

An Order of Worship for the Home

November 8, 2020
What We've Lost – week 2



This service is written for two speakers. Ideally, family members can speak and declare God's grace to one another following this format. For those who live alone, this worship outline can be followed with a brother or sister in Christ over the phone. You may call on a friend to fill this role, or your elder or pastor can worship with you by phone.

There is an "offering prayer" included in this outline. As we shelter in place, please continue to worship through giving. You can mail offering envelopes and checks to Calvary or visit www.calvaryslz.org to give online.

Opening Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

¹ For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

² a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

³ a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

⁵ a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

⁶ a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

Invocation

Reader 1: There is a time to remember what we've lost.

Reader 2: The people, the time, and even our sense of direction.

Reader 1: It is appropriate to grieve, but we do not grieve as this world.

Reader 2: We grieve, and we hope.

Reader 1: We gather in our grief with hope supplied by our God,

Reader 2: Who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Together: Amen

Psalm 70:1-5

¹ Make haste, O God, to deliver me!

O Lord, make haste to help me!

² Let them be put to shame and confusion
who seek my life!

Let them be turned back and brought to dishonor
who delight in my hurt!

³ Let them turn back because of their shame
who say, "Aha, Aha!"

⁴ May all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you!

May those who love your salvation
say evermore, "God is great!"

⁵ But I am poor and needy;
hasten to me, O God!

You are my help and my deliverer;
O Lord, do not delay!

Confession & Absolution

Make sure each person present has opportunity to confess to a brother or sister in faith. Go through both parts as many times as needed to accommodate all who are gathered.

Christian Confessing: I place my hope in the wrong things far too often. I want government to provide help. I want schools to provide answers. I want medicine to provide safety. My hope gets side-tracked by all of these and more. I have placed hope in the wrong things, and I am sorry for that. Restore me, God, for the sake of Jesus. Restore my hope.

Christian Responding: Your God is the God of hope. Jesus is God who became man in order to bring hope to this world. By his death and resurrection hope has broken through. His promise to return is your ultimate hope. You are loved by God. You are forgiven by God. He is your hope and salvation!

Together: Amen.

Matthew 25:1-13

¹ Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' ⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' ¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹² But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-14

These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon...

⁴ "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶ Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷ But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. ⁸ For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they

dream, ⁹for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the Lord.

¹⁰“For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹²Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. ¹³You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.”

Message

Opportunity for Grace

My parents, my sister, my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, and almost all of my cousins live in Wisconsin. In fact, they're all living in and around Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Our family here in California are the outliers. We had plans to visit this past summer. We hadn't been to Wisconsin since Thanksgiving of 2018, so we were really looking forward to it. In the spring, after a pretty routine eye exam, it was recommended I see a retina specialist. It was just precautionary. It took a while to set up that visit, but on a Friday in June it finally happened. She sent me to see a retina surgeon *that day*, and I was scheduled for surgery for a detached retina the following Tuesday – the day our family should have been getting on a plane to Wisconsin. We lost those plans for a visit.

We still had a family visit in July to anticipate. We were headed to Texas to see Sherrah's family. We hadn't been in Texas since Christmas of 2018, so it had been a long stretch since spending time with her family too. I had my post-op appointment, and the surgery went well, but not well enough. I would need a gas bubble in my eye to hold the retina in place while it healed. A second surgery was scheduled. Flying was ruled out while my eye healed. Our Texas trip was ruled out too.

No Wisconsin trip. No Texas trip. No family visits of any kind. We lost our plans because of eye surgeries (never mind this thing called coronavirus).

I don't share this story because I want you to pity me. I told my story only because I don't know yours. You've lost some plans too. I told a story and didn't pin my losses on the virus, but in reality, we've all lost a lot due to restrictions, and sickness, and cancellations over the past seven months.

Last week we spent some time considering people we've lost. This week I want to talk about the plans we've lost.

You had plans. They got dropped. What were they?

Family gatherings?

Time with grandkids?

Time with grandparents?

Neighborhood parties?

4th of July celebrations?

Memorial Day observances?

Backyard BBQs?

Graduations?

Trick-or-treating?

A lobster feed or a crab boil?

Concerts?

Sports... that you would have played... or you would have watched someone else play?

The Bible has a lot to say about plans – even lost plans. Job's words are fitting as we consider the plans we've lost:

*My days are past; my plans are broken off,
the desires of my heart. (Job 17:11)*

That's why it hurts when our plans get derailed. The things we plan reflect the "desires of my heart." Job's sentiment can feel all-too-familiar. My plans got derailed. My heart's been broken. It's as if my days are at an end.

There are numerous examples in the Bible of plans gone awry. We find company, not just with Job, but with many of God's people. Perhaps the nation of Israel can help us think through these losses.

God formed the nation of Israel when he brought them out of slavery in Egypt. He guided them through the wilderness and gave them the land of Canaan. Jerusalem was established as the capital city, and the site of the temple. God established a king to govern fairly, and made himself present in the temple.

However, this didn't last long. In a few generations the kingdom was split in two. Kings did not pursue justice or faithfulness. The temple was abused. By his prophets, God warned that discipline would come through other nations. The northern kingdom fell first to the Assyrians. The southern kingdom – and the city of Jerusalem – fell to

Babylon. The people of Jerusalem were forced to leave their city and move to Babylon. We know this time as the exile.

