

Sermons at the All Saints Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Alison Heal on Sunday 12th October 2025

Bible passage: Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-7

“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.”

Let's have a little look at the people who were given that instruction from God, the people who were told to pray for their city of exile.

The prophet Jeremiah is one of the big figures of the Old Testament, this first huge chunk of the Bible that Christians share with our Jewish brothers and sisters. Jeremiah comes quite late in the history of the Jewish people, after the miraculous parting the Red Sea, after God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. Jeremiah comes after the glory days of King David and his son King Solomon, when foreign rulers like the Queen of Sheba came to learn about God, attracted by the wisdom he gave his kings.

Poor Jeremiah comes when everything seems to have gone wrong to his people. He comes with a call from God, to preach and to act out the consequences of a nation turning away from God. His unenviable task was to point out his nation's idolatry, social injustices and moral decay. I'm quoting that from Wikipedia, by the way, and it's a great summary. For preaching such a negative, depressing message Jeremiah was imprisoned, and persecuted.

Our reading today comes a long way into his story, chapter 29 of a total of 52 chapters! You'll see that the dire consequences of the people turning away from God have already begun – some of them, including their royal family, have already been taken off into exile in the enemy capital of Babylon.

So their exile is not very much like our exile, if exile is what we're experiencing. Many of us have come to live in Luxemburg from abroad, often for very positive reasons. Discussion about human migration uses the concept of 'push factors' and 'pull factors', and Luxembourg has lots of 'pull factors' which draw us to it: its wealth and quality of life, its financial sector, its political stability and freedom. But some of us here in the congregation are truly in exile from countries which have become unsafe.

Of course, what you're gathering from the Bible story today is that things were the other way around for the exiles Jeremiah wrote to. There were no 'push factors' causing them to leave their homes, no 'pull factor' to draw them to Babylon. They were physically taken there by an invading army. Tragically, we know this still happens today, to children from eastern Ukraine, to people kidnapped by Hamas, ISIS and Boko Haram, to young people like Leyan Nasir from Fr Fadi's church in the West Bank, who has been imprisoned again this week. It's a symptom of human sinfulness, that those in power capture and de-place those without.

So it would be very understandable if these forced exiles hated the capital city they had been forced into. You can see them in misery in Psalm 137, where the captured people are weeping by the banks of the river of Babylon, forced by their captors to sing worship songs which belong in their destroyed temple.

But here, God gives the prophet Jeremiah a message for the leaders of that exiled community, and they must have been shocking words to hear:

Thrive in exile.

Build, garden, marry, multiply.

Do this, in the capital which Psalm 137 calls 'doomed to destruction'? In Babylon, where the vengeful psalmist says: 'happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us'? Thrive? Here?

But Jeremiah gives God's word:

Thrive in exile.

And don't do it to repay those captors according to what they have done. Thrive as a part of the city, living together with its citizens, praying for its welfare.

This must have been hard to accept. Please couldn't we just sit and weep by the river?

No, says the Lord, seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray on its behalf.

Why?

For in its welfare, you will find *your* welfare.

That's not a very complete answer. It doesn't go into the details of the welfare of the people of Babylon. But God seems to find it enough: in your city's welfare, you will find your welfare.

These were people who, however badly they'd lapsed in terms of idolatry, social injustice and moral decay, knew the songs of Zion. They knew how to pray, to a God who loved them, and they had some scriptures, if they'd studied them, which told them to be a light to the nations, an example of God's love to the people around them.

If we come back to our situation here, we are so much better off than those captives in Babylon. We remember and pray for captives around the world today, and we pray for peace with justice. But our own circumstances have thankfully placed us in a more comfortable exile, for those of us who weren't born here.

So it's easier for us to take to heart the message: "Seek the welfare of Luxembourg, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

I think we know that the welfare of Luxembourg includes our welfare. We live in a wealthy, benevolent nation, and whatever our reason for being here, we receive some good from that. We also like to grumble. And some have good reason to grumble, with the problems of housing, employment issues, racism and injustice.

But *pray* for the welfare of Luxembourg? How often does this come to our minds? Yearly, when we have our Te Deum services around National Day. Exceptionally, with the Throunwiessel celebrations last weekend, as Grand Duke Guillaume took the throne.

Both of those events this year have been marked by prayer for the people and institutions of Luxembourg, and what a great way to honour that call to prayer.

But I'm sure you find yourself praying for the people around you, I'm sure you find yourself anxious on behalf of some part of Luxembourg society. You may have a concern for the young people in your local school, knowing some of the pressures that they're under. You might be aware of older friends and neighbours who are experiencing isolation. Maybe you see colleagues exploited and working unsustainable hours, or you see people of colour challenged by racist attitudes. You may know families which are breaking up under one kind of pressure or another. Perhaps you're a part of

one of those groups I've just described, and you find you're praying for yourself, as well as for your friends.

The task of praying for Luxembourg, just like the task of praying for the world, can seem daunting. When does an anxiety become a prayer? How does a worry or a challenge turn into an appeal to God, our loving Father?

PAUSE

It's in obedience to God's call to pray for our country, and in response to the wonderful model of the yearly Te Deum services, that a wider group of churches got together to organise the Week of Prayer for Luxembourg, which we're hosting here in the Konvikt Chapel, starting tomorrow. We're each offering our gifts, to make this prayer week a reality: All Saints have offered our city-centre space, the different language churches have offered translations of our material, a team made up of an Anglican, a free church member and a Catholic are organising the prayer stations, Hillsong Church will be leading the music at our Saturday night prayer gathering.

The theme of the week is inspired by the paintings behind me here – the Prodigal Son. We owe that to Sophie, who recently wrote a well-researched piece on the artwork here in the chapel, drawing our attention to the spiritual impact of this painting. In the chapel, from tomorrow onwards, you'll find prayer stations based on the different stages of that story. Each prayer station offers you different ways to pray for the welfare of your neighbours, family, school, workplace, government and institutions, here in Luxembourg.

We'll be focusing on God's love for the people of Luxembourg, locals and more recent arrivals. We'll be praying that more and more people can come to know that love for themselves. With this in mind, we're always praying for the Catholic church, because of its key place in the faith life of our country.

So, "Seek the welfare of Luxembourg, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

I pray many of you will come and give that a go in this chapel over the coming week. I pray even more that we'll find ways to make prayer for Luxembourg a consistent part of our personal and church lives. As we move around Luxembourg this week, as we speak to our neighbours and colleagues and friends, I pray that we'll remember to turn observation, anxiety and concern into heartfelt prayer for the welfare our country, to our loving Father.