

November 19th, 2017

Scripture:

Psalm 119:9-16

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-14

“He knows the plans.”

“For I know the plans I have you --- declares the Lord ----- “Plans to prosper you not to harm you --- plans to give you a hope and future.”

This is the message ---- the words of encouragement --- that God provides to the people through Jeremiah.

“For I know the plans I have you --- declares the Lord ----- “Plans to prosper you not to harm you --- plans to give you a hope and future.”

And it comes at a very difficult time.

Jerusalem has been destroyed --- and the Israelites have been banished to the outskirts.

And this is no small thing.

It’s very hard for us to understand just how devastating and disrupting the destruction of Jerusalem was for the Israelites.

Jerusalem falling wasn’t just a city falling ----- or a homeland being destroyed --- it wasn’t even just a way of life being destroyed or falling part.

Jerusalem falling was like their faith falling --- their trust eroding --- their hopes being shattered.

Watching Jerusalem fall for the Israelites in the time of Jeremiah was like watching God turn their backs on them --- that’s how devastating it was for them.

It was their world --- their faith --- almost their very God falling apart before their eyes.

Before Jeremiah the thought of Jerusalem ever falling was put to rest by Isaiah --- after Isaiah the mere thought of Jerusalem falling was akin to heresy.

In 701 BC ---- in the time of the prophet Isaiah ----- before Jeremiah --- the Assyrians attacked Judah and Jerusalem ---- and they demolish absolutely everything.

Absolutely everything except Jerusalem itself.

The prophet Isaiah speaks the word of God to King Hezekiah --- and instructs him to stand firm in the city of Jerusalem --- and the king does and Jerusalem is miraculously saved.

Coming out of this is the idea that Jerusalem cannot be conquered.

Coming out of this is the idea that God will simply not allow Jerusalem to be conquered.

So when people like Jeremiah and Ezekiel come along after this and preach differently ---- there is huge resistance to their message --- and their authority is questioned.

And so the thought goes something like this ---
---- “If God spoke through Isaiah and the message was --- Jerusalem cannot and will not be conquered it cannot be God speaking through Jeremiah if the message has anything to do with Jerusalem falling.”

As if the two are mutually exclusive ---- God speaking and the message being that Jerusalem can be conquered.

And yet the truth is --- Isaiah is right --- and the truth is Jeremiah is right.

When Isaiah says --- “Jerusalem cannot and will not fall.” --- it is God speaking.

And when Jeremiah says ---- “Jerusalem can and will fall.” ----- it is also God speaking.

When God said --- “Jerusalem will not fall through Isaiah.” ----- He meant it --- and He meant it will not fall now --- to the Assyrians in 701.

And when God said --- “Jerusalem will fall through Jeremiah.’ --- He meant it will fall now in 586 to the Babylonians.

Sometimes the message God gives is to a very specific generation --- and so it is not cross generational.

Other times the message of God is cross generational and applies to all times ---- and all peoples ---- and all circumstances --- and other times it simply applies to one time ---- one people ---- and one set of circumstances.

And sometimes it’s a bit of both.

And it takes great discernment and great trust in the Spirit of God to lead us to understand just what is being said.

As people of faith --- we have to seek the blessing of God --- the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the clarity of Christ to know what God is revealing to us.

Some of the rules that we heard about last week in Leviticus ----- “Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of materials.” ----- don’t really apply today.

Every single one of us right now likely has broken this rule.

We are all likely wearing at least one piece of clothing made of at least 2 different kinds of materials --- cotton and polyester --- or wool and polyester --- or lycra --- or silk or viscose or linen ---- and so on.

Some rules don’t necessarily apply any more --- in light of Christ.

But then --- just before ---- “Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of materials.”----- we have ----- “love your neighbour as yourself” --- which of course applies as much today as it did when it was first heard.

We have to think and we have to feel --- sense --- discern.

We have to turn to God for clarity.

Jerusalem did fall --- as outrageous as this may have seemed at that time Jeremiah was right --- and more important than him being right ---- God was speaking through him.

And God continues to speak through Jeremiah in the after math of the destruction of the temple and city.

The Israelites have been booted out of Jerusalem and their homeland ---- and they now find them selves a very long way from home thanks to the Babylonians.

And the message God gives to Jeremiah to share with the people goes something like this ---

“This is your new reality --- this is it for the rest of your lives ---- you won’t be returning home again before you die.

So settle in ---- make a life for your self here ---- build homes --- families and lives for yourself --- because yes this will end well --- but it will not end all that well in your lifetime.

You’re not going home.”

Listen again to verses 4 to 10 from Jeremiah today.

Beginning with the first few verses.

“This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.

Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.”

In other word settle in and build lives ---- increase in numbers.

And then verse 7-----

“Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

Seek peace and prosperity God says ----- because if it prospers you too will prosper.

In other words --- care for this place --- and care for its people ----- the other people --- the Babylonians --- pray for them --- don't just be selfish and long for home --- but set up shop and live and pray and work for the betterment of this place --- this foreign land and these foreign people.

And this applies to us as Christians in Canada now as much as it did to Israelites in Babylon then.

Like the Israelites we live in culture of mostly non-believers.

And just like them God wants us to pray and work for the betterment of our society.

He doesn't want us to pick up and head for somewhere better --- He wants us at ground zero ----praying for and leading by example.

And we aren't to complain or feel down trodden --- we are to pray and live working for betterment and prosperity ---- bearing witness and remaining faithful.

That's the meaning of ---- "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

We are to live and witness where God places us and not always long for a better or easier life.

And then verse 8 -----

"Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have.

They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the Lord."

In other words --- don't just listen to anyone or anything --- but listen to and for me --- God.

