

FaithBIT



Living in Exile

Reflection by Dave Paul

Separation, upheaval, isolation, loss, loneliness, anxiety, lamenting, and nostalgia are some aspects of living in exile. When have you experienced some of these for any length of time? It is easy to understand how the current global pandemic might be foremost in everyone's minds. However, I believe the sense of living in exile is far more pervasive. I've experienced feelings of exile at other times in my life, such as:

- A sense of emptiness upon finishing college and saying so many goodbyes as we went our separate ways.
 - Loss and grief when my father, who was my best friend, died from a heart attack during a short bout with cancer.
 - A darkness and sense of foreboding during recovery from a brain injury after falling off my bike.
 - Betrayal and lack of self-worth when my job, along with hundreds more, were outsourced.
- Granted, these are probably not as profound as being uprooted from one's country and becoming an immigrant in search of a new home. And yet I believe they still qualify.

One exile we all share dates to the creation story in Genesis—the fall, when Adam and Eve were cast out of Eden. They were exiled from that garden and separated from God. Death became their wages for sin. This is lamented in a familiar hymn that says:

We mourn in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appears...

Where is our redemption? How can we be restored? I believe it came to us in the birth of the Christ child, Jesus, who was born into exile in a stable and lying in a manger. And he was exiled to Egypt with his parents to escape the wrath of King Herod's slaying of the innocents. However, I believe his most painful moments in exile were hanging on the cross and crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He must have felt completely alone and abandoned by God. He suffered, endured, and died while atoning for our sins, redeeming us. In those moments, I wonder if he knew that his death was not the end but a new beginning on that Easter morning when he rose from the tomb and avenged that sentence of death. Immanuel, *God is with us*.

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*

Although our separation from God continues in this life, we hold a "get out of jail card", namely our baptism, when Jesus adopted us into his heavenly family forever. Baptism is when "...each of us became a child of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and marked with the cross of Christ forever." Paul writes in Romans 8: 38-39:

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I now have a better understanding why Martin Luther asserted that we are “simultaneously saints and sinners.” We became sinners in exile ever since the fall, and we became redeemed/restored into sainthood through our baptism. Therefore, I think it is important *to remember who we are (sinners in exile) and whose we are (Baptized children of God)*. Our baptism gives daily hope during moments of exile in our lives.

In closing, so many around us experience feelings of exile at different times in their lives, and I hear a calling in our confession and forgiveness during this Advent season: “In the love of God we go into the world—to our friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors. We are Christ’s ambassadors. We are a new creation in Christ.”