

God Has a Plan

Matthew 6:25-34; Jeremiah 29:11

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Introduction: God's call to Jeremiah came when he was just a boy and it included the requirements that he not marry or father children, not go to weddings or funerals, not sit in a house with feasting, and not sit in the company of merry-makers. Since he did complain about how hard this made his life he was called the "weeping prophet." He had plenty of reasons to cry. His charge as a prophet was to reveal the sins of the people and explain the reason for the impending disaster of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and the captivity of the leaders of the country who were exiled to Babylonia. And all these things happened. He was not thanked or congratulated for being right.

Like most messengers of bad news, he was blamed. He was attacked by his own brothers, beaten and put into the stocks by a priest, imprisoned by the king, threatened with death, and thrown into a cistern by Judah's officials.

But in our passage today, Jeremiah shares words of hope and comfort for the people that there would be redemption.

Jeremiah 29:11

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

Prayer: Gracious God, open us to the promise of Your plans for each of us and for Geneva. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen

I want to take a few minutes to explain our text. The meaning is clear, but our understanding can be deepened with some insights from scholars. First, note that these are God's words, not Jeremiah's.

The word translated here as "plans" can also mean "thoughts" or "thinking of." Therefore, God thinks about us. The God of the universe thinks about us. God considers us, knows us, remembers us, keeps us in mind.

I love the way Ray Pritchard puts it. He says, "God knows who we are and where we are. Not for one second are we ever lost or forgotten for His heart is so big and His knowledge so vast that no one ever gets lost in the shuffle." [Ray Pritchard, "Rock Bottom Truth," Keep Believing Ministries, retrieved 7/19, 2016]

There are a variety of ways the phrase "plans for your welfare and not for harm" can be translated. Here are a few:

- "Plans of peace and not of evil" (King James Version)
- "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you" (New International Version)

- “Plans to take care of you, not abandon you” (The Message)
- “Plans for good and not for disaster” (New Living Translation)
- “Plans for well-being and not for trouble” (New Living Version))

Finally, notice that God’s plan results in hope. The Hebrew people felt hopeless. They felt that God had abandoned them, but God had a plan that promised a future with hope. Sometimes we feel that God has abandoned us, but God has a plan that promises a future with hope for us and for Geneva.

One more thing to note is that in the Hebrew “you” is plural. This passage has meaning for us as individuals, but also for us as a church, as the body of Christ.

This is a time of change in the world, our country, and Geneva. Change is always a little worrisome. I was talking to my son, Johnny, about the violence, especially in the United States. I was saying to him that I was worried about the violence against people of color and the violence against the police. In one of those moments when you see a child is becoming a man, he said, “There are some things in our country that are very wrong – things that need to change. Perhaps the violence we are seeing will force changes for the better.” Change can bring good.

Geneva is going to be facing changes. When you get an interim pastor, he or she will encourage you to look at yourselves as a church. I like to use the image of a plow breaking up the ground so that new seeds can be planted. I’ve been around here long enough that the ground is pretty well packed down. The interim period is a time of self-discovery. New energy and excitement will be generated.

A few days ago, Irene, our office manager, suggested that I do a new video for the web page, but I said, “I’m leaving. Shouldn’t we wait for the interim?” Her point is that my leaving will create an opportunity for new people to have input on how the church proceeds. Now is a time for exploring, a time to see things anew, a time for Geneva to become a new creation in God. We are part of God’s plan.

This is also a time for kindness. We may never know the affect of our actions. I keep thinking about Montrell Jackson, one of the police officers killed in Baton Rouge. Just the week before his death he wrote on Facebook about his experiences and fears as a person of color and a police officer. He admitted that when he was wearing his police uniform, he felt vulnerable and when he didn’t have on his uniform, he felt vulnerable, too, as a black man. He wrote, “Please don’t let hate infect your heart...If you need a hug, I got ya.” His post was on July 8th; he was killed nine days later.

I believe that his words have made a difference. His words made it personal. We could relate to his fear and we grieved when he lost his life. We never know how one action we take might affect many people. As Christians, our actions affect how people see our God. We are a part of God’s plan.

I was talking to Reverend Leslianne Braunstein. She served as a parish associate here, so many of you know her. I was talking about this idea that we don't ever know where and how God will use us.

When Reverend Leslianne moved to Washington, before her call to be a pastor, she went to the National Presbyterian Church on Nebraska Avenue. One of the first ways she got involved was making "Bible snippet" magnets for the two-year-old Sunday school class. She would write simple things like "God is Love," "God cares for you," "The Lord is my shepherd," things a two-year-old could understand. Then she would laminate them with a magnet so they could be put on the refrigerator or some other metal surface.

Years later, Reverend Leslianne saw one in a hospital room in Children's Hospital. The parent was not a member of National Presbyterian Church and did not know anyone who went to National. Apparently, this snippet had been passed around as a comfort from child to child. It ended up in that hospital room with someone who only knew "God cares for you." That bible snippet was a part of God's plan.

God has a plan for Geneva and you are a part of that plan, too.

A few minutes ago, we baptized Teresa Rose. Every baby is God's promise of hope. What does Teresa's future hold? She is growing up with parents and grandparents who love her dearly and with a church family that promises to surround her with prayers and care. She has many blessings already – a nice home and plenty of stimulation. She will go to school and learn. She will play sports and belong to clubs and social groups. Maybe she will sing in the choir.

And we know that she will have challenges. We don't know what they will be, but challenges will come. In all lives there is suffering and loss. As we live we face hardships and disappointments. That's all part of life.

We also know that God has plans for Teresa Rose. She is God's beloved child. We are a part of God's plan for her. We agreed to be just a minute ago.

Nothing describes babies more than changing. Julia and Jake see changes daily. That is all part of the plan. You see, change can be very good.

With all the changes we can expect in Teresa Rose's life, the important part of God's plan for Geneva is to be here for her. May Geneva be the constant in her life.

Yes, some things will change around here, but the most important thing will not change: Geneva will continue to be a loving and supportive congregation, the body of Christ in this time and place.

God has a plan and Geneva is part of God's plan for a future of hope. Amen.