

August 29, 2021 “Some Important Reminders” Rev. Patricia Weatherwax

¹⁰⁾ For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon’s seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 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. ¹²⁾ Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³⁾ When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴⁾ I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.
Jeremiah 29: 10-14

Today, I have no grand new words, just the same scriptural reminders we review every week, and need every day of our lives as Christ followers. A bonus today though, you get six points instead of my usual three, but they need very little explanation; I’m just stating the obvious. Here they are from Jeremiah 29:10-14. You might want to have an open Bible for this reflection,

- verse 10a: The timing has to be God’s timing.
- verse 10b: God keeps God’s promises.
- verse 11a: God has plans for you.
- verse 11b : God’s intent is to give you a future with hope.
- verse 12: Your response is needed.
- verse 13-14: God will bring you to where you belong.

Starting with verse 10a

The timing has to be God’s. In Jeremiah’s context, God’s people were exiled and unhappy. Whatever is happening in your life, expect that there’s no quick fix. It may well take your lifetime, 70 years or more to figure things out. God’s clock and calendar are SO different from ours. Our clock and calendar are controlled by the sun and God controls the sun. We can’t ignore God’s timing in our lives. ...

Then, verse 10b

God keeps God’s promises. In the Hebrew promises are “good words” or “good things”. Believing God keeps God’s promises means we need to be patient and accepting of the life we are living, if it seems to be in God’s will. God’s intentions for us are good. Take a Bible with themes or a concordance and track just how many verses there are, reminding us of the promises of God. Or find another resource. I have a daily calendar with scripture promises and quotes from well-known authors that I’ve used off and on for many years. We have so many promises from God! God keeps those. Maybe not how we’d prefer, but God is faithful and good, and God is God. We are not.

verse 11a: God says

“Surely I know the plans I have for you”. Earlier in this chapter (29:5-7) God tells the people to bloom wherever they are planted. Wherever you are, blossom! Live life fully. Be blessed. Be a blessing.

I heard a sweet country song the other day. If you need a reminder of God’s plans being wiser, look for the Garth Brooks ballad “Unanswered Prayers”. A happily married man runs into his old high school sweetheart and realizes “Some of God’s greatest gifts are unanswered prayers”.

I love the way Frederick Buechner wrote it, too:

“God has a plan for us, to be sure, but he leaves us in the dark as to what that plan is, and if God’s plan happens to conflict with some plans of our own, guess whose way wins out?” (Beyond Words, pg 216)

We hear the promise in verse 11b

God's intent is to give you a future with hope, Future. Always look ahead. Paul wrote that to the Philippians (3:13): "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead". The future is in God's and our hands. And don't be afraid to alter, to change course, anytime. Always consider second chances and the ability to try something new. And remember; "Nothing is the end of the world until the end of the world". *Hope* for the future is key to faithful living. I often pray with the frailest: hope for good days yet to come. ...

There's another promise in verse 12,

"Call upon me and come and pray to me; I will hear you", a response to God is requested. Our action is required! God hears and knows us. God wants to hear from us. But sometimes the action we take is to surrender. One of my favorite contemporary Christian songs is Casting Crowns, "Just be Held"

Come to Me, find your rest

In the arms of the God who won't let go...

So when you're on your knees and answers seem so far away

You're not alone, stop holding on and just be held

Your world's not falling apart, it's falling into place

God's on the throne, stop holding on and just be held. (CCLI# 637582)

I'm not sure exactly how we do that. How do we discern when it's time to surrender? Whenever life is just too hard, that's when we pause for a rest, in God's grace and love.

My grandson Jude, uses picture cards to aid in his communication. His favorite is "take a break". We all need one of those, sometimes.

This sweet section of Jeremiah 29 concludes with verses 13-14 and more promises from God: "You will find me, I will find you, and bring you back". God will bring you to where you belong, where you need to be. And again, wherever you are, bloom where you're planted.

What if you get it wrong sometimes? What if you aren't happy with your circumstances? What if you never considered God's plan, or wandered away from it? Maybe you've done that more times than you can count? Or you were a bad influence on others? Paul told the people in Rome: "Don't think more highly of yourself" than you ought. (Romans 12:3).

God is love and grace. My spiritual director frequently has to remind me: "No one is going to die and go to hell because of something you did or didn't do." You're not that powerful. We aren't in charge. In God's time you will die and be brought to your heavenly home. Lots of us wonder when that will be. Shall I repeat verse 11a? God says "surely I know the plans I have for you". God says "surely I know the plans I have for you". ..

I get to repeat my Jeremiah 29 story, why I love this text...

My mind and spirit were unsettled. The work I was doing as a nurse was busy and fulfilling, but something was incomplete. I knew what it was; it was the call to a religious vocation I was hearing, had been hearing for many years. I was managing the outpatient surgery unit at Borgess in Kalamazoo; things were going well. But I was struggling to believe the challenge from God that I was hearing. Mindlessly, nonchalantly I flipped the daily calendar on my desk and read:

"For I know the plans I have I have for you", declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

So, by more of that planning and timing God led me into ordained ministry and into pastoral care. And here. Now there are new plans that God has for me and for all of you, as individuals and as a faith community.

Our responsibility is in the response, our response to what's unfolding, what God's doing. Even when God is laughing, and pushing in ways we don't expect or even particularly want, our response matters.

We've heard that old Yiddish proverb: "We plan, God laughs." That's funny, except when it's not. We know pain and disappointment is part of our human condition.

The amazement comes when something is better or easier than our expectations. Conversely when something is supposed to be “a piece of cake” it’s often way harder than we anticipated.

Here’s more of Casting Crowns’ lyric:

Hold it all together
Everybody needs you strong
But life hits you out of nowhere
And barely leaves you holding on
And when you're tired of fighting
Chained by your control
There's freedom in surrender
Lay it down and let it go
So when you're on your knees
and answers seem so far away
You're not alone, stop holding on and just be held
Your world's not falling apart, it's falling into place
God's on the throne, stop holding on
and just be held
Just be held, just be held
(CCLI# 637582)

In the time of transition and wondering that we all are facing, I am still convinced that “nothing can separate us from the love of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:8).

The old dutchmen of my childhood used to say it this way: “*veilig in de armen van Jezus*”: safe in the arms of Jesus. That’s where we are; held by the holy one who has a plan. Just be held.

Amen.