

The Rev. Dr. Mary Barber
10.12.25

Whose home is this?

This feels like a living question this week, who belongs here, who is in, who is out, who is part of us?

Whose home is this?

It feels like a real question in this last week of Hispanic Heritage Month. It feels like a real question when we are having controversy over Bad Bunny being picked as the Super Bowl half-time performer, some folks questioning whether Bad Bunny, a Puerto Rican man who raps in Spanish, is American enough to perform at this quintessentially American sports event.

Whose home is this? It feels like a real question when we are celebrating Indigenous Peoples' Day tomorrow, which is apparently back to being called Columbus Day, marking the beginnings of our origins, whether centering the original people or the colonizers.

Whose home is this? It feels like a real question when our own military troops are in the streets of our cities, protecting "some" people from "those other" people. Whose home is this? It feels especially relevant in this time of mass deportation and threats of deportation and taking away legal status from those who are considered enemies of the state.

Whose home is this? I mean, in today's Gospel we even hear Jesus making such distinctions, referring to one person in a group of ten as a "foreigner."

Whose home is this?

In our first reading we hear the priest and prophet Jeremiah speaking God's word to the people of Israel in exile. Their land had been invaded by Babylon, the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem and reduced the Temple to rubble. Then they had marched the leaders, the priests and rulers, the scholars and elites, out of the city to live in exile and servitude in Babylon.

The group of exiles, living in a foreign land with a different language and culture and different gods, were hoping that their time away would be short. Jeremiah says, you had better settle in, because you

will be there for a bit. Build houses and live in them. Plant gardens and eat from them. Seek the welfare of this city of exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf.

In other words, Jeremiah is saying to the exiles, make this strange city your home.

Seek the welfare of this city and pray to God on its behalf. Now God through Jeremiah is not exactly saying that the people need to pray for the Babylonians, the conquering empire who desecrated and destroyed their Temple and forced them out of their home and enslaved some of them. But God is certainly saying that the people will need to coexist with the Babylonians and to pray and work for a common purpose, for the welfare of the city.

This message must have been so hard for the people in exile to hear. It is hard to hear today, when some of us feel like our country is being taken out from under our feet, when some of us who thought we were just maybe starting to belong, now are being told we are dragging things down, we are making the country not great, we are a threat.

And it is hard to hear when the forces that are causing our current chaos are doing so in reaction to feeling themselves that their country had become a strange and foreign place, a place where they felt excluded by the inclusion of people who had formerly been hidden or marginalized, and they are trying to take things back to an earlier time.

Whose home is this?

Jeremiah's message, God's word to the people, is a survival strategy. And it is more than that. God is saying, you are going to be here for a while. Make something of it. Make this your home, for your own sake. Make this your home, because I am here with you. Make this your home, and you will show the people of Babylon that you are a people, my people, that you belong and you are somebody.

I wonder what the people of Babylon thought of the people of Israel after they had been living among them for nearly 50 years. It was through their own actions that the people of Israel were there, but did they resent them? Did they feel excluded when they saw a group of them walking together, speaking in their own language, sharing food from their gardens?

I can understand a bit of both of these viewpoints. I thought I was "good" because I was in a relationship with a Black woman, but when I had Black daughters, when I saw what they had to face

from teachers and others out in the world, when they challenged me and did not give me as much of a pass as my wife did, I realized I had more to learn. I thought I was “good” because I worked in a diverse environment at a state hospital and got along with everybody, but when I went to seminary where I was not the boss of others but just another student, I had to again see that folks had been polite, that they had not called me out on my obliviousness to my privilege, I had to see that I still had more to learn.

And it is not over for me. And all of this has been uncomfortable, and at times I have felt alienated or excluded. No one made me feel that way. That feeling was coming from inside of me. Others are simply saying, this is my home too.

Puerto Rico is America. Bad Bunny is American. Speaking Spanish is American. Queer and Trans people are American. Straight white men are American too.

America is Indigenous and Black and brown and white, America is the colonizers and colonized and enslaved, sometimes all mixed up in one person, as Pope Leo’s DNA testing shows. This is challenging, it is often uncomfortable, and it is also the good news, the Gospel news for us today. We are all unique and particular, and we are all here together as members of the same body, the Body of Christ.

So go ahead in these anxious times. Build houses and live in them. Plant gardens and eat from them. Pray to the Lord for this country.

Whose home is this? Whose home is this, St Martin’s? This is your home, this is my home, this is our home. Amen.