

THE SERMON

Eighteenth Sunday in Pentecost

Sunday, October 12, 2025

With a Grateful Heart

Thankful for God's Presence

Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-7

Beloved Church, I'm not sure how many of you have moved from one city or town to another during your lifetime. I have previously shared with you that my last move was my 29th in my entire life, between three different countries. But let me tell you, it is not easy to move. It brings a lot of challenges.

Now, imagine the life of a young man who had moved to a new city for work, far from his hometown, family, and everything familiar. The first few weeks were challenging; he felt out of place and longed for the comfort of his old environment. One day, while sitting in a local café, he overheard a couple discussing their struggles and dreams about starting a community garden. Instead of retreating into his discomfort, he felt

a nudge to join their conversation. They began to share ideas, and before long, this young man found himself not just participating but leading the project.

Through this experience, this young man discovered that while he was physically out of his comfort zone, he was not alone; he had the presence of God right there with him. It transformed his entire outlook. Instead of mourning what he left behind, he became grateful for the opportunities and connections being in a new place could provide.

My friends, this story illustrates a profound truth we are exploring today—how even in challenging seasons of life, we can be thankful for God's presence in our lives.

Yes! It may sound difficult to believe, but God is with us even in those moments —the uprooted moments of life.

I am sure that none of us in this place has experienced exile. And even though I knew people in my home country who suffered exile during those seventeen years of military dictatorship, I don't have the sense of what it means for someone to be uprooted and sent to a completely unknown place.

So, because we are not familiar with this feeling, let us use the concept of "exile" to describe those challenging

moments in unfamiliar places — places that are not our comfort zone or places we dislike being in.

Let us do a second exception to this concept of "**exile.**" Let us not be limited to a physical place, but also to those situations in life that make us uncomfortable.

Perhaps this is the reason why this passage is so beautiful: because it invites us to explore unfamiliar places, even though they are uncomfortable, we know that they can make us grow in our faith.

Here, we see God's message to the Israelites, who find themselves in exile. They were in Babylon, a foreign land, experiencing disorienting circumstances. Yet God does not leave them without guidance. Instead, God instructs them to flourish right where they are! This lesson is a powerful reminder for us: we often find ourselves in situations that feel foreign or uncomfortable, yet God is present even in those moments.

So, how can you feel comfortable, safe, and secure in an unfamiliar place?

The Israelites were in Babylon, a place of captivity. Yet, God was inviting them to dwell, to build homes, to plant gardens, and to make this unfamiliar place "their place."

God was instructing them to be active participants and be thankful in their current context. And that is hard!

So let me ask you... ***How often do you wait for the right circumstances to be thankful?***

We think, ***"Once I get that job, or once the kids are grown, or once I retire, or perhaps when the world feels stable again, then I'll be grateful."*** But, my friends, gratitude is a posture of the heart, not a reaction to our external situation.

What would it look like for you to cultivate gratitude in your "exile"? Consider areas in your life where you feel uncomfortable or out of place. What small steps can you take to plant roots in that soil? Even when it seems to be dry land?

Jeremiah encourages the Israelites to ***seek the welfare of the city***. This attitude is an incredible call to active engagement. God was not only concerned about the Israelites; He wanted them to bless those around them and take action accordingly.

This attitude of the people of Israel is a radical shift in perspective. Instead of focusing on their own suffering, challenges, or longing for what they had lost, the people were called to serve and uplift their community with what they had in their hands.

Have you wondered how you can contribute to the welfare of your community? Whether it's volunteering, helping neighbors, or simply being a source of encouragement.

Ask yourself how you can invest your gifts, talents, financial resources, and your time for the sake of others. Genuine gratitude often spills over into acts of service.

Over the past two weeks, we have been sharing some of the challenges that we face as a congregation. We have even said that this seems to be an unfamiliar situation for us, because most of the time, we have been able to sustain our budget and use our financial resources to fulfill our commitments.

Yes! It seems an unfamiliar land. Does it?

But guess what? What about if we turn this challenging time into a positive time? And we turn it into the ***"power of purpose-filled gratitude."***

My friends, as we embrace God's presence and engage with our own community of faith, we discover purpose. In verses 6-7, God reminds the exiles that their prosperity is linked to the prosperity of the city. This idea is a crucial realization: our lives are deeply interconnected with those around us.

When we are thankful for God's presence, we find that we have a purpose—even in exile; even in the unfamiliar lands. Our gratitude can become a call for change, not only in our own lives but also in the lives of others.

Let me ask you a question: ***Why are you part of Charlton Church?*** *(Take a few moments to reflect on it)*

I am sure that there are many reasons; perhaps it has been the only Church that you have attended in your entire life. Maybe it was a moment in your life when you were seeking a safe spiritual place, and you found it in the people of Charlton. Or perhaps it is a place where you have built relationships or found your comfort zone.

No matter what the reason is why Charlton Church is part of your life, perhaps one of the main ones is that you have found your place of worship in Charlton, as you have seen God's work in your midst and in this community of faith. In other words, God has brought you here to be part of this family.

Now, think about how you can express your gratitude through purposeful actions. Perhaps it's supporting one of our church ministries or even sharing your testimony with someone who feels lost or is seeking a place to experience God's love. Perhaps you feel the call to go

the extra mile in your giving, as a way to support the Church's mission and work.

I truly don't know what God is putting in your thankful heart today.

What I know is that a grateful heart can lead to a life of fruitfulness that impacts not only yourself but also those around you.

What I know is that the people who were in exile, in this unfamiliar moment in their lives as a community, were able to serve God and praise Him, even in exile.

My friends, let us remember that regardless of our circumstances today, we can be thankful for God's presence in our lives. He is with us in our exile, encouraging us to build, plant, and seek the welfare of our community. Gratitude is not a distant sentiment; it is an active engagement with life, with God, and with each other.

Let us pray:

God of all that we are and have, thank you for your enduring presence in our lives. Even when we feel like exiles in unfamiliar circumstances, help us to recognize Your presence and actively seek to

engage with our surroundings. Call us to cultivate a grateful heart that is eager to serve, love, and bless our community. May our lives become a testimony to Your goodness as we plant seeds of hope and joy around us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.