

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of June 28, 2009

Jesus Christ Has a Vision for You (Jeremiah 29:11)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 29th chapter of Jeremiah:

“For I know the plans I have for you’, declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

This is the text.

Sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ, they say that hindsight vision is 20/20. When we look back at decisions we have made in the past, we can see more clearly now what we should or should not have done. When we see how things will turn out it helps us to make the right decisions right now...important decisions like what to study, what line of work to go into, where to invest our money, what schools to send our children to, what numbers to play in the lottery...I'm just kidding about that last one. There's no need to play the lottery. I don't advocate it. It promotes greed. And besides, we have the best and lasting riches in the Kingdom of God.

To things like these we might say, “If only I could see the future”. Well today I want to talk to you about that, the future. I want to talk about going forward. To do this we need to know where we came from and where we are going forward to.

What is your purpose? Where are you going? How are you going to get there? These are questions you need to ask; they are also questions we need to ask as a church as fellow members of the Body of Christ. What is the church? Why do we go to church? We need to examine ourselves and consider the ultimate goal for our lives. We also need a plan for the future to reach this goal.

The best place to start for these questions is with God. The first words of the Bible say, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” God has a plan. He has the best plan for your life. He says, “I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Friends, we have all come from God. He breathed into each of us the breath of life; He knit us together in our mothers' womb. God made us for a good purpose. He made you to have a bright future with Him.

God is forward looking. When the first people first sinned in the Garden He did not leave them alone to wonder “What do we do now?” He promised them a Messiah to come who would redeem them, who would conquer the serpent and who would restore the lost paradise. And He supplied their clothes, their food, and all their needs. He was with them every step of the way.

I'm sure that each of us has a vision for our life, short-term goals perhaps, some long-term goals. We have hopes and aspirations, hopes for our family, our work and our hobbies. For without a vision we cannot see with hope for the future.

In the business world, every successful company has a mission statement and a vision for where they want to go. Lee Iacocca, a former CEO for Chrysler Motor Company, for example, once said that good business leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to completion." This is from a man who almost single handedly saved Chrysler from bankruptcy in the 1980s. The reason was because he had a vision. Any successful organization needs a clear vision. Henry Ford had it, Bill Gates has it. Without a vision these companies would never have prospered.

This brings us to the church. I am not talking about the institution of the church but the church being the people of God gathered around the Word and the Sacraments. Unlike the entrepreneurs mentioned we're not in the business of making profits; we're in the business of winning souls. Christ's vision was to redeem the world, to preach the Gospel, to help the poor.

What is your vision? Our Lord gives us His vision, which is better than anything we could even begin to dream up. He says, "I have plans to give you hope and a future" and this is what it looks like: St. John writes in Revelation 21, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'" This is a vision of the Kingdom of Heaven, where there will be no more mourning, or crying or pain, where God's love and peace reign. This is His plan for you, for me, and for anyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

God's vision is to end all suffering. To do this He sent His only begotten Son to suffer for us, to die for our sins so we might live with Him. Oh how we wait and look for His coming!

God sees every person on the face of the earth, our family members, our neighbours, our coworkers...as people who need of Jesus Christ, who either have Him or don't have Him; who either have life or do not have life; who are either lost or found. He has a vision to save as many people as possible who would repent and believe the Gospel.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who has come on a mission to seek and to save the lost. Every week through the Word and the Sacraments God comes to His churches; He comes down to us to reach His people. He comes to give us a beautiful relationship with Him and to build us up and prepare us to share in His mission to make disciples of all nations. He has a vision for His creation. He does not want anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance. His love moved Jesus to give His life so everyone

might live. The way to heaven is open through Christ. But people need to hear this Good News. And that's where you and I come in.

Friends, I have a vision for this church. The times they are a' Changin' as the famous folk song goes. The time has come to stop chasing yesterday. It is time to look forward. The neighbourhood has changed. It has changed from largely Christian Eastern European to non-Christian South Asian. Most people we see in our neighbourhood do not know Jesus as Saviour. Every day people are dying without the eternal life Christ won for them on the cross.

Friends, hell is hot; time is short. God has sent us to speak this saving Gospel. Together as a church with God's help we can do this. We need to focus on the mission God has given us, not only to be feed ourselves but to reach the lost as well. We have a calling to take care of the poor, to share the life of Christ by showing the love of Christ. At our District Convention this past week our congregation, Ascension Lutheran Church was highlighted as a special church. We are a unique outreach church. We have a special opportunity in God's service. Our District has a vision for our church. God has a vision for our church. He has brought hungry souls into our building. Will we feed them? Will we welcome them? I hope so.

My vision for our parish is to be a community of believers where as members of the Body of Christ we may grow together in the Lord and rejoice in our salvation. I see our church potentially as a place that exudes the love of Jesus Christ, that exudes zeal for His Word. I see our community here potentially as a place where people may see the love of Christ displayed as we care for one another's physical needs and most importantly as we care for one another's spiritual needs. I see our church potentially as a place that cares for the poor and genuinely welcomes newcomers. Friends, our church has tremendous potential.

The Christian life can be infectious; joy and love are infectious. English as a Second Language mission classes are a way to show people this love we have in the Lord and ultimately to share the saving Gospel. There are other ways of course.

Friends, what a life we have with God. He says, "I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future". He has plans to bring you to eternal life with Him. He has plans to lead us to the Promised Land. He has plans to use you in this life to spread the Kingdom of God. What a life, what a purpose! As you know, as I announced last week I have a call to another church that I am considering. I want to stay here but I need to know that you share this vision, otherwise I have to go. Will you support me in this mission? Do you share this vision? I hope so. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.