



Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

August 8, 2021

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord.

"They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."

Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)

*Call to Worship

A word of encouragement came from prophet to people;
Live a life that is full – build, plant, eat, love, multiply--
Pray for your communities
Keep God in the center of all that is.
We enter into worship today with hope in our hearts
For something happens here
that reminds us that we can live as God desires
God has made a promise of faithfulness to us
and we can trust the promise.

*Hymn of Praise

"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

UMH 139

*Opening Prayer

Ever-present God, we reflect today on the glory and wonder of your unending love for us. Your care is humbling and awe-inspiring, that amidst the vastness of creation, you act for us. We remember with gratitude your healing of our brokenness; the undeserved forgiveness you so generously provide. And we acknowledge our helplessness, turning our worries over to your loving protection. Help us to trust and affirm your support and compassion, that we may find peace in your promises to us. Amen.

Share How You Can Present Your Offering to God

Make your offering personal...through a donation or an act of service...bring to God an offering of praise and gratitude!

Sing the Doxology Together

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer for Finding True Hope

Lord, you are in this place. Fill us with your power. Cover us with your peace. Show us your presence. Lord, help us to know that we are in your hands, under your protection, and are covered by your love.

Lord, You and You alone, are the only Source of true hope. However, we confess that so much of what we place our hope in—ourselves and our possessions and our connections—cannot sustain us when our lives begin to unravel. Thank You that You love us so completely that You want to bless us with Your grace and power. We experience that best and most certainly in the midst of life's most challenging tests and trials and tribulations. Thank You that You do not abandon us in the midst of them, but are our ever-present Helper.

Lord, even when we make a mess of our lives through our willful stubbornness, resisting Your will and Your way, You come to us offering forgiveness and mercy. When we least deserve your grace, it flows from Your heart to ours. Your grace resuscitates and rescues us. So, Lord, we respond to Your invitation to return home. Like the prodigal son, we long to be home in Your embrace of love.

Lord, we continue to be astounded by how You can take all the strands of our lives and weave them into something of beauty and grace. If left to ourselves, we'd have given up on that long

ago. But You never give up on us. You weave together our rugged and broken experiences along with the strands of Your grace and love, and create what is pleasing in Your eyes and joyful in ours.

We long for others to experience this miracle of Your astonishing love and power. Use us to spark a thirst in their hearts for this grace. Help them see that Your grace can untangle what seem like hopeless messes and make something beautiful in its place.

Lord, hear our prayers as we uplift these before You...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

God's Word

Jeremiah 29:10-14

The Word of God for the people of God...Thanks be to God!

Message

“Woven in Love”

Pastor Clark

*Hymn of Faith

“My Faith Looks Up to Thee”

UMH 452

Blessing

“Trust in the Lord, and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart’s desires. Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you.” Psalm 37:3-6 (NLT)



Jeremiah 29:10-14 (NLT)

This is what the Lord says: “You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again.¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.¹² In those days when you pray, I will listen.¹³ If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.¹⁴ I will be found by you,” says the Lord. “I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and will bring you home again to your own land.”

Praying for One Another

- Heather Martin, recovering from successful surgery last Wednesday
- Elizabeth Jones, another surgery earlier in week, still in ICU at MCE
- Becky Callendar, friend of Paul Owens, recovering from lung cancer surgery
- Jan Smith from Faith Church continuing treatments
- Christina Cuddihy, as she begins her treatments
- Paula Prose, moving to a facility in Illinois to be near her daughter
- Sarah Cory and Guy Cory as they contend with all they are facing
- Brady Martin, 10-year old struggling with leukemia
- Gary Stammiller, doing well after pancreatic cancer surgery
- Eileen Moffo, mother of Carla Jay, as they found a mass on her liver
- Community Focus: Children and the supplies needed for school
- National Focus: Resurgence of COVID-19 via Delta Variant
- World Focus: Olympics in Japan

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

*1 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation!
Come, all who hear; now to his temple draw near,
join me in glad adoration.*

*2 Praise to the Lord, above all things so wondrously reigning;
sheltering you under his wings, and so gently sustaining!
Have you not seen all that is needful has been
sent by his gracious ordaining?*

*3 Praise to the Lord, who will prosper your work and defend you;
surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend you.
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
if with his love he befriends you.*

*4 Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him.
Let the Amen sound from his people again;
gladly forever adore him.*

My Faith Looks Up to Thee

*1. My faith looks up to thee,
thou Lamb of Calvary,
Savior divine!

