



Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

(Lectionary Year C, Pentecost 21)

By Beth Barnet

Praying for our communities, our cities and for the strange places we find ourselves in.

You will need:

- Print outs of “3 layers” of Chris Booth image ‘Bless Babylon’ (this is best done in large scale)
- Pale green and blue Post-it notes, or note paper and blu-tak.
- Markers
- “Building” materials: blocks, lego, sticks and leaves, blue fabric or crepe paper water
- “People”: lego figures, paper dolls, play dough or modelling clay
- Music: Chris Tomlin ‘God of this city’

Time required:

10-15 minutes

Connect

Jeremiah encourages God’s people to pray for wherever they are. Even if it isn’t where they wish they were. Even if it isn’t their own land. Even if they are in enemy territory. Jeremiah’s words from God help them to know how to pray in a sad place, in a strange place.

After all, if they worship the God of the whole earth, the whole universe, then there is no place anywhere that God isn’t. When we know God as the creator of the whole world, and as the one who loves the whole world, and who works to reconcile the world in Christ, every place becomes a prayer place – even the places you wish you weren’t. Even prison places can become a prayer place.

Context

The art image here is called “Bless Babylon” – Babylon is the name of the enemy city where God’s people have been taken as prisoners to work. Bless Babylon shows us Jeremiah’s call to different ways to bless the city, to live and pray as a blessing to the city, and invites us to pray too. Let’s read again how Jeremiah encourages God’s people – including us – to pray.

Content

Read the text together

“Build houses and live in them;
plant gardens and eat what they produce.
Take wives and have sons and daughters;
Take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.
But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile,
And pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

We are going to bring our prayers for our city, our community, our neighbourhood, to the art piece, ‘Bless Babylon’.

This image invites us to ‘seek the welfare of the city’ and ‘pray on its behalf’. At this station, use the blocks and the materials in the baskets to build a city. Think about all the kinds of life that are part of this community or city:

- Buildings, trees, water
- Add people in families of all kinds and sizes using lego figures, paper dolls or modelling clay
- Add whatever other kinds of life is in your city – backyard cricket players, street buskers, pop-up coffee carts, cars, animals, factories, playgrounds, circuses! Remind each other of the parts of the text that call God’s people, wherever they are, to bless and to pray for the welfare of the city: welfare here means the whole of life working well together.

Once you’ve finished constructing the city, take some time together to make a place for your prayers for seeking the welfare of your community, your household, yourselves. You might make your prayers into billboards on the sides of buildings, or move the figures and elements around to demonstrate the prayer you intend.

Note that the artist has used ‘green’ for the figures and buildings of Babylon and ‘blue’ for the people of God, hinting at the difference. Use the two different coloured Post-it notes to pray in different ways for those who feel at home in the city and those who – for maybe lots of different reasons – feel some strangeness or alienation.



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We are going to take 5 minutes now to move around to the other stations – or you can stay at the big city - and add your prayers – you might choose to share a prayer with someone else at that station.

There are three stations to invite our prayers with different 'layers' of life - each of the 'layers' of the art invites us to offer prayers for various parts of community/city life.

- Building houses (display the image of the houses)
- Planting gardens (display the image of the gardening)
- Growing families and community connections (display the image of the families) – you might need to offer 'families and community connections' as an explanation/translation of 'take wives, have sons and daughters, take wives for your sons etc'

While we do this, the song "God of this City" by Chris Tomlin will play. Perhaps sitting and listening to this song and praying along with it is for you.

