



RETURNING FROM PANDEMIC EXILE

WHAT WE LOST

WHAT WE LEARNED

WHAT WE LONG FOR

RETURNING FROM PANDEMIC EXILE

A time to process together what the Covid-19 pandemic has meant for us individually and communally

A chance to listen to biblical texts of exile and learn from our faith ancestors

An opportunity to journal about this experience and an option to share journal and scrapbook items in a congregational journal for future generations



CONGREGATIONAL JOURNAL

All are invited to create entries for the congregational journal

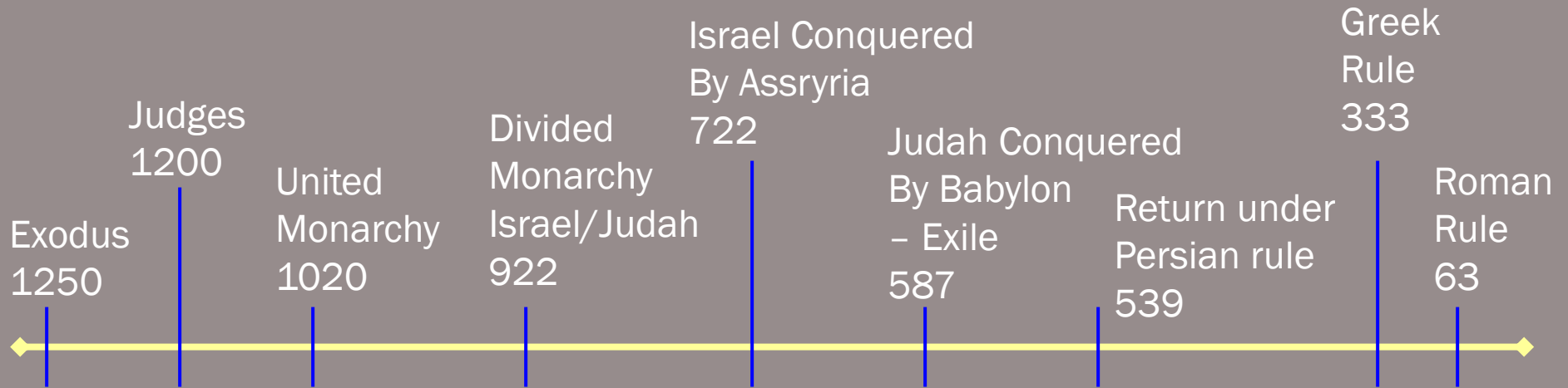
You are invited to write and reflect on the three themes: What we lost, what we learned, what we long for

You will have a 12" x 12" piece of paper and you can use both sides.

You can add anything you like from your hand-written or computer-printed journaling, to images, news stories, and other creative scrapbook-type items.

We will continue to create these after the adult forum ends, through October.

BIBLICAL TIMELINE



EXILE AS METAPHOR FOR OUR EXPERIENCE

- Walter Brueggemann. *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles*. 1997.
 - Exile is the loss of a structured, reliable world which gives meaning and coherence, and a context where treasured and trusted symbols of faith are taken away.
 - Exiles must grieve their loss and express and express their resentful sadness about what was and now is not and will never again be.
 - Exile is an experience of being orphaned, feeling like a motherless child, rootless. Exiles need connections to the past.
 - Exiles are tempted to despair, whether social, economic, or theological. Is God still faithful and reliable in exile? Are we abandoned now?
 - Exile is an experience of profaned absence. God has vanished. Holy symbols have lost their power. When God is absent, we become increasingly selfish and brutalizing. The sacred presence of God must be rethought and rediscovered in exile.
 - Exile reveals to us that our moral symmetry does not hold. Terrible things have happened and there is no easy answer why, no obvious morality to cling to, no single person/group to blame.
 - The danger in exile is to become so preoccupied with self that one cannot get outside one's self to rethink, reimagine, and redescribe larger reality. Stories of courageous and generous faith ancestors who sought a larger good than self become important to us in a new way.



WHAT WE LOST

WHAT PERSONS, PRACTICES, AND
PLACES DID WE LOSE, EITHER
TEMPORARILY OR PERMANENTLY?

LAMENTATIONS: LOSS AND GRIEF AND FEAR AND DOUBT

Lamentations 1:1-4 How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal. ² She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has no one to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies.

³ Judah has gone into exile with suffering and hard servitude; she lives now among the nations, and finds no resting place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress. ⁴ The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to the festivals; all her gates are desolate, her priests groan; her young girls grieve, and her lot is bitter.

LAMENTATIONS: LOSS AND GRIEF AND FEAR AND DOUBT

Lamentations 3:1-9 I am one who has seen affliction under the rod of God's wrath; ² he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light; ³ against me alone he turns his hand, again and again, all day long. ⁴ He has made my flesh and my skin waste away, and broken my bones; ⁵ he has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation;

⁶ he has made me sit in darkness like the dead of long ago. ⁷ He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; he has put heavy chains on me; ⁸ though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer; ⁹ he has blocked my ways with hewn stones, he has made my paths crooked.

PSALM 137: RAGE WE DARE NOT SPEAK BUT MUST

By the rivers of Babylon-- there we sat down
and there we wept when we remembered Zion.

² On the willows there we hung up our harps.

³ For there our captors asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth,
saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

⁴ How could we sing the LORD's song
in a foreign land?

⁵ If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!

⁶ Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

⁷ Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem's fall,
how they said, "Tear it down! Tear it down!
Down to its foundations!"

⁸ O daughter Babylon, you devastator!
Happy shall they be who pay you back
what you have done to us!

