

Gardening in the City

Scripture Reading — Jeremiah 29:1-9

Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. . . . Increase in number there; do not decrease. — Jeremiah 29:5-6

One of the best years of our life as a young family was when we lived on the south side of Chicago. We were Dutch-Americans living in a mostly African-American neighborhood. As soon as possible after moving in, I dug up part of the backyard and planted a garden. My first thought was for the produce we would enjoy—and the money we would save.

If you have ever lived far away from extended family, friends, and the place you have called home, you know a little of what it feels like to live in exile. And at some point you must decide to embrace your new surroundings and put down roots.

The Jewish people to whom Jeremiah wrote the words in this letter were in forced exile. They were carried off to the big imperial city of Babylon. The familiar surroundings of Jerusalem became a mournful memory. Jeremiah's words to them, at first, probably sounded startling and offensive.

Big, unfamiliar cities are often portrayed as harsh and evil—the opposite of places we call home. Curiously, though, in such -places God tells his people to “build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.” Our Chicago garden also led to over-the-fence conversations and sharing produce with our neighbors. And blessings were multiplied to all.

Prayer

Lord Almighty, open us up to being planted in places where we can be agents of your influence. Lead us into relationships that will transform us and others. In Jesus, Amen.

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