Some things to pray for:

Pray for all people in your city or land to have a safe house to live in

Pray for healthy sources of sustainable food for all the people of your city

Pray for good relationships with your neighbours – that you will make friends, be good friends, close friends

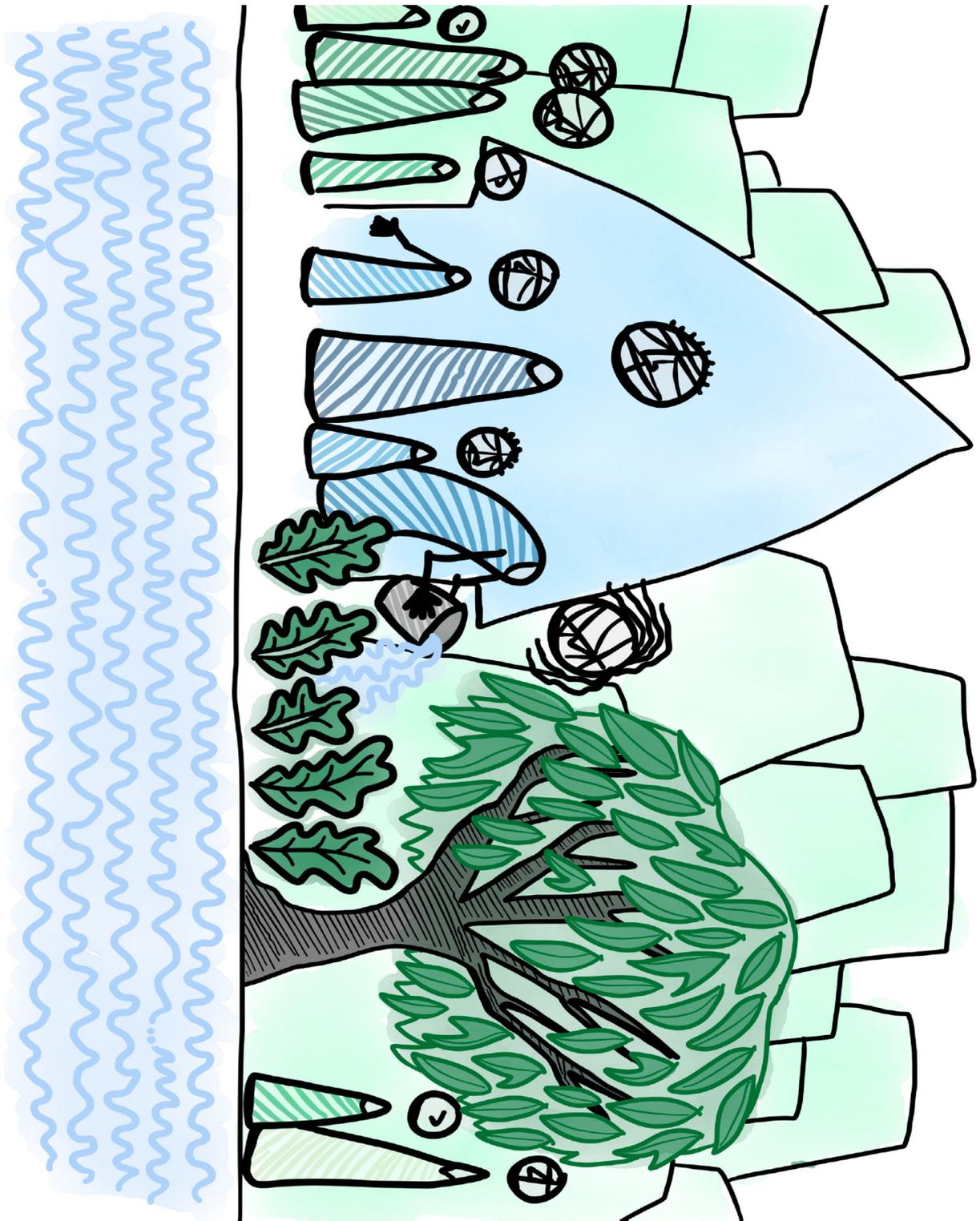
Pray that your communities work together to care for children.

Pray for the whole of your city – every part – that it would be just and healthy.



