**Life on the Frontline 2**

**Jeremiah 29.1-14**

Hands up if you ever get that Sunday evening feeling?

You’ve had a great weekend off – Friday night in watching TV and eating pizza, a day out with the family or friends on Saturday, a great time at church on Sunday followed by a fantastic roast dinner.

But then Sunday evening comes and with it the thought of work again on Monday.

Well, maybe that’s how we felt before covid, and who knows, it may become a reality again one day in the future!

Of course, many of you haven’t got a 9.00-5.00, Monday to Friday job.

But even so, you know that Sunday evening feeling.

It comes at other times…before a village hall or parish council committee meeting when you know Mrs Miggins is going to be difficult or there’s an item on the agenda that’s going to cause tension.

It comes before another day volunteering in school or the nursing home. Why did you sign up to help? Wouldn’t it be more fun to spend the day in the garden?

It comes before taking your elderly mother out shopping when you know she is going to spend the whole day complaining. Nothing you do is ever good enough!

Last week we began our “Life on the Frontline series” looking at our daily lives and where we spend them.

We’ve begun to ponder the questions; “What does God want to do in the places where I spend the majority of my time?” and “How might he want to use me?”

Last week we thought about how “the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it” (1 Corinthians 10.26).

God loves everything he has made.

Jesus came to establish God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven – so that the world may glorify God and so that his people might flourish and enjoy life in all its fulness.

Jesus continues to build this amazing kingdom through his people – the church. We have a role to play.

You’d think this would be enough to get us jumping out of bed each day – keen to get on with the task in hand.

But so often it isn’t, is it?

Let me tell you a secret – even clergy get the Sunday evening blues… its just that they generally get it on a Saturday evening after a day off and before a busy Sunday.

Its not that what I do isn’t important – I know it is.

Its just that it takes effort and I’m lazy.

Its just that I sometimes seem to put in a lot of effort for not a lot of results.

Its just that sometimes people can be quite difficult and don’t always seem very grateful…

I’m sure you know the feeling?

So, how, as Christians, can we thrive when our frontlines seem hard and we are struggling with motivation?

Let’s turn to our bible passage for today from Jeremiah 29.

The context of this passage is really important.

God has set his people up in the Promised Land, to live with and for him.

But they’ve consistently failed to keep their side of the covenant – living in faithful obedience to him. Often they’ve paid lip service to him whilst chasing after foreign gods.

After repeated warnings, God has finally punished them by letting them be over-run by the Babylonians, and the majority of the people have been carried off into exile, where, by the rivers of Babylon, they sat down and wept.

What were they to do, far from home and all that they held dear?

How were they to seek God when the temple, now in ruins, lay many miles away?

Its in this context that Jeremiah writes God’s message to his people:

Settle down, build houses, start families…. And seek the prosperity of the city in which you find yourself.

God hasn’t given up on you.

He has plans for you… good ones…

But its going to be many years before you return to your homeland. In the meantime enjoy the good God gives you in the place not of your choosing, but where God has put you nonetheless.

Can we identify with God’s people, I wonder?

Some of us may feel, like them, that we are in exile. That the places we find ourselves in are a result of bad choices or even sin.

Others of us will enjoy our frontlines, finding them stimulating and fulfilling, and yet still with a sense that there must be more.

If all is perfect, then thank God and pray for the rest of us!

God’s message to his people in Babylon was not that everything in Babylon was great – although no doubt some things in Babylon were much better than back home!

But his message was that, even in Babylon, they could find happiness.

So, what was it that God told his people to do?

And what might we do in the contexts we find ourselves?

Three things:

Number One; Get on with it! (verse 5)

God’s message was to build houses, settle down, plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters.

Last week we spoke about how God calls some people to up sticks and move. But he also calls plenty of people to stay put.

Some of our frontlines we are stuck with.

Our Christian calling is to love our families and care for them. We can’t duck that one as much as we might like to!

Our frontline might be our local community, with our neighbours… and we have no opportunity to move.

Our frontline may be the doctor’s surgery where we go often to receive medical treatment. Stopping that might be a bad idea!

For some of us, there may be an opportunity to change our frontlines. We should be open to that…

To look for a new job, to resign from one voluntary commitment and take up another. These are things to consider carefully, take advice, pray about.

In rare circumstances, such as when we are in danger, we may need to get out urgently.

But for most of us, when we get up each morning and head to our frontline, we can get on with life and try to make the most of it; recognising that God is in it with us.

Two: we can bless (verse 7a).

You don’t have to like someone to bless them.

I don’t think the Israelites particularly liked the people who had ransacked their homes and taken them into exile!

Jesus prayed for the people who crucified him.

Maybe our boss is a tyrant – we can model good grace and kindness even when mistreated.

Maybe we’re the boss and we’ve got to make someone redundant – we can do it with kindness, give them a fair package as they leave and help them to look for something else.

Maybe one of our neighbours needs some help with the garden – we can run the mower over their lawn when we do ours.

Maybe someone at the coffee morning smells and doesn’t have much in the way of social skills – we can talk to them.

Three; we can pray (verse 7b).

Its amazing what difference praying for our frontlines can make.

Not only will it change the context in which we find ourselves,

But it will change us.

When leaving university, I applied to a charity to spend a year out doing voluntary work. They sent me to Birkenhead, the last place in the world I wanted to go.

But as I sat on the train heading to Merseyside God put on my heart to pray for the couple sitting opposite me (one of whom was obviously feeling really unwell) and by the time the train pulled in Lime Street station I felt a real heart for the place these people came from.

The situation hadn’t changed, although I hope the man I silently prayed for felt better.

But God had changed me.

Finally, I hope you spotted that God’s message to his people was to his ‘people’ – plural. They were to do this together.

As Christians we are called to support each other in our frontlines.

And its this that we’ll come on to next week…

Our frontlines may be wonderful, life giving places. They may be a hard slog.

More likely they are a bit of both.

But God is in them with us.

So let’s get on with blessing and praying for our frontlines… and support each other as we do.

Let’s pray:

Father God,

We praise you that you know us intimately,

You are there when we get up in the morning and when we head to bed at night.

Please help us to get on with life where you have put us, yet be open to any changes you would lead us through.

Please help us to bless and pray our frontlines and the people we meet there.

For your glory’s sake,

Amen.