



*Raise your eyes and look around you:
all are assembling, coming to you.
By my life, declares the Lord,
you will put them all on like jewels,
like a bride, you will fasten them on.
For your desolate places and your ruins
and your devastated country
from now on will be too cramped for your inhabitants,
and your devourers will be far away.
Once more they will say in your hearing,
the children of whom you were bereft,
'The place is too cramped for me,
make room for me to live.'
Then you will think to yourself,
'Who has borne me these?
I was bereft and barren,
exiled, turned out of my home;
who has reared these?
I was left all alone,
so where have these come from?'*

Isaiah 49:18-21

The motivational challenge

Monday of Advent III

Whatever the historical circumstances under which the first 39 chapters of Isaiah were written, from chapter 40 to 55 we are clearly in a time late in the Babylonian exile, after the event of the Persian conquest of that empire. The possibility, unthinkable before except in prophetic vision, now presents itself as concrete reality. The Hebrews could return to Palestine: yet many did not want to go. By this time, two or three generations had passed from the original exiles. They would have put down roots in Babylon and adopted Babylonian culture as their own. To use modern terminology, Isaiah was hyping up the return and what it would mean, challenging the people's reluctance to make such a radical move and change. The hype succeeded, although it is probable that only a portion of the exiled community made the return.

We live in a world in which only a vast change in human culture from top to bottom will enable us to survive the ecological and resource crises confronting us. How does the prophetic church of today motivate the community to make these changes?