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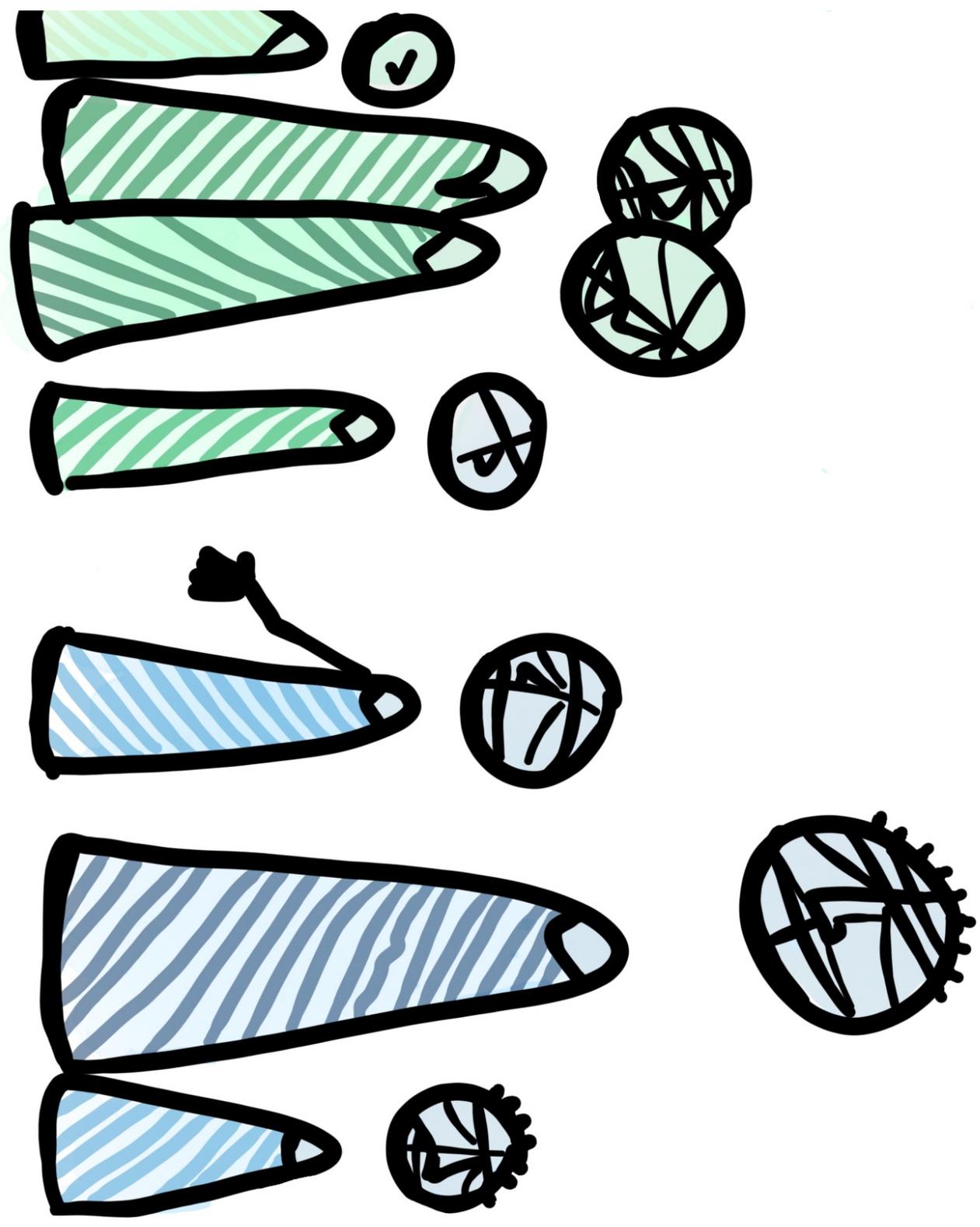
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