This was not what anyone had planned. In this teaching series we're considering what we've lost. People from Jerusalem had plenty of loss to consider. Imagine all the things they were missing out on! The list I went through earlier fits rather well. They were missing time with family, because not everybody was taken captive. They were missing celebrations, gatherings, holidays, neighbors, and neighborhoods.

This is a good place to pause and point out a stark difference between our setting and theirs. In the exile, it was pointed out clearly that this loss was the result of God's judgement. He had warned that this would happen if his people turned away from him. In fact, he even predicted to Moses – 800 years earlier! – that that Israel would breach their covenant with him. Over time, many additional warnings were given through God's prophets. The exile was more than just the result of people living in a world corrupted by sin. The exile was judgement on people who turned their back on the God who loved them.

Our setting differs. The coronavirus was not foretold in prophecy. This period in history cannot be stamped with the label of God's judgement, because he has not revealed that to us. You and I are not allowed to put words in God's mouth. It's tempting, but it's wrong.

God's people do not focus on judgement.

Jesus gives us a better way to understand our setting. When his disciples asked about a man born blind, inquiring if this blindness was judgement for his sins or his parents' sins, they had a focus on judgement. However, Jesus' response showed no interest in assigning blame.

Jesus steers his disciples away from this focus on judgement, and instead points them to an opportunity for God's grace. He points to this difficult situation – a blind man who was likely begging for his food because there was no place for him in the society of that time – and Jesus says this is an opportunity for God's grace. Instead of a focus on judgement, Jesus shows his followers something else.¹

God's people find opportunity for grace.

¹ You can read this entire story in John 9:1-7 and following.

In fact, the prophet Jeremiah invites the exiles in Babylon to do this too. Even in their setting, which was definitely the result of God's judgement, Israel is invited to see the opportunity for grace.

Their plans were lost. To say this was a difficult time, would be a major understatement. Yet, this was an opportunity for God's grace.

*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.
(Jeremiah 29:11)*

As God directed, Jeremiah wrote those words in a letter to the exiles. Their plans had been lost. It's true that they had turned their backs on God, but that doesn't mean every one of their plans was evil. It's not even certain that every person taken from Jerusalem had turned away from the true God. It's certain that their evil plans were lost, but their good plans were lost too. Their helpful plans were lost. Their faithful plans were lost.

I hope you can relate. I hope you see the connection to the plans you've lost, because the hope given to those exiles is given to you as well. Your God has plans for you. He has plans for your good, and not for evil. He has a future in store for you. He has hope for you!

We see his plans in Jesus. If there is judgement for sin lurking in the corners of our difficulties, it's nothing compared with the final judgement on sin. You and I would never escape that, except for the fact that Jesus took that judgement on himself. His death on the cross and his separation from God the Father removed every sin and every judgement – yours and mine included. When he rose to new life, that was all left behind. In him, you receive this new life, free from judgement; free from sin; full of hope!

You no longer focus on judgement. You find opportunity for grace.

If we can relate to the exiles, alongside this hope we'll find direction in this message from Jeremiah. The hope which looks to the future is coupled with direction for living right now. Jeremiah wrote this in his letter to the exiles:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives

for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29:4-7)

In the midst of lost plans, God's people were invited to make new plans. In the aftermath of disrupted lives, they were told to put down roots. In a place where nobody else knew their God, they were instructed to pray for their neighbors.

People who focus on judgement, cannot do this. People fixated on assigning blame, would find many things to blame, and many people to critique.

God's people were called to find opportunity for grace. They could do this because they had hope. They could do this because their God had plans for them. You are a people with hope, too. Your God has plans for you. You see his plans in the resurrection of Jesus. You have hope because of his new life which is already at work in you. You're a people who find opportunity for grace.

When your neighbor is isolated, it's an opportunity to reach out.
When your friend is angry, it's an opportunity to ask how you can help.
When lies are abundant, it's an opportunity to reveal what's true.
When the world is falling apart, it's an opportunity to rebuild.
When your plans are lost, it's an opportunity to see what God has planned.

You are God's people. You find opportunity for grace.

Amen.

Offering Prayer

If you have an offering present as you worship, you may place your hands over it during the offering prayer.

Reader 1: With thankful hearts we receive from you, O Lord.
Reader 2: With thankful hearts we respond.
Reader 1: Receive our thanks and praise.
Reader 2: Receive our offerings.
Together: Receive us as your own.

Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Share prayer requests with one another. Pray over the requests shared, then pray the Lord's Prayer together.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Blessing

Reader 1: We grieve for what we've lost.
Reader 2: Our God was grieved when he lost us.
Reader 1: We take comfort because our grief is known to our God.
Reader 2: We find hope because our God has made his plans known to us.

Reader 1: Go as one who is known by God!
Reader 2: Go in the hope God provides!
Reader 1: Go, and know that your God goes with you,
Reader 2: The God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Together: Amen.

For This Week

Take time this week to do the following reading and reflecting. Share your responses with a friend or family member.

Read Jeremiah 29:1-14

- What grace was God supplying for his people?
- What opportunity to share grace did they have?

Next, consider your life as an individual and/or family.

- In what ways does God supply grace in your life?
- What opportunities to share grace do you have?

As applicable, please share this resource with others who would benefit. An electronic version is available at www.calvaryslz.org. We can also add friends to our mailing list if that is preferred.

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