

Future and Hope

Sermon January 2, 2022

Scripture reading Jeremiah 29:1-14

Golden 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.”* Jeremiah 29:11

Dear beloved,

Two days ago we said good bye to 2021 and we were greeting the New Year. These days we are extending our very best wishes to those we love with the hope that all our good wishes might come true. Amongst many good wishes, we expressed our hope that those whom we love will have a very Happy New Year, filled with joy, prosperity and peace.

My greeting to all of you at the beginning of this year is this:

The gift of a new year is one of God’s many blessings. Count your blessings and thank God for each one! Life is not life without God by our side. He is the reason why we are alive. He is everything. With our Heavenly Father, may we be prepared to live another year under His guidance. Size, intensity and nature of a problem does not matter as long as you have your faith in God Almighty who will be with you and help you to overcome all your problems. Love the LORD. The LORD preserves those who are true to Him. Wherever you are, God will be there for you. God never said that the journey would be easy, but He did say that the arrival to His glory would be worthwhile. Do not be afraid to face life. This New Year has a lot of promises for us. Trust God and everything will be fine. So Happy New Year!

This morning, we heard the reading from Jeremiah. His time and his issues were very similar with ours. Today, Jeremiah would translate God’s message to us in a very similar way. Let’s take a brief look at the time when he lived and we will see how close this old message of Scripture is to our day and our lives.

In 587 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon occupied and destroyed the land of little Judah, looted and destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, and captured the people of God. People were terribly bitter. Everything they built was ruined. No one knew what the future would be like and what would happen to them in the future.

The situation at the time was very similar to ours today. Even today, a lot of people are bitter because our last two years have been terrible. The economy is destroyed. Many had to close their businesses for good, and many are close to bankruptcy.

And, even today, we hear only bad news about the future because of COVID's new variant of Omicron.

Also, we hear conflicting and contradicting news and don't know what to believe or whom to believe. Our brains are full of discouragement and we have lost hope that this problem will come soon to an end. There are those who say this is only going to be short, it will be over soon. Others, they think, will never end there.

Unfortunately, the general situation is characterized by discouragement, hopelessness, and despair.

2,500 years ago, God's people were in a similar situation. Then God sent to them the prophet Jeremiah with a message. Jeremiah did not share his own thoughts with the people but said what God was saying.

Today, through this message, God is encouraging us to look up. Look not at the bad situation with bitter hatred, not with despair, not at the tragic present, not at the uncertain future, but upward, look up at God. Look at the mighty, just, and merciful God. We can only expect help from Him. But we certainly can expect help from Him. God is ready to help. God lives and rules, speaks and acts. His love and grace is endless and immeasurable.

Jeremiah wrote a life-saving message in this letter. He encourages the people again and again not to listen to the complaint of their bitter hearts, and not to the complaint of each other, but listen to God, because God is with them.

From Jeremiah's letter, I would like to highlight four short but very powerful messages which can mean a lot to us when we start an unknown year.

1. History is in God's hands. Events do not follow one another by chance, they do not happen by chance. The virus is not shaping our future, but everything is controlled by God. Our destiny is in the Almighty Heavenly Father's hands, who governs history and is completely free to do His work with His full power.

2. Secondly: God, from time to time, shakes His people when they neglect Him. Our rebellions against God carry their judgment. 2,500 years ago God's people disconnected from God, and this was followed by a judgment. Our God will determine the duration and extent of His judgment. God loves His own people, so that, even in His judgment, God is gracious to us. Even with His judgments, our God works for the good of His people. I do believe that this pandemic is also God's tool to change our hearts and strengthen our faith. But God will determine the duration and extent of His judgment.

Translating Jeremiah's message to our situation, it would be: "This is what the Lord says: And if I have accomplished my plan with the pandemic, and you are renewed in your faith, I will take care of you and restore the situation."

This difficult time will end. We know that God will act. We have a good God. If we do not really trust Him, we should feel sorry for ourselves, because the virus will not destroy us, but our unbelief.

3. The third that is that God never uses judgment to destroy His people but to cleanse those who believe in Him. God remains faithful even when the people become unfaithful to Him.

What is God's plan with us in 2022? There are two beautiful expressions here that may the Holy Spirit of God carve into our hearts: "I plan peace ... I give you a future and hope."

Future and hope. God's covenant with us in Jesus Christ will continue. God's love for us will not change, even if our faith is weakened. God will give us strength and patience to endure the difficult times and will give us strength to look forward for a better future. I give you a future and hope, God says.

4. The fourth message for us is God's promise, as we can understand it today: IF you will call on me and come and pray to me, THEN I will listen to you. IF you will seek me, you will find me WHEN you seek me with all your heart.

My hope is that in 2022 the time will come when for me and for you God will become more important than anything. There is no one else we can trust. There is no one else who loves us unconditionally, and there is no one else who can help us in every situation.

God is waiting for those who have departed from Him. He is faithful to the man who has become unfaithful to Him.

God repeats this promise: "You will find me if you will search for me." God is waiting for His people to seek Him and find Him.

May God's Holy Spirit help us to start seeking God. May God open our eyes to see His presence.

God loves you. God promises you today: I will give you peace. I know my plan ... I have made you a future and hope. God wants to give us encouragement for this year as well.

As a closing I am asking us to challenge our faith and to answer three questions faithfully:

Do you believe that God is truly the lord of history?

Do you believe that He is gracious in His judgment and we can count on His grace?

Do you believe that God is giving us a future and hope for this year as well?

If you said YES to all these questions, please start or continue to seek Him with all your heart today. Let us learn to pray again, constantly, steadily and seriously every day, asking: "Lord, what do you want me to do?"

Let us not be afraid of the future and let us not complain. Complaining doesn't help. Let us look up to God. We seek Him with all our hearts, and He will allow us to find Him. AMEN