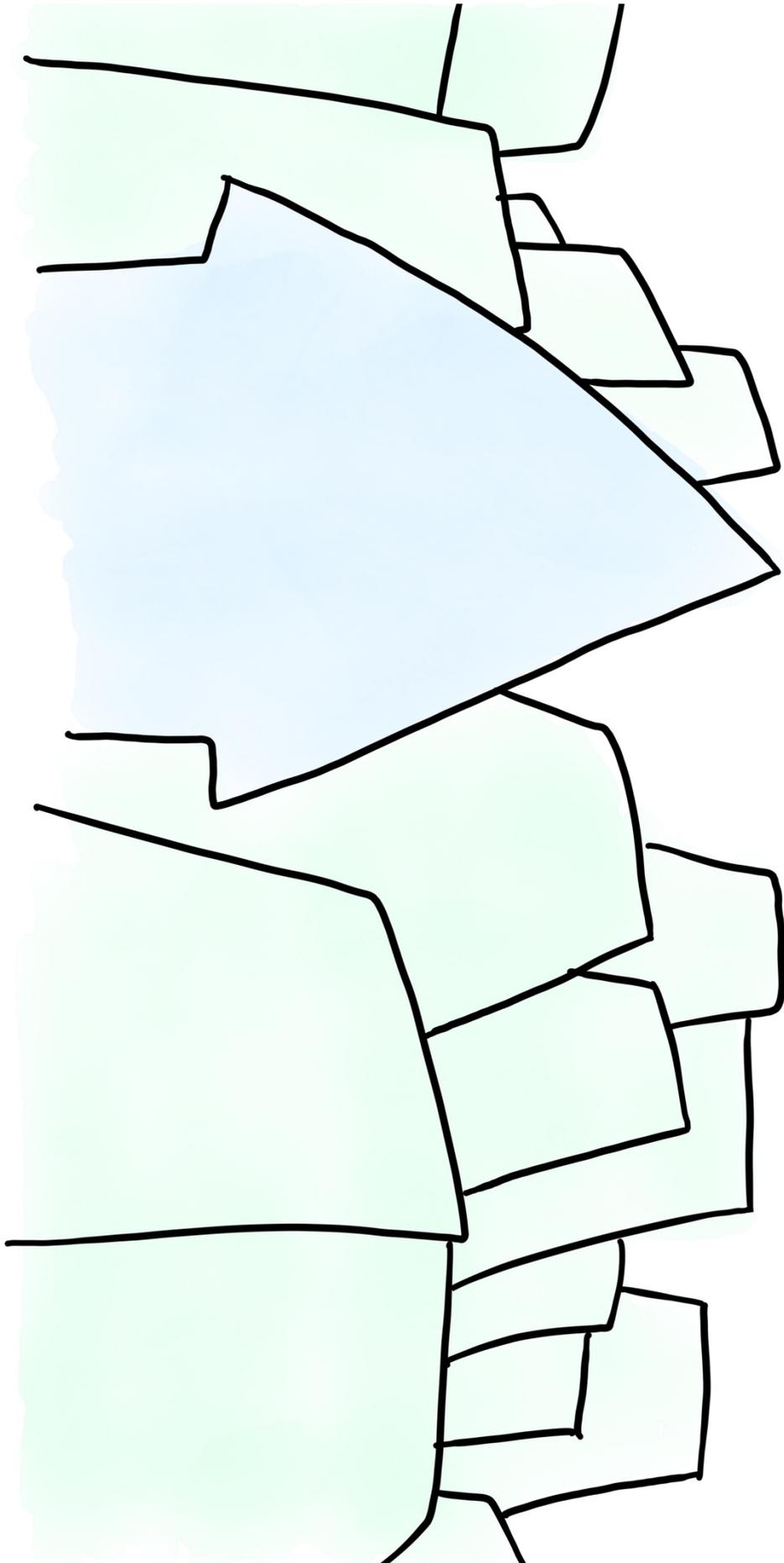


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