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I like it here -- in Arizona, I mean. I joke about it and say that, between the scenery and the weather, if it were not for the politics, everyone would want to live here, and we don't have enough water, hence the politics. Of course, it appears strange politics is the norm in other states as well -- I just returned from Illinois, where government is both corrupt and incompetent -- and politics is bizarre on the national level, so save your water and watch out for an influx of new Arizonans when people realize they might as well live here.

I like it here; I live here. Patricia and I have friends here; we have our house here; the second of our dogs has lived only here since leaving the kennel; we are active in opera here. I live here.

-- no, wait, I *sojourn* here; I am what the Hebrew Bible refers to as a "resident alien," because I am not a native Arizonan; Arizona is not my *home*; it is where I am living. By the way, before I go further and offend some of you, a few verses after "Love your neighbor as yourself," the book of Leviticus instructs us to "love the sojourner" or "the resident alien" or "the alien who is resident among you," so let me feel the love.

But I'm fairly clearly not a real Arizonan to those of you who have been here many years. I don't own a pair of jeans -- though they are as universal in Chicago as they are here; I don't own a cowboy hat, though I have to say I like the way I looked the one time I put one on my head; I prefer loafers to cowboy boots, which I have never owned nor had on my feet. I like the Arizona Cardinals, but I liked them sixty years ago when they were the Chicago Cardinals. I like the Diamondbacks, but the truth is, I do not follow them; what with satellite radio and television, I follow my Chicago White Sox as closely as I ever have.

No, I am not a true Arizonan; I am a midwesterner, really an urban midwesterner, *sojourning* in Arizona.

Mind you, many of you are not native Arizonans and yourselves are from the midwest, and in Florence, in the winter, the only group that rivals in size the midwesterner cheese-heads (Wisconsinites for those who do not know the term) are those from Montana.

Now, there is nothing wrong with being an Arizonan, with being a native Arizonan, but please don't ruin the thrust of my sermon.

Being a midwesterner is for me to be without any shred of an accent -- though one of my Buffalo, New York high school classmates said I had a "Hoosier twang,"-- and to me, being a midwesterner has also meant not being either a California beach-bum nor a Manhattan snob; being a midwesterner has meant embracing the ideas of marrying for life, being a responsible parent, and having a tough-as-nails work ethic, believing in God and going to church on Sunday and, importantly, not looking down on others. . .

Not looking down on others, except that there is a bit of a reverse snobbism I have had toward people on either coast, the kind that says: "'No,' we are not hill-billies nor country-bumpkins, and we can form complete sentences and do know how to use chop sticks in a Chinese restaurant, and we *prefer* to call it 'pop' rather than 'soda.'" But we midwesterners are only minimally for show other than sometimes when we are really having a good time.

I do not remember whether it was before or after I had my business in Valparaiso, Indiana, that a business consultant I used, who remains a friend with a friendship formed in part based on shared cultural interest, books, music, and movies, -- but who lives in Santa Barbara, California -- said to me, "John, you belong on one of the coasts," implying that only there can one experience such "culture."

"Joel," I said, "You don't understand. I'm a midwesterner, and *that* is a cultural thing as well; it shapes who I am." Who I am, at least in my own mind.

That was somewhat overly simplistic, but it is a fact in a sadly important way: the least *religious* areas of the county in terms of church membership and religious self-identification are on our northeast and Pacific coast lines. There are some magnificent congregations and some magnificent Christians, but as a percentage of population, they are a small percentage in their localities compared to the number of self-identified Christians in the midwest -- or in Arizona.

To say the least, I suspect that any observant, self-identified Christian in Manhattan or in Santa Barbara is a *sojourner*, whether that Christian is a native of either place or comes from Arizona or Chicago or Wisconsin.

And it is not just a geographic sort of *sojourning*; it is a cultural and social and religious sojourning as well. We are, most of us, uncomfortable with the lack of respect for religion that pervades most corners of the nation; we are uncomfortable with a lack of standards in sexual behavior; we abhor much about the overly materialistic society around us even here, in Arizona, no matter from where we came in order to sojourn here. Let there be no mistake, and this is neither pro- nor anti-, but the Donald Trump phenomenon draws heavily on a sense that "this is not how I remember this place as being; I am *an alien* in my own country."

Which takes me to our friend Jeremiah. We have been reading and shall for one more week be reading from this prophet of Judah, Judah's being the tribe and part of the kingdom that was left after the fall to Assyria in 722 BCE of the kingdom of Israel, which with Judah had been united under David and Solomon two-hundred plus years earlier; with that fall came the disappearance of ten of the twelve tribes of Israel. Writing roughly from 600 BCE to sometime after 587 BCE, Jeremiah first foretells that Judah and Jerusalem will fall to the Babylonians -- which happened in the 589-587 BCE period, and resulted in

perhaps 5000 leaders and people of Judah's being taken in exile to Babylon. In the passage we read last week, Jeremiah appeared to know that the resultant exile would not last forever. Today's passage was written sometime after that 587 BCE date to those in exile. It is impossible to understate the trauma this exile must have caused; Judah and Jerusalem were more than home; they were where God had promised that the descendants of Abraham would live; the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem was thought of as where God would occasionally dwell. This exile was crushing to the morale of the people. So I can only speculate as to the surprising impact on those exiles when Jeremiah wrote to tell them, to tell those *sojourners*, to live their lives where they were sojourning, as *though it were their home*; to take wives, to have kids, to work and to pray for the well-being of the community in which they found themselves -- *even if it was not their home*.

It is in fact an incredibly Christian message delivered nearly six hundred years before Jesus -- himself a good Jew. Jesus never spoke of *here* as "home"; he made clear where his *home* was. But though Jesus was thus a *sojourner*, he worked and prayed and taught for the well-being of all in *the places where he found them*.

What was true for Jesus is true for those who believe in him: This is not our home, and I do not mean Coolidge or Florence or Valparaiso, Indiana or Ames, Iowa, or Santa Barbara, California. We *sojourn* here until we are called to that home of which Jesus spoke.

But while we are *sojourning* here we are called to listen and to heed what Jeremiah said and wrote: we are to live where we are and to pray for where we are. And for the Christian, that living does involve participation in the life of the community, which does include voting and campaigning and, oops, *not* ignoring politics. But as I have been saying, let us not delude ourselves into thinking that through our politics we can make His "kingdom come, on earth, as it is in heaven."

Let us, quite frankly, never sacrifice human relations, the love for each other God commands, at the altar of political differences.

Although other than at the airport, I was not in Chicago, I did visit my beloved University of Illinois Friday afternoon and Saturday. It has been part of my life for more than fifty-six years, and it offers pleasant memories and a touch of nostalgia, but I do not live there any more; it is not my home; I am a visitor there.

I visit there, I *sojourn* there, but whether visiting or *sojourning*, Jeremiah would tell me to pray for the communities in which I visit or sojourn.

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And so for us; for none of us is any earthly place our home, but because here, on earth, is not our final home, let us put into perspective the differences over earthly matters that can divide us, and as Jeremiah would tell us, while we *sojourn* here, let us live -- but live in accordance with God's laws; let us seek to be happy, but never at the cost of another's happiness; and as we sojourn, wherever it might be, may we always seek to let those among whom we sojourn be able to see within us the presence of Christ, and let us invite them to sojourn with us until we meet in our true home.

Here matters, but here is not there; here is not home.

Amen