Now hear me while I pray,
take all my guilt away,
O let me from this day
be wholly thine!*

*2. May thy rich grace impart
strength to my fainting heart,
my zeal inspire!

As thou hast died for me,
O may my love to thee
pure, warm, and changeless be,
a living fire!*

*3. While life's dark maze I tread,
and griefs around me spread,
be thou my guide;
bid darkness turn to day,
wipe sorrow's tears away,
nor let me ever stray
from thee aside.*

*4. When ends life's transient dream,
when death's cold, sullen stream
shall o'er me roll;
blest Savior, then in love,
fear and distrust remove;
O bear me safe above,
a ransomed soul!*

Woven in Love

Jeremiah 29:10-14 (NLT)

This is what the Lord says: “You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. ¹² In those days when you pray, I will listen. ¹³ If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. ¹⁴ I will be found by you,” says the Lord. “I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and will bring you home again to your own land.”

Introduction

Last week we uncovered the treasure trove of God's great and precious promises...we even looked at a few of them. This week, we want to hone in on one of those precious promises as we bring our multifaceted series on Goodness to a close. Let's look at this promise verse:

"'For I know the plans I have for you,' says the Lord. 'They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.'" Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)

This is an oft-quoted verse and I want to help us explore this promise deeply. Why? Not only is it an oft-quoted verse; it is an oft-misunderstood or mis-applied verse. That is largely due to the fact that the verse is, all too often, lifted out of its context and plopped down in the midst of our circumstances. As we will see, what God is saying here has a lot to do with our circumstances, just not in the way that is so many times misconstrued.

Sharpening Our Vision of the Grand Promise

A little background is essential to getting to the heart of this powerful verse...the Hebrew people are in **exile in Babylon** under Nebuchadrezzar. Chapter 29 is actually a letter from the prophet Jeremiah to those in exile delivered by Elasah and Gemariah. The letter invites them to carry on with life while in exile, but also stirs within them the hope of deliverance. Jeremiah confirms the judgment of their sin but also signals fresh reasons for hope. The people are enduring what must have seemed to be a dead end...a season without hope and without end. It likely seemed to them as if the Jewish people were finished. It was then that God gave this word to His fallen and broken people.

The Hebrew people got into trouble when they had insisted on their way instead of God's way. Idol worship and forbidden alliances with threatening enemies compromised their faith and their future. They had drifted far from true worship of God. Their faithless actions not only led to disobedience, but ultimately to this season of judgment. They were exiles for 70 years! What an upheaval! What a mess!

That same is true in our lives. We get into lots of messes in our lives when we insist on our way, thumbing our noses at God's way. We end up hurting ourselves and those around us. There isn't a

person here today that couldn't take a big-picture look at their lives and point to one stretch where you demanded to have it your way instead of God's way. And look what happened!

Though I have shared this story before in another context, it bears repeating as a more humorous take on this serious subject.

I loved to play football with my neighborhood friends. We often retreated to a large tree-lined field where we would play for hours. In those days kids had a different set of school and play clothes. My mom insisted that I never play tackle football in my school clothes. It was kind of like one of the ten commandments in our home! One day, though, I was in way too much a hurry to change out of my school clothes or I'd miss the opportunity to get on a team for the game.

Despite playing in my school clothes against my mom's wishes, one day we were enjoying an especially crisp fall afternoon. Allow me to describe the scene...

I intercepted a pass and raced toward the other end zone, only to slow down as I approached our makeshift goal line. I was caught from behind just as I crossed the line sliding across the mud at the end of the field. What I should have seen but didn't was that this end of the field was lined with black walnut trees. The ground was littered with **decaying black walnuts...**

In the joy of scoring a touchdown, I was oblivious to what just happened to my clothes. But on the way home I noticed that my clothes were deeply stained!

I snuck inside and down to our washroom to wash the stains out of my clothes. I tried a little dish soap, then a little laundry detergent, then the brown bar of soap I had heard my mom say would get out most stains.

To my horror, nothing would touch the black walnut stain that now graced my clothes! The harder I tried the worst it seemed to get. I was caught in quite a dilemma: throw the clothes away, put them in the hamper and let mom deal with it, or go and confess my sin which so glaringly stared at me.

