

Today is Christ the King Sunday. One of the themes that emerges from Christ the King is a reminder that Christ will return to us someday. As a student I always hoped he would return before finals week and not after it! Many of us don't think about the return much at all. While others spend way too much time thinking they have the secret code when Jesus will return. Rather than worrying about the if and the when, what matters most is the hope we have through Jesus Christ. When we look at our world we can certainly say things are much more complicated than even 20 years ago. The internet has become both a blessing and a curse. Our world is still a mess. We think that we are advancing as humans yet we have far too many places where war, famine and strife occur. So one way to deal with the matter is to have hope that someday Jesus will return and makes things good, and whole, and just and pure. This brings us to the text from Jeremiah. We continue our journey through the prophets.

Prophet Timeline

Jeremiah is a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah just before Judah is taken into captivity. Jeremiah is known as the prophet of doom. Trust me, if you are prone to depression, do not read this book! Jeremiah predicts doom and gloom for Judah mostly because they sin against God. Yet even as Judah ends up in captivity, God still loves God's people. So within these words of doom, emerge also words of hope.

Now in the 29th chapter most of the elders, priests and the main leadership has already been deported. Jeremiah gives them some words of advice. He says this in 29:7

"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"

So Jeremiah says, yes you are going into exile, but while you are there, do what is best for the city in which you live. We could simply say, wherever you are, let Christ be known to the world. We are lucky in Maricopa in that we have a new town and it is a place that people want to come to. There are situations across the United States where the Lutheran-Christian presence is struggling. The culture of the local church is no longer Northern European. We could also be rural with a declining population base. What happens too often is that churches circle the wagons. We strive on faithfully even if it doesn't make sense.

Picture of Country Church

On internship I did a four point parish which means 4 churches covered by a pastor and an intern. Two Lutheran country churches were a mile apart. You worshipped at one, one Sunday and the other the next Sunday. You could climb the steps in one and see the other church. It was funny, whatever church you worshipped in consisted of $\frac{3}{4}$ members from that church and $\frac{1}{4}$ from the other. The next Sunday it would be reversed. Why oh why didn't they just join together? They could do so much more ministry by working together for the benefit of the welfare of the community. The same goes for many urban churches. The church holds on and the culture around them changes. They are no longer like us. The church has tons of people around them, but we ignore them. We cling to what we know. So one lesson is to embrace people, love God and love people wherever we may be. We may be exiled to a foreign land or the land may change around us. Either way, love God, love people.

Now as the people head into exile, they need to know that God cares. So Jeremiah gives to us one of the most beloved verses in the Old Testament in Jeremiahs 29:11

Picture of Verse

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."

This is my wife's Jan's favorite verse and a friend made a banner for her. She had this in our house in Ohio and I caught the sun shining through one of our round windows that framed this verse. It was exactly as I planned it. Speaking of planners.

Whose Profession Came First?

A Doctor, a Engineer, and a Planner are going out golfing. They are trying to decide whose profession came first.

The Doctor says, "My profession came first because when God removed Adam's rib he performed surgery."

The Engineer then says, "No, no, no. When the earth was dark and void God created light. That was engineering."

The Planner says, "You're both wrong."

The doctor and engineer reply, "Oh yeah? What makes you think yours came first?"

The Planner replies, "Who do you think decided to grant the planning permission for the light?"

Many people have taken this verse to simply imply that God has a plan for all of our lives. What I would like you to consider is the difference between a General Plan and a Specific Plan. The danger is that too often we get hooked on God giving us a Specific plan. Thus we think God is sitting there going, today is the day, that Glenn is going to get a hole in one. The danger of course is that it also means the reverse is true. Today is the day Glenn is going to break a leg. What happens if God is more about General plans than Specific plans? God's plan for Israel is that someday they will return to the Promised Land. The General plan will include a time in the future when a Messiah will come. It is more about plans for a nation than plans for a specific individual purpose. Now I don't know if I have used this before, but if so, it is a good reminder. I like the image of a funnel.

Show Funnel Image

The General Plan for God is to direct the whole world back to God. This is done of course through Jesus Christ. The specifics of how that happens is left to us and the Holy Spirit. Some of us have it very good. We grew up Christian, we remain a Christian, and other than having a lousy sports team, our lives are pretty easy. If this is you, you are sailing right down the middle of the funnel. Most of us don't have it that easy. Some of us question God and want to climb out of the funnel. Some of us have all kinds of crisis', big and small, and we bounce all over the place. To many of are just existing, we stop moving towards God and truth be told, we are stuck. Now wherever we are in the funnel of life, God sill is with us. God still cares for us. God still wants to be near us. Someday, when Jesus returns, or when we go home to Jesus, we will live into the presence of the one who loves us dearly.

For God's General plan is for the whole world to come to God. So on Christ the King Sunday we remember these words often read at funerals. It is Joh 14:2-3

In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

Now that is a good plan to remember. Amen.