

**11 For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope**

### **Meditation on New Year's Eve 2020**

Jeremiah was a lonely voice in a time of great darkness. He was a prophet.

He was the voice of God, who wanted to speak through him.

Jeremiah knew he had to be in touch with those in exile, who had been put in chains and led away to a hostile land. And he wrote this beautiful letter, that ends with the most comforting sentences a believer can hear from his or her God:

**11 For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.**

Those whom the letter was for were full of despair and hopelessness, whenever they allowed themselves to remember what had happened.

They could see no way out, no tomorrow, no future, no more happiness...

In those days of brutal warfare between the small country Israel and the superpower Babylon, many of the Israelites had been deported; dragged from their country and forced to settle far from home.

Cheap labour they were meant to be.

And weakened and terrified as they were, there was not likely to be a rebellion.

Intimidated and frightened as they were, they wouldn't dare rise up against their oppressors.

So, the Babylonians did not scatter them across their huge empire but allowed them to settle together.

And there - in exile - they tried hard to care... to care to remember the past, to care for their people, to care about their faith and keep it going.

They tried to behave as calmly as possible, to keep their heads down and keep out of everyday Babylonian life and reality.

They cried a lot. They lamented. They sang sad songs... And some of them couldn't help it: they were literally heartbroken.

And then, one day, came this letter from Jeremiah.

A sign of life from home.

A message - so clear:

Don't allow yourselves to fall into despair.

Don't fall silent.

Don't withdraw...

Care!

Try to live in this foreign country.

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce; get married and give birth to children.

Support the place that your complicated life story has brought you to.

Pray for the people you have to live among, and do know:

if they are fine, you will be fine, too.

Do whatever you can that you and others can be happy and live together in peace. Care!

Jeremiah today would insist on us working for mutual understanding in this church, for better living conditions in this city and for peace in this world.

And he would tell us never to let go of hope.

"There will always be difficulties. Life is never easy", he might say. "And often you will be discouraged, frightened or frustrated. But you can keep going! All of you. You can contribute to the changing of things – just care and be part of it all, and there will be hope!

There is always the chance of a better life on earth. Believe me.

And don't withdraw into exile – inner or outer exile.

Don't just live in your small private world but connect your personal little dreams with God's great vision for the future of humankind. Join the community of believers, find people who share your hopes and your faith and work together with them. Offer your

time and talents and bring forth changes that an individual could not even dream of achieving on his or her own.

Join forces and show solidarity with those who need you.

Support the place you live in. Care for it.

Because in its well-being, you will find your well-being.”

“Believe me”, Jeremiah might say today, “God needs you in this church and in this city.

God needs you in this country. God needs you for his world.

You can make a difference, if you just do what Jesus has taught you to.

Follow him, care and heal and help and save. You can do it – especially in the year to come.”