

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Thursday, July 30, 2020

Plans

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. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart. —Jeremiah 29:11-13

And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. —Matthew 4:19-20

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. —John 14:1-3

What's the plan? Or has that become a sore topic? Much of life is about making plans. We have plans for work and how we can most effectively accomplish the tasks before us. We make plans for how we organize our homes; we make plans for our days off and for our retirement, and joyously we make summer plans and strategize our much-anticipated vacations. Making plans is an important part of our lives, and when we are feeling down, setting and executing plans can lift us up. Resolving to accomplish a few long-procrastinated tasks and then actually doing them can give us the boost we need in a low moment.

But what are we to do in a season where planning seems next to impossible? Much of the stress of these times is our great difficulty in making plans, as the future is so much in question. We are now in the summer when all kinds of recreational plans are usually made, and what shall we do? Will that park, hotel or amusement even be open next week? Is the restaurant we love still seating customers? Certain states are now demanding proof of health, either by self-quarantine or a COVID test, before tourists can pay a visit! This is not a plan-friendly time! What's a planner to do?

One can try to wait things out, pausing as long as possible before making a reservation or committing to a plan of action. As that time approaches it usually becomes clear whether an anticipated activity will be possible or not. But this strategy can be emotionally exhausting, and even as the last minute approaches the near future may still be unclear. Some have resorted to what I call a scorched earth approach. If there is *any* possibility that an event or activity may be cancelled, then any and all plans are

cancelled. Some organizations have zealously cancelled all kinds of activities well into the next year because of the COVID virus. Are they doing this to appear responsive, bold and dynamic in their leadership, or are they simply being cowardly in their strategizing? We are not in a pretty situation. What shall we do?

Another possible response is to make small plans which appear to be outside the realm of the COVID-cancellable. Plan a backyard barbecue, or plan on painting the garage. These might not be grand plans, but they keep us in a positive and active mode. We can also do some Kingdom planning by making arrangements, not to advance our own interests, but to do a kindness to someone God has brought into our lives. Or we can go to the default plan of getting depressed—or how about we *don't* go there!

For the depressed planners of the world there is an option which offers great hope. Let us spend some time contemplating God's plans for us. In this season of graduations, we love to remind our young people of Jeremiah's promise to the exiles in Babylon. Here was a group of folks badly in need of a lift! Jeremiah told them of God's plans for them, and that these were good and joyful plans. They had a future! Graduates have a lot of future in front of them, and this can often prove intimidating. We do well to lift our grads with Jeremiah's words, and we should borrow some of that encouragement for ourselves in the season of COVID when our sense of the future starts to feel like one big cancellation.

Jesus has all sorts of plans for us. To those who will follow He offers a life of bringing others into the Kingdom and Family of God! On an ominous evening, just before our Savior's betrayal and death He told us of great plans for us, of a place in the Father's estate and the guarantee that He will personally take us there. Those are some plans worthy of our meditation! Presently I am reading through the Book of Revelation, and while it is an unsettling read with all the reports of judgments and destruction, it is also a bold reminder that God has a plan for the rescue of His people! A New Jerusalem awaits us.

Let us remember God's plans for us, and may those plans give us a delight and hope which can help us to bear up under this plan-frustrating moment. A popular evangelistic tract begins with an explanation of God's intent for us: "God loves you, and has a wonderful plan for your life." God has a wonderful plan. Let that be our strength in these aimless days.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Grant, O God, that amidst all the discouragements, difficulties and dangers, distress and darkness of this mortal life, I may depend upon thy mercy, and on this build my hopes, as on a sure foundation. Let thine infinite mercy in Christ Jesus deliver me from despair, both now and at the hour of death.

—Thomas Wilson, 1663-1755