Well, life tends to stain our souls as well...and these stains are far messier than trying to get walnut stains out of school clothes. These are the kinds of messes that leave people hurt deeply. These are the kind of messes that harden hearts toward God. These are the kinds of messes that detour lives in unfortunate directions. These are the kind of messes that end in crashes that bring tragedy and unending pain.

Yes, when we humans stubbornly insist on our way over God's way, we can create some royal messes!

And oh how we try to remove our stains...we try our best to remove our stains...

- Some, haunted by past mistakes, punish themselves with unrelenting harshness
- Some try to counter balance their failures with good deeds yet always wondering if they have done enough
- Some get angry and blame God for their own destructive choices

Try as we may, **self-stain removal just doesn't work! We need help from beyond ourselves.** Just ask David after he sinned with Bathsheba and tried to cover it all up...the mess got messier!

Only God can remove the stain of sin. Only God can forgive our sins and cleanse our hearts. Perhaps the Hebrew people were thinking what they had done was just too big a sin, too egregious, for even God to forgive? Perhaps they felt as if they had gone too far and done too much to ever be forgiven, to ever make it home again?

A pastor went to see a woman in death row in prison who was about to be executed. The woman asked her to be present at the execution. My friend asked the convict, "Francis, are you absolutely sure you are a believer? That you've come to know Jesus? Do you know your sins are forgiven? Do you know in one hour's time you're going to go through that front door, and you're going to be with God. You do know that, don't you?"

"Yes," she replied, "I know. But my sin is so big. I've killed. I've taken a life. That's just *too big*."

This pastor then told her about walking along the beach on a holiday and seeing a little crab come out of a tiny hole. She walked along, and a child was making a sandcastle and in the process had dug quite a hole in the sand which was bigger. Then she walked along, and there were some men excavating in the area. It was now a huge, great hole. After walking several miles, on her return trip, the tide came in, filling up all the holes.

That's what the blood of Christ does—it fills up the hole. I don't care if it's a big hole. I don't care if it's a tiny hole. Even the little hole hurts God as much as the big hole. Sin hurts God. Only God can deal with the stains on our souls. Only God can bring the deepest kind of hope that rescues us from ourselves!

Three Astounding "Pre-Promises"

This is what the Lord says: "You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. 29:10 (NLT)

In response to this mess, notice what God did do and what God did not do. God didn't short-circuit the life-altering lesson the Hebrew people had to learn through this trial. He left them to agonize through this season and wrestle with the implications of their disobedience.

But also notice what God didn't do. God didn't declare to the people, when you have managed to clean yourselves up, when you've finally managed to get your act together, then I will possibly consider forgiving you and reclaiming you as my people. Notice in these three "pre-promises" what God does:

- ❖ ***God will come!*** I will come back and get you! Restore your fortunes!
- ❖ ***God will do all the good things I have promised!*** God will bring promises back to life!

God is active. God is preparing plans for our well-being, for our hope-filled future! This is but a foreshadowing of all that God will do in final victory over evil.

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him." I Corinthians 2:9 (NLT)

❖ **God will bring you home again!** "...and I will bring you home again."

God will orchestrate the ending of the exile and arrange for the people to return home.

Imagine what that colossal homecoming must have represented to these people who had once thought that their future had been derailed and with it any hope for restoration.

Woven in Love

"'For I know the plans I have for you,' says the Lord. 'They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.' " Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)

Let's unpack it some to discover its treasures. You might wonder how in the world I came up with that description of this verse? Here's why:

There is a form of the Hebrew word translated as "**plan**" embedded in this single verse no less than three times! That word in Hebrew, "**makhashabah**," means so much more than our English word plan connotates.

Makhashabah speaks of the careful, skillful, intricate weaving of a fabric. It could well be translated: "**I know the meticulously woven purposes that I am skillfully, carefully, and intricately weaving together for your future.**" God is the Master Weaver.

And in this context, the Master Weaver has plans for the exiled Hebrew people. God is not finished with them yet! Even though it might seem impossible from their current vantage point where all seems doomed to destruction and despair, God has a plan for their good and for their welfare. God is coming to rescue the people despite their previous disobedience! God in His mercy is coming to deliver them.