⁹ Happy shall they be who take your little ones
and dash them against the rock!

EZEKIEL: NO ROOM FOR DENIAL, ONLY TRUTH-TELLING

Ezekiel 12:1-7 The word of the LORD came to me:
² Mortal, you are living in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, who have ears to hear but do not hear; ³ for they are a rebellious house. Therefore, mortal, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight; you shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house. ⁴ You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight, as baggage for exile; and you shall go out yourself at evening in their sight, as those do who go into exile.

⁵ Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry the baggage through it. ⁶ In their sight you shall lift the baggage on your shoulder, and carry it out in the dark; you shall cover your face, so that you may not see the land; for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel. ⁷ I did just as I was commanded. I brought out my baggage by day, as baggage for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my own hands; I brought it out in the dark, carrying it on my shoulder in their sight.



JOURNALING WHAT YOU LOST (TEMPORARILY OR PERMANENTLY)

- What persons have you lost during the pandemic?
- What practices, routines, and enjoyable experiences did you lose?
- What places did you lose?
- What sense of family and community did you lose?
- What have you lost in terms of your faith?
- What did we lose as a church?
- What have we lost in our culture and nation?



WHAT WE LEARNED

WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE
LEARNINGS FROM THIS EXPERIENCE?

LEARNING FROM EXILE IN THE BIBLE

Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings: These books together form a massive retelling of Israel's history during the experience of Babylonian exile. It is commonly thought they were written by someone close to Jeremiah. They include a sustained self-criticism of the failure to follow the Lord's ways of justice and mercy, expressed most simply in love of neighbor.

The entire work is a sustained re-evaluation of the choice to put trust in a king instead of God.

Failure to live by covenantal faithfulness with God, living God's justice and mercy, results in judgment and unavoidable negative consequences.

Deuteronomy speaks about this as choosing the way of life or choosing the way of death.

LEARNING HOW WE FAILED AT NEIGHBORLINESS

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 ¹⁴ You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. ¹⁵ You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt.

Deuteronomy 24:19-22 ¹⁹ When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings. ²⁰ When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. ²¹ When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. ²² Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this.

LEARNING HOW WE FAILED AT NEIGHBORLINESS

- **Jeremiah 22:13-17** ¹³ Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages; ¹⁴ who says, "I will build myself a spacious house with large upper rooms," and who cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar, and painting it with vermilion. ¹⁵ Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. ¹⁶ He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the LORD. ¹⁷ But your eyes and heart are only on your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence.

LEARNING WHAT MATTERS MOST

- **Isaiah 42:6-8** ⁶ I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, ⁷ to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. ⁸ I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.

LEARNING WHAT MATTERS MOST

Isaiah 58:5-14 ⁵ Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? ⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? ⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, ¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. ¹¹ The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. ¹² Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. ¹³ If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; ¹⁴ then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

LEARNING HOW GOD IS FAITHFUL TO US ALWAYS

- **Isaiah 40:1-9** Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." ⁶ A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. ⁹ Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"

LEARNING HOW GOD IS FAITHFUL TO US ALWAYS

- **Lamentations 3:19-33** ⁹ The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! ²⁰ My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. ²¹ But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: ²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." ²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. ²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. ²⁷ It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth, ²⁸ to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it, ²⁹ to put one's mouth to the dust (there may yet be hope), ³⁰ to give one's cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults. ³¹ For the Lord will not reject forever. ³² Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; ³³ for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.

JOURNALING WHAT YOU LEARNED

What did you learn about how we have failed to take care of one another?

What did you learn about what matters most in life?

What did you learn about God's faithfulness?

What else have you learned in this pandemic exile experience?



WHAT WE LONG FOR

WHAT DO WE ENVISION AS OUR FUTURE
TOGETHER AFTER THIS EXPERIENCE?

**LONGING FOR
WHAT NEVER
WAS BUT CAN BE**

What about our world before the pandemic was wrong?

How did the pandemic make this more clear?

What is the vision for the world after the pandemic?

ISAIAH: PROPHET OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Isaiah 40 – 55: This section of Isaiah is often called “Second Isaiah” because it comes from a later period from most of Isaiah 1 – 39. Isaiah 56 – 66 is often called “Third Isaiah,” since it comes from a period shortly after the exile when Jerusalem is rebuilding its life. Walter Brueggemann calls Second Isaiah “The Poet.”

Good news! God is at play in the world for us and for all.

Good news! Testify to it.

Good news! Our hope for a world of justice with mercy can flourish.

GOOD NEWS! GOD IS AT PLAY IN THE WORLD FOR US AND FOR ALL.

- **Isaiah 52:7-12** How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." ⁸ Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion. ⁹ Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. ¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. ¹¹ Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of it, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the LORD. ¹² For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight; for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

GOOD NEWS! TESTIFY TO IT!

- **Isaiah 40:5-11** Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." ⁶ A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. ⁹ Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" ¹⁰ See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

GOOD NEWS! OUR HOPE FOR A WORLD OF JUSTICE WITH MERCY CAN FLOURISH.

- **Isaiah 42:1-7** Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ² He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³ a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴ He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. ⁵ Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: ⁶ I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, ⁷ to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

JOURNALING WHAT YOU LONG FOR

Which poets today are speaking hope for the world we long for? What poems or quotes inspire you?

How can we imagine God at play in the world even now and after the pandemic?

When and how can we testify to the world we long for which we trust God is ushering in?

How do you envision your life, the church, and the world under the reign of God's justice and mercy?

What else are you longing for for the future?

How did the pandemic change what you long for?