

Morning Devotions @  
Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly  
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God Has Plans for You!

Dear Friends in Christ, Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I bring greetings to you this morning from the St. John's Congregation in Waukon, where I have been the pastor for a just little while, my wife & I complete our 28<sup>th</sup> year at St. John's this month. Just as the ELCA and our synod celebrates it's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, our congregation is celebrating it's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary later this year, and I celebrate my 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ordination. So this is clearly a celebrative year.

As I have thought about anniversaries in the past few months, I believe that anniversaries are much more about the future, than they are about the past. Certainly we can reminisce and remember, and even talk about the 'good ole days'; but in realty an anniversary primes us for tomorrow, for the future.

So the text I have chosen for this morning is one of my favorite texts in the Bible, from Jeremiah 29:11-12: *"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future!"* In this particular lesson, the prophet Jeremiah has sent a letter to the Babylonian exiles. In this letter, Jeremiah was instructing and encouraging these exiles to remain faithful to God against the enemies and false prophets and false gods that surrounded them in Babylon. What strikes me as we read this part of Jeremiah, is that in the midst of these hard suffering times, Jeremiah reminds the people that God has plans for them!

*"I know the plans I have for you..."* – A plan according to Webster's Dictionary is a method or way of doing something that has been decided beforehand! In other words, plans are not spontaneous by definition, they have to be thought out and prepared. Planning takes thought, effort, organization and preparation – we all know that. And the text here does not just say a plan, but it says 'plans' – plural. God has 'plans' for you...God has thought long and hard about the multiple ways that God will use to stream blessings and gifts and opportunities to you, in order to provide you with many and various plans for your life, and all of those plans are filled with a hope for the future.

Have you ever dreamed about your life, and what God might do through you? God gave us the capacity to dream and to make plans for the future. It has been fun this year reminiscing with our seniors at graduation parties, as they prepare to go on to school this fall. When we think back to when you and I graduated from High School, those were exciting days, adventurous days. Our heads and hearts were filled with many dreams and hopes for the future.

Well, I believe that God has placed within each person, a vision, a dream for your life that is designed to give purpose and meaning. The question always remains, 'Am I following that plan and dream that God has created me to fulfill?' It is a question that our graduates will wrestle with as they prepare for the future.

It is also a question that many congregations wrestle with, as they face the future, a future perhaps of declining membership and attendance; it is a question that our synod and our church must wrestle with even as we celebrate 25 years of ministry, because our focus is not on the past, but our focus is on the plans that God has in mind for our future.

Last week, I was walking into Walmart, as I passed through the door I saw this little boy getting onto a toy machine, one of those trucks that the kids climb into and you feed quarters into it and it will 'roar to life, and rock and roll'. The kids love it as they feel like they are on their way somewhere in an imaginary land. Perhaps as a parent, but certainly as a grandparent you have fed those machines. The little guy of course, was thrilled.

Well I did my shopping, I needed just a few items and in about 20 minutes I was leaving the store. When I came out, I noticed that this little boy was still riding in the truck. Grandma was saying, probably for the umpteenth time, 'this is my last quarter!' As I smiled to myself and walked out the door, I realized that this is often a picture of life itself! For there are lots of people today who feel like that little boy and certainly like that grandma; they are riding along in life, spending all their time and their money and their energy...all in an effort to get somewhere, but when the day is over, when the ride is over, when the carousel of life stops... Guess what! They realize that they really haven't gone anywhere at all!

Our world is filled with people who are busy doing lots of things, but who are not feeling particularly effective or useful or satisfied. 50% of all US workers feel overwhelmed by the growing number of jobs and tasks that they have to do; and that they have to do those jobs in longer and longer working hours. Less than 50% of the workers in every age group, young and old, express satisfaction with their chosen vocations. These statistics tell us that a great number of people are just like that little boy in Walmart, riding along in an imaginary truck to an imaginary destination, and getting nowhere fast!

So what's the answer? The truth is that God has hidden within you a great treasure, a treasure that is the key to living a more fulfilling life that you ever imagined was possible. For God has hidden within you, God's plans and purpose for your life. "*I have plans for you*" says the Lord, "*plans filled with hope for the future!*" Hope of course is 'a confident trust in the Lord with the expectation of fulfillment.' God wants us to hope in the future and to trust that God will bring about a bright tomorrow!

So, as we celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ELCA and of our synod, as our congregation celebrates its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and even as I celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my Ordination, both you and I must ask ourselves today: "What are the plans that God has for our synod, for your congregation, for each one of us?" What will that future bring? We can be confident that God is at work in the life and ministry of the church. We can have a confident trust, a hope filled with the expectation of fulfillment, that God will lead us into tomorrow. Because I believe God has plans for both you and for me. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all our understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.