***Home Enough?* – Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7**
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So, the question came to the advice columnist Megan O'Grady of the *New York Times* a few years ago from a woman who was moving her family to Sweden after stints living in different locales across the United States over several decades: Can I and my kids lead a meaningful life if we don't put down permanent roots?

In her long response, the columnist O'Grady wrote, "For many of us, the true fairy tale isn't about landing the right partner but the right coordinates on the globe. I have the same question you have, about what exactly is lost when one is a serial monogamist of geography, when the very concept of home is ambivalent. We leave home for all kinds of reasons — seeking security, opportunity or a different scale of existence — and, once we do, we can never really return in quite the same way. I doubt I'm the only one unconvinced by the ending of "The Wizard of Oz," when Dorothy awakes in her bed, back on the farm. "There's no place like home," she says, but we — at least, any of us who have fled our equivalent of a farm in Kansas, uncertain where the tornado in our hearts might land us — know that Dorothy, having had such adventures in courage, won't be happy there for long."

O'Grady was herself not a serial monogamist of geography. She was just finishing her eighth move in ten years. And so her advice was that of endorsing this Sweden-bound mother's move and not letting it keep her from finding meaning.

"I can't fully answer your question," she said, "but what I do know is that places take hold of us in ways we don't always understand in the moment."

O'Grady quoted Natalia Ginzburg's 1944 essay "Winter in the Abruzzi," in which Ginzburg "recalls her family's time in exile in a poor village. Banished from Rome because of their antifascist activities, the Ginzburgs spent these years dreaming of returning to their home and friends and bookshelves, to the beautiful, longed-for life they'd left behind. Little did they know that, immediately upon that return, Ginzburg's husband would be arrested, never to be seen again. 'I had faith then in a simple, happy future, rich with fulfilled desires, with shared experiences and ventures,' Ginzburg writes. 'But that was the best time of my life, and only now, now that it's gone forever, do I know it. I look at my family and know that we are *home enough*, and that this is probably the best time of our lives.'"

Megan O'Grady concludes her advice with this: "I can tell you all the usual advice: to learn Swedish and speak it poorly, then better; to have Swedish adventures and Swedish friends and neighbors; to read all of the books and see all of the art. Embrace the dark and the fika; be the diversity and the light. Encourage your kids not only to become citizens of the world but of the street on which they live. Because the strongest roots are always the kind that survive transplant, grounding us wherever we go."

I bet we've all struggled with a similar conundrum in our lives—whether it's moving to a different country, or state, or neighborhood, or job, or relationship, or into a new family: Where to find home.

Home is our place, and we so ache to know where home is.

The story we just read from Jeremiah 29 is also one that makes us ponder the question: Where is Home?

There was a bleak future awaiting those in 606-586 B.C. who had been exiled from their homeland. It was in these years that their nation had ceased to exist. The glory years of Saul, David and Solomon were now only tales told by the scribes and elders. There was no Israel now. No Judah. No nothing.

How they got where they were was due to a confluence of factors, but they didn't have a choice, much like we do when faced with a decision to relocate. Babylon was where this people would be until they weren't—whenever that ended up being. This being the case, Jeremiah says to them: stay where you are. And more than that, make this place your home.

In that place called Babylon is where they would settle. And despite their longing for what was familiar, their lament for their homeland, their wishing to be back where their roots were, it was there where they would live. And it would be their home, home enough.

What would identify Babylon as their home? Jeremiah laid it all out for them: They would build houses there and plant gardens. They would build families—taking spouses and having children and grandchildren. And, they would work for the welfare of the city where they now lived. For if their community was flourishing, so would they flourish.

In those days, where you came from, second only to your family name, was what identified your status. And the people of Israel had been taken out of Israel and Judah. They were strangers in a foreign land. And Jeremiah said, "Make it your home until further notice."

Where's home? Well, it's anywhere we flourish. In the cases of peoples who are geographically displaced for whatever reason, home becomes where individuals and families thrive, where effort is made to live faithfully no matter the circumstance.

Maybe we've been exiled metaphorically to a foreign land. Maybe our parents moved us halfway across the country when we were kids, and we were forced to start a new life we hadn't wished for. Or maybe our career choices took us far away from what we thought was home. Or maybe, as we get older, the health challenges we incur mean at some point our lives are alien to what we always knew we could physically do.

New restrictions, or new geography, or new people in our lives make us feel alien to what we thought was home.

In these new places, though, when we commit to building new lives free from anger or resentment over what we've lost, we discover that here is home enough. And we find gratitude for what we have.

The Samaritan in our Gospel reading today was outside his homeland—in a region, we are told "between Samaria and Gallilee." He was a foreigner. And yet, his outsider status didn't prevent him from turning back and thanking Jesus for the gift of healing imparted on him. He shunned resentment for gratitude.

In the case of the Church, one could say we as part of the Church are aliens today in a strange land. For decades in the last century, the West was home to a church culture that ranked supreme, if you count popularity and conformity as the criteria for cultural supremacy.

All we had to do was open our doors on Sundays and the people would rush in. Religious life was largely part of people's

civic duty. Plus, there was a social bonus in being seen as active in the life of a worshiping congregation.

That all started changing in the latter parts of the 20th century. The marriage between church and culture started developing cracks. The culture didn't deem it important as much for religious life to be primary. You could be a community leader and not be a church goer or even a person of faith.

Christians, in some sense in western culture, became aliens.

In 1989 a book was written called *Resident Aliens* by two scholars at Duke University, Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon, which acknowledged that the church was awakening from its comfortable life as a civilizational religion and Christians were starting to recover their status as 'resident aliens,' which meant reclaiming its authentic place for theological discussion and mission beyond anything the culture would have us do or be.

We look back now and lament our decline in status within the culture. But as Hauerwas and Willimon wrote in their book, being resident aliens in the culture was important to reclaiming our authenticity as a people of God. Without the trappings that came with such a tight marriage to social status or cultural advancement, the church was getting back to what it was designed to be: a voice of proclamation of the true Gospel, a willingness to live counter to the culture in accordance with the ideals of God's mission for us.

That mission is rooted in our call to love God and neighbor, to proclaim Christ crucified and risen, and to be agents of service to the least among us.

In our dismay over what appears we have lost, that's home enough. Those roots are strong enough to indeed survive this

transplant. We can thrive in this place. And we can and should be grateful.

It's uncomfortable being strangers in a foreign land. Whether we choose to go there or have no say in it whatsoever, being exiled from what seems like "home" stretches us and challenges us.

But when we seek the welfare of whatever place we find ourselves in, we will find *our* welfare. And there will be enough home there.