

TITLE: "A Future with Hope"

TEXT: Jeremiah 29:11-14a (OT p. 731)

God's word you this morning...¹¹For 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. ¹²Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴I will let you find me, says the Lord...

Introduction – What does it mean to be a Christian?

A minister woke up one Sunday morning, looked at his clock and realized that he had forgotten to set the alarm. Now he was late. While shaving, he sliced his chin. LOT'S of blood. The tie he was going to wear had a huge grease spot on it, so he had to change not only his tie, but his suit as well. Then he went out to get in his car and one of the tires was flat. He changed it and then had to go back in to wash.

Now he was really late and in his hurry, he ran through a stop sign on the way to church. He immediately heard a siren and saw flashing lights in his rear view mirror. Now he was REALLY upset. He hopped out of his car, ran toward the patrol car and when he came face to face with the police officer, he said, "Go ahead! Give me a ticket! Everything ELSE has gone wrong today you might as well make my misery complete!"

The officer quietly said, "Sir, I used to have days like that, before I was a Christian."

...What DOES it mean to be a Christian? ...It means staying in touch with God.

1. Live long and prosper

Some of you may recall Spock from the Star Trek series. Star Trek is a science fiction show which has played on TV and in movies since 1966. Spock's mother was a human from earth and his father was a Vulcan from the planet Vulcan. Spock attempted to live his life totally by reason, which required him to squelch all of his emotions, and most of the time, he was successful. His Vulcan greeting, and farewell, involved a hand maneuver that I have never been able to duplicate (try...). It also involved this expression: "Live long and prosper."

I was thinking of “Live long and prosper” this week as I was writing this sermon. What does it mean to prosper, to BE prosperous? After talking with young couples who I am going to marry, I have compiled a list of what they consider being prosperous:

To have a job they enjoy, at least some of the time;

To have health insurance although they don’t think they will need it.

To make enough money to have a nice apartment, a cool car, comfortable furniture, a computer fast enough to play video games, a flat screen TV and a whole bunch of other essentials like I-Phones and I-Pads.

Then they want to get married, and after a while have children, and maybe someday buy a house.

...These are NOT the most important things to God. God knows these things ARE important, but the MOST important thing, to God, is the PLAN God has for your life. No matter what your age, God DOES have a plan for your life. And God promises that if you get in line with that plan, you WILL prosper and you WILL live long. In fact, you will live far longer than Spock ever imagined.

1. Plans for your welfare

OK, so if God DOES have plans for you, how do you know they are for our welfare and NOT for harm and God says in the Bible? Good question... When I was a teenager, I thought that if I did what GOD wanted me to do, I would wind up doing something I hated to do. For some reason, being a missionary in a poor country in Africa was a particular dread of mine.

After college graduation, I traveled for a while and then moved to Massachusetts and took a job in inside sales with Hope Company, which was the largest industrial distributor in New England. Over that year long period, I rarely attended church and didn’t spend much time praying either.

Six months later, I was promoted to outside sales and moved to Connecticut. Life was grand. I bought a new car and had a nice apartment. Salesmen had to wear three piece suits, so I was fitted for them at an expensive men’s shop in Hartford. I went to lavish company sales dinners and attended sales meetings in high end hotels. I wined and dined my customers and made a lot of sales. For the first time in my life I was making so much money, I could even save some.

I had always thought that having money WOULD make me happy. And it did, for a while. ...But then I began to realize that something was missing. I should have been thoroughly enjoying myself, but I wasn't. I sensed emptiness in the lives of my co-workers, in many of the people to whom I sold my product lines and an emptiness in me; an emptiness that entertainment and alcohol could not fill.

During that time in my life I didn't think that going to church was the answer. I was wrong. I started going to church. I began to pray each day. And while praying, I asked God for guidance and was quiet until I sensed what God wanted me to do.

And that is what God promises will happen to you. In our text, God says:

“...when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴I will let you find me, says the Lord...

When you pray to Jesus, and when we ask Jesus to guide your life, Jesus WILL show you the plans He has for you. And they ARE plans for your welfare and plans that CAN give you hope for your future. Why? ...Because God loves you MORE than you can ever love yourself, and God wants what is BEST for you and those you love.

When you follow the plan that God has for you, God will USE you to help other people and God will use you to help make the world a better place. That will bring you peace and satisfaction and that will start to fill any emptiness you may feel inside. As a matter of fact, there is no better way to find out who YOU are, than to lose yourself in helping people in need.

That is one of the reasons I am so proud of each of you who is part of the youth group which includes teens from Holy Cross, Dryden Methodist and our church. Today you begin collecting underwear and socks for needy kids in Dryden. You help with the Weekend Backpack program that provides nutritious snacks for primary schools over the weekend. Soon you will be collecting food for Thanksgiving Baskets so that many poor families here in Dryden will have a turkey dinner this Thanksgiving. Later you will be collecting money so the children of needy families can have gifts on Christmas. I am proud of you. ...God is proud of you.

Let me tell you a story. When you get with God's plan for your life, God will use you in ways that are REALLY amazing. This true story was written by April Grube. April was a senior in high school when this happened. (*Guideposts* 8/10 p. 39 “God's Guidance”):

I settled into my seat on the redeye from L.A. to D.C.—a trip east to tour some college campuses before I had to make the big decision. The seat next to mine was empty and I couldn't wait to get some sleep. Then I spotted a big guy maneuvering down the aisle, bumping passengers and apologizing profusely, and I knew—lucky me—I had a seatmate. Sure enough, he sat next to me and started talking. “Never did like flying, always too hot or too cold. And these seats are too small, don't ya think? But I can't complain. Lord knows, I'm a blessed man...”

So much for sleep. At least I was used to the annoyances of flying. Every summer for the last six years I'd flown to South America for mission trips. I'd heard babies crying nonstop, had my seat kicked and my tray table bumped, often when I was deep in thought or prayer, trying to make sense of my faith in the context of the suffering I'd seen in the world. Once I'd even lost my favorite book in the mad rush to get off the plane. So I smiled politely, listening to him chatter away. “Name's Billy,” he finally said. “What's yours?”

“April,” I said. “April Grube.”

Abruptly, the man stopped talking. The strangest look came over his face. “Excuse me, but I didn't quite catch that,” he said. I said my name again.

“Have you ever been to South America?” he asked. “When? What airline?”

South America? Was he on one of my mission trips? “You don't know me,” he said, “but if it weren't for you, I don't know what would've become of me.”

Three years earlier, Billy said, he was unemployed, living with his parents, desperately unhappy. He'd gone to South America, hoping new places would renew him. But everywhere he went, he saw suffering. *No God would allow such pain*, he thought. He headed home more miserable than ever. On the plane back, he searched his seat pocket for headphones. Instead, he found a book, *Searching for God Knows What*, by Donald Miller.

The pages were filled with handwritten notes. At first, Billy laughed at their sincerity and naiveté. But the doubts and questions and thoughts echoed his own. Here was someone else struggling with their faith. He read the book cover to cover. There, written on the last page, was the name of the owner: April Grube.

Conclusion – God has a future with hope for you

God had plans for April Grube and God has plans for you. They are plans for your welfare, plans that will give you a future with a hope. If you stay close to Jesus in prayer, listen for the Lord's guidance, God will show you the plans he has for your life and you will find that they are the BEST plans you could possibly imagine