People speak lies ---- this is not new and this will never change.

Just because we hear something said doesn't mean it's worth our time.

Just because CNN or CBC or BBC said it doesn't mean it's worth thinking about.

Listen to me God says.

There will always be deception and senseless chatter --- they are not new ---- senseless chatter and worse deception is not a 20th century or 19th or 18th or 17th or 16 or 15th century invention they have been around as long as humans have been around.

Be discerning God says.

Some messages are cross cultural and cross centuries and others are culturally specific and apply only to a certain time and place.

“Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of materials.” --- isn't really all that binding for us --- but clearly it once was.

But it isn't anymore.

Back to Jeremiah --- verse 10.

“This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.”

70 years here means a lifetime --- means your lifetime.

It's settle in --- get married --- buy houses --- have children ---- plant gardens --- settle in for your lives because this is your new reality --- and it isn't going to change before you die.

Yes ----- it's also ---- “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

But that's not for now or tomorrow --- or the day after tomorrow.

The Israelites wandered for 40 years in the desert --- and now they are going to labour for 70 in exile.

“Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” --- begins now ---- but it will be 70 years before it comes to fruition.

So it often is with us.

If we ever feel discouraged by the culture and society we live in --- one where God and Christ and the Christian Church is often marginalized if not outright dismissed.

Consider the message from Jeremiah today.

The message of ---

“O.K. Jerusalem --- O.K. people of God.

You have been conquered --- you're in exile --- deported from your homes and homeland ----- you're going to spend the rest of your lives among the Babylonians --- people who do not know God --- but don't complain --- don't be discouraged --- don't lose heart ----- instead set up shop --- build your lives among these people.

And pray for them and work for the betterment of society --- work for prosperity because if it prospers so too will you prosper.

Verse ----

“... seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

These words apply to us today as much as it did to them back then.

As Christians we can often feel like we live in enemy occupied territory.

As Christians maybe we feel like we want out of this mess.

But God says --- settle in --- set up shop --- be my witness and be my presence here and now.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.”

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord...”

God has great and marvelous plans in store for us.

When we call on Him --- when we pray to Him --- He listens ----- and He hears us.

When we seek Him with our whole heart He finds us ----- He comes to us.

Our Psalm reading today drives this point home nicely ----- it begins -----

“How can a young person stay on the path of purity?

By living according to your word.

seek you with all my heart;

do not let me stray from your commands.

I have hidden your word in my heart

that I might not sin against you.”

Words to live by.

Words all about the orientation of the heart.

Just saying the right things doesn't cut it --- we also have to have our hearts and not just our lips oriented to God and His goodness --- beauty --- and truth.

“Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven...” Jesus says.

Orientation of the heart matters.

Back to Jeremiah ----- the last verse from our reading today.

“and I will bring you back from captivity.
I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,”
declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried
you into exile.”

God doesn't abandon us.

He will bring us back ---- He will come and get us --- He will return us to
exactly where it is that He wants us to be.

It just may not happen according to our timeline ---- it may not happen in
our lifetime ---- but it will happen.

Part of what this passage reminds us is that we have to get rid of the narrow
mindedness of measuring everything in terms of our timelines.

To use the old adage we have to be prepared to plant trees whose shade we
will never sit under.

We act and live and move and have our being out of faithfulness not out of
results or actualized outcomes.

The Psalmist rightly says ----

“How can a young person stay on the path of purity?

By living according to your word.

I seek you with all my heart;

do not let me stray from your commands.

I have hidden your word in my heart

that I might not sin against you.

Praise be to you, Lord;

teach me your decrees.

With my lips I recount

all the laws that come from your mouth.

I rejoice in following your statutes

as one rejoices in great riches.

I meditate on your precepts

and consider your ways.
I delight in your decrees;
I will not neglect your word.”

And to be clear it's not --- How can a young person stay on the path of
purity?
By having the plans shown to them.

It's not about us knowing what God has in store ---- it's not about us
understanding what God is doing ---- why and when.

Instead it's about us trusting in God --- and doing what He says --- in His
infinite wisdom ----- goodness --- beauty and truth --- and in His time.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper
you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.
Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to
you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I
will be found by you,” declares the Lord...”

Means He knows but not necessarily we know.

He knows but maybe we don't.

We trust in God.

He has the plans.

He knows the plans.

And we trust in Him.

Adam and Eve got into hot water when --- when they wanted to know more.

Adam and Eve weren't content knowing what they did ----- they wanted to
more.

Tell us more God --- give us more God --- more more more.

They weren't content with their lot in life ---they wanted more and more and more and more.

We gather to worship God not because we want more.

More good feelings and emotional lifts.

More ways to self express.

More emotional cookies to nibble on all week.

More little nuggets of wisdom to cling to.

We gather to worship to fall at the feet of our Saviour.

We gather to worship to fall at the foot of the cross.

We gather to worship to fall before the throne of grace.

We gather to worship to be still ---- and know that He is God.

We gather to step outside of that hostile corrupt foreign territory that is Babylon ----- that is the world --- and come into sanctuary.

Sanctuary ----- Holy place.

Like the Israelites we will spend our whole lives in foreign territory --- in exile --- this fallen world.

But we are also blessed with the love of God and the grace of God and the mercy of God --- and ultimately we are blessed with salvation.

God has a plan ----- God knows the plan --- the plan works --- the plan wins.

Even if we never see it this side of the grave it wins and it is beautiful.

And so we fall at the foot of the cross.

And so we submit before the throne of grace.

And so we are still in the presence of the Lord.

He knows --- and we trust.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

God is so good to us.

He knows --- and we trust.

And so we submit before the throne of grace.

Amen.