**Serving the City**

**The Word**

Read together Jeremiah 29:4-14

**The Big Idea**

Cities are marked by sin, pride, and brokenness, yet God has a heart for the city and his ultimate plan is to redeem and transform human culture in the New Jerusalem. As Christians, we are resident aliens in our cities, and we have the opportunity to serve the city as a way of bearing witness to God’s future kingdom.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. As you consider the brief Bible overview of human culture and cities (beginning in a garden and ending in a garden-like city), was there anything specific that struck you, surprised you, or was helpful to you?

2. On Sunday, a spectrum was given in terms of opinions on the church’s role in the city. Perspectives vary from seeking to transform and redeem the city to having a more hands-off approach that simply seeks to love and serve individuals within the city. Where have you found yourself on that spectrum historically?

3. As you consider the church’s role as being a servant to the city, do you have any examples or experiences of churches doing that well?

4. As you consider serving the city, are there any specific opportunities or ideas you have for yourself or for Grace moving forward?

**Digging Deeper: Sermon Outline**

I. Biblical Overview of the City

 A. The biblical story begins in a garden

 1. We were designed to cultivate the garden (Gen 2:15)

2. We were called to spread out from there and be partners in cultivating God’s creation. This probably implied the development of human culture, society, and cities (which would have been places marked by shalom, justice, and God’s presence)

 B. After the fall, human culture and cities are marked by sin and brokenness

 1. Babel (Genesis 11): “let’s make a name for ourselves”

 2. Babylon (Jeremiah 29): conquers Jerusalem and carries its people into exile

3. Babylon the Great (Revelation17): the personification of human society organizing itself in opposition to God

 C. Yet God still has a heart for the city and identifies a city for his own

 1. Jerusalem

 2. A city of shalom, righteousness, care for the vulnerable

 3. A light to the nations of the earth

 4. Yet, the earthly Jerusalem failed to live up to those values

 D. God promises a future city

 1. The New Jerusalem (Revelation 21-22)

 2. It is beautiful, just, peaceful, radiant with God’s presence

3. It is a garden-like city (the river of the water of life and the tree of life are there)

4. God’s plan is not to take us back to the garden but to redeem and transform human culture and society until it is all that he desires it to be.

II. Our relationship with cities

 A. We are resident aliens (see Hebrews 13:14 and 1 Peter 1:1)

We love our cities and belong to them in many ways, and yet our ultimate hope and citizenship is in the New Jerusalem

B. There is a spectrum of opinion on what the church’s role in the city is to be. Some think the church’s role is to transform, redeem, and renew the city itself through working on the structures and dynamics of the city. Others think our role is simply to love individuals within the city, sharing the love and truth of Jesus with them, and bringing them into God’s family.

C. Regardless of where you fall on that spectrum, the church can see its role as serving the city.

1. See Matthew 20:25-28.

2. What if the church said to the city, “we’re here to serve. We may not agree with everything or participate in everything, but we are here to serve the needs of the city.”

3. Where the city’s needs and God’s values come together, the church has a great opportunity to serve and make an impact in the city.

Examples: Prayer, education, homelessness, immigrant communities, housing, etc.

4. “Service is something the community needs, God desires, and the church has the capacity to do. The community may not care much about salvation, but it does have needs.  It is in meeting those needs through service that meaningful relationships develop, and out of relationships come endless opportunities to share the love of Christ and the gospel of salvation.  The early church grew because its people loved and served.” —Eric Swanson

III. Interview with Costa Mesa City Councilman, Allan Mansoor