And this **Master Weaver has plans for you**, plans that are not only good and beautiful, but intricately woven plans already at work for you. This plan even includes those times when you have made a mess of your life due to your own stubborn resistance to God's will and God's way. **God is not finished with you, either!**

And this God will take every thread of your life...every joy, every mistake, every failing, every victory, every defeat, every gain, every loss, every regret, every wound, and every question—yes, every thread—and will knit them all together carefully, skillfully, meticulously to become a tapestry of woven love." (seed idea from Jonathan Cahn).

Just when it seems like your life has crashed into the wall of tragedy, just when it seems there is no way out of the exile of circumstances, God opens up a new way through it all to rescue you! That's where genuine future hope resides! And that's the kind of hope that allows us to live with courage in

the face of all the brokenness we encounter in this broken world! That's the kind of hope that settles our souls in deepest peace no matter the circumstances.

"Human beings can live for forty days without food, four days without water, and four minutes without air. But we cannot live for four seconds without hope." Andy Crouch

I read recently in my daily devotional about hope: "*Trust in God is not a thin hope in some not very sure outcome. Hope in God is rather a present investment in a future guarantee. What God says will be done. What God has promised will come to pass. His Word is reliable because in His grace God wants to bless us and in His power God has the ability to do anything He has promised. When you live with His promises in view, you live with confidence, courage, and unshakable hope.*" (Paul David Tripp)

Here's a story—not of someone in the exile of sin—but who without doubt experienced God's amazing capacity to orchestrate and weave all the threads of life into something beautiful.

In a recent article for CT Pastors, Ken Shigematsu writes:

My mentor and close friend, **Leighton Ford**, was ambitious for God and he yearned to have a significant impact. After graduating from Wheaton College, he wed Billy Graham's sister, Jeanie, and became part of the "royal family" of the Christian world.

A rising star, Leighton began preaching in large football stadiums around the world. He was named Clergyman of the Year, and Time magazine identified him as the person most qualified to succeed his brother-in-law, Billy Graham.

Leighton's son, **Sandy**, had become an accomplished track and field runner. Like his father, he aspired to become a minister of the gospel. Unexpectedly, he was diagnosed with a rare heart disease that caused arrhythmia. After an operation to address his condition, Sandy seemed fine. But then, while running shortly after his 21st birthday, the arrhythmia struck again. A few days later, he died on the operating table.

A few days after Sandy's funeral, Leighton went to Sandy's room near the university to gather his son's belongings. As he looked over Sandy's desk, Leighton found an unfinished poem. It was titled "To Dad, for his 50th birthday:

What a golden honor it would be to don your mantle, to inherit twice times your spirit. For then you would be me and I would continue to be you." Leighton wept. He thought of the mantle that would never fall on his son's shoulders.

But in the midst of his searing loss and pain, Leighton sensed the Holy Spirit calling him to begin a new ministry, one that would mean stepping out of the limelight. He felt led to invest himself into a small group of younger men and women to help them "run their race" for God through **one-on-one spiritual mentoring.**

Leighton, now in his 80s, has been blessed with many sons and daughters. He is no longer an A-list Christian celebrity, but his influence is deep and wide. And he is now truly content with his life and calling. As Sandy's poem foretold, the mantle of Leighton's ministry has fallen—not on Sandy, but on his many spiritual sons and daughters.

The Master Weaver

*Our lives are but fine weavings,
that God and we prepare,
each life becomes a fabric planned,
and fashioned in his care . . .*

*We may not always see,
just how the weavings intertwine,
but we must trust the Master's hand,
and follow His design.*

*For He can view the pattern,
upon the upper side,
while we must look from underneath,
and trust in Him to guide.*

*Sometimes a strand of sorrow,
is added to His plan,
and though it's difficult for us,
we still must understand.*

*That it's He who flies the shuttle,
it's He who knows what's best,
so we must weave in patience,
and leave to Him the rest . . .*

*Not till the loom is silent,
and the shuttles cease to fly,
shall God unroll the canvas,
and explain the reason why.*

*The dark threads are as needed,
in the Weaver's skillful hand,
as the threads of gold and silver,
in the pattern He has planned.*

Conclusion

God is the Master Weaver.

God comes to rescue us from our messes. God takes all the strands of our lives and weaves it into something beautiful!

God will take every thread of your life...every joy, every mistake, every failing, every victory, every defeat, every gain, every loss, every regret, every wound, and every question—yes, every thread—and will knit them all together carefully, skillfully, meticulously to become a tapestry of woven love."

Makhashabah