

Celebrate! (More)
A Conversation with Dennis Landon and Kristi Pless
Jer. 29: 10-14
November 17, 2020
Reve. Dr. Marcia Bailey, facilitating

Our focus this week is the **future**. Last week we celebrated what God has done with us and thru us and maybe in spite of us in the **past**. In some ways, that's the **easiest** thing to celebrate; we look back, we recognize, and we call it out. But celebrating what God has not yet done is a whole other thing.

Our scripture comes from a *passage in Jeremiah* where the Israelites are looking to the future. They have been without a homeland since before the days of slavery in Egypt and they are ready for God to lead them to this place. The prophet promises God's blessing for the future but maybe not exactly what they expected; let me read a little bit more for you from the text, Jer 29:10-14:

“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. “

So of course, the people **thought** they knew what this meant: God would lead them straight to the land they had been waiting for, a homeland of their very own, a place of safety, comfort and rest.

But here's the thing: God **doesn't actually promise** them that here at all. God promises to **be with them**, to be **responsive** to their cries for help. God promises to **look out** for their best welfare. God promises to **hear them**, to **care** for them and to bring them to a place of **safety and peace**. But **nowhere** does God promise them what they thought they needed and wanted most.

We are looking to the future, with expectation and hope! Some of us may be **hoping** that the future looks very much like the past; some of us are hoping that these pews will be filled, that we will be free from financial care, that the diversity of folks among us would be like it was 10, 15 years ago. We, like the Israelites, are **projecting the past** onto what lies ahead.

But hear the passage carefully: God promise to care for all their needs; to bless them abundantly. **But there is no promise here that the future will look like the past, only that it will look like God!**

So, as we hear these words of promise, for them and for ourselves, we need to ask ourselves, **what is God calling us to be and do?** It seems by all accounts that to be faithful requires **risk taking and imagination**. We have begun to wonder, to dare, to dream, to investigate what that risk-taking and imagination might bring. **Kristi and Dennis**, you each know something about risk-taking and imagination. I want to invite you to share your own sense of why you are hopeful for the future of this community of faith and why you dare to be committed to being a part of it in the days ahead.

Conclusion Notes:

--**We are no doubt motivated by a sense of urgency** –the urgency of our financial reality, the urgency of a building that has great needs, the urgency of a small community who wants to include others—these are the things that can serve to push us out of our comfort zones to imagine and do what God is calling us to do!

--**We are motivated by a call to faithfulness**, not to know but to follow. Not to lead but to listen, not to be comfortable but to stretch and grow and fail and try again in order to be fully alive, fully human and fully God's in the days ahead.

---**We celebrate God's future in this place**. God is not finished with us or this community. We can trust God to know what's best for both, even if we don't know, see, or think we "like" the plan.

--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.