

Dear Friends,

What will life be like when all of this is over? How long will it take to rebuild from the devastation we are experiencing? Some will recover faster than others. Those with wealth have an advantage while the street children, the refugees and others who are poor are in danger of being left even further behind. In the light of all that is happening and our concerns about the future we may not be singing many songs at the moment and we may be wondering when the time for singing will come again.

This may have been how they were feeling in the time of Jeremiah. Israel had briefly been a powerful nation during the reigns of David and Solomon. But the nation divided into two. There was the northern kingdom which continued to be called Israel and to the south Judah which included Jerusalem. Both nations were eventually defeated by foreign powers. First Israel by the Assyrians and then Judah in the time of Jeremiah by the Babylonians. Under the Babylonians the city of Jerusalem, including the Temple was burnt to the ground, most of the people were taken to live in exile, only a few of the poor remained to tend the land.

Maybe they asked questions like ours. Will we return to what we once knew? Will there be opportunities to build for the future? Will we ever feel like singing again?

Jeremiah looked long and hard at the suffering, but he also dared to hope. He looked back and remembered how in the time of Moses the people had been set free from slavery. They had passed through the sea and the wilderness and had come to a promised land. He remembered that in the wilderness God had said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." He believed that God would continue to be faithful. He heard God say, "Again I will build you ... again you shall take your tambourines and go forth in the dance of the merry-makers, again you shall plant vineyards ... and enjoy the fruit." He looked ahead to a time when there would be meaningful work as people cared for the land and enjoyed the harvests. He could see the moment when there would again be simple pleasures, like music and dancing. He also saw the need for reunification of the northern and southern kingdoms. It was important that those who had been divided should become one.

Can Jeremiah's hope help us? We will be back together, face to face in the same room. We will be able to work for our future well-being. There will be opportunities for the pleasures we enjoy. And maybe we can be inspired by his dream of unity. Though there is currently division, maybe we can not only save our own skin but also work for a world where all may know justice.

God bless you,

Tony