

We have all been shocked. Our day to day life has been and continues to be, exposed to the threat, devastation and the effects of a worldwide pandemic.

In the last two years we have all been confronted by unimaginable events, of all kinds, that we could not have anticipated.

Threats to life, hope and a future were very real before and during the ministry of Jeremiah. A prophet of God, sent to bring His word to a struggling world. Jeremiah's challenging ministry, was to speak God's word to a suffering people, who were in the gravest circumstances: death, war and exile.

*‘Am I only a God of the nearby’ declares the Lord, ‘and not a God of far away?’*  
*Jeremiah 23: 23*

Jeremiah, devoted prophet, was utterly faithful in conveying every letter of God's message to His people. Against this terrible background of struggle and strife, the words he was committed to convey, not for the first time.. to the people, were not what these people expected or wanted to hear.....

*‘This is what the Lord God Almighty of Israel says to those in exile’*: Settle down. Seek peace and prosperity.... *‘I will come to you’*... Do not listen to diviners and dreamers – false prophets. *‘They tell you lies. I have not sent them’*  
*Jeremiah 29: 8,9.*

*‘You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart’*  
*Jeremiah 29: 13*

Seeking from an overwhelming need.

Need, for anyone then or now, is presented in so many forms of suffering: exile, illness, grief, poverty.

Thomas Merton (1915 – 1968), in his book, *Contemplative Prayer*, spoke passionately, concerning seeking abandonment in God. Abandoning oneself to this *‘Source of Life’*.

Being *‘called to the deepest levels of prayer.’*

Merton observes that *‘stopping too soon is the commonest dead-end street in prayer’* He also calls on the complacency of *‘praying with the feet alone, not with the heart, a self separation from God.’*

In challenging circumstances people can find themselves feeling cut-off, - exiled. Unable to accept the change brought about by these desperate events. Not believing

anyone else would know, understand or care about those things that are happening to them..!

These difficulties can be much worse than can be imagined. People pray: 'Where are you God?

*'seek Him with all your heart" Deuteronomy 4: 29*

God is coming to us as we search for Him.

Circumstances have altered, dramatically – God is unchanging.

He is unchanged in His thoughts for us. Thoughts for peace, hope and a future.

Negative thoughts creep in, 'If I pray will I be changed – do I want to be changed? Everything is changing!'

Fear is the overwhelming feeling.

Enter: devilish thoughts, suggesting quick fixes and easy half thought out solutions.

Thomas Merton writes: ' We should let ourselves be brought naked and defenceless in the centre of that dread where we stand alone before God with our nothingness', dependent on 'the gift of His grace, His mercy and the light of faith'

'True contemplation is a not a psychological trick but a theological grace'

He quotes William Blake, asking 'Can we bear the Beams of Love ?'

And also Abbe Monachanin: 'For let it be enough to know ourselves to be in the place where God wants us.' ' the hour of the silent offering: therefore the hour of our hope'

Merton continues writing in words of a theatrical nature:

He sees getting to a process of approaching that 'nakedness', through a series of stage 'fire curtains'

Each one lifting, ultimately, to reveal the lively reality of the action, the gift of peace, hope and a future.

In his commentary of Jeremiah 29, David Guzik (Enduring Word), accepts that God's resolution is:

Is first to comfort, with reassurance and is secondly, a command, to live in 'it', accepting change.

To live wholeheartedly, and care for the others too. Reflect His love and share His comfort.

*'Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.'* Joshua 1.9