** When in the midst of a despairing, discouraging world, people of faith live an active hope that serves others without agenda, simply because they are part of our human family, and our shalom is dependent on one another - **that kind of embodied hope will raise questions.** It raises the "why would you go out of your way to live this way?" It's the reason tech gurus listen to the Pope. And if we are true to what God is calling us to, **we too will have**

**the opportunity to point to Jesus as the one who inspires us and calls us to live lives of blessing and service.** To share the answer for our hope, as Peter says, “with gentleness and respect” for all. (1 Peter 3:15).

- H. **But it starts with living shalom.** With investing in our neighborhoods in real practical ways, with treating our actual neighbors and coworkers with genuine tenderness, with praying for blessing for our community, lifting up the spiritual needs we see around us.

**VI. As We Transition to Worship: A Practical Exercise Today.**

- A. A map. 3 kinds of stickies.
1. Where you live
  2. Where you work
  3. Places you frequent (go at least once a week). Organization you are a part of. Place you eat out regularly. Coffee shop you frequent. Where you do your grocery shopping.
  4. As small as our community may feel, how many places are we touching each week. What if we saw those touches as invitations from Jesus to bring blessing to our neighborhoods? To invest? To get intimate? To pray and get spiritual.
  5. How might this grow over time?