

STARTING ALL OVER AGAIN
Congregational Meeting – Reformation Sunday –October 23, 2011
Jeremiah 29: 10-14
The Church of the Covenant

It is good to be home. You know, we here in Western PA do indeed live in “God’s country”. I know that I am quite biased where such things are concerned, having been born and raised here, but the people here do love the Lord a little bit more than other places I have served; we really are terribly staunch where our faith is concerned; the rest of the world may be going to hell in a handbasket but not so much here in Western PA. We are indeed the “Northern Bible Belt”. People here still do believe and we are pretty traditional in our faith and we do pray and we do read our Bibles and we do want to follow Christ. It is not that way in other areas of the country where I have served.

I always remember the one church I served and a woman made an appointment to come in to see me to complain about my sermons. She said, “Stu, all you talk about all the time is Jesus and the Bible and prayer and things like that...I want something RELEVANT for my life!” I have to say for one of the first times in my ministry I was caught absolutely speechless! In another church one of my more controversial proposals that got me into trouble was instituting the Apostles Creed in worship. People would say “Don’t tell me what to believe or what to say!” “Don’t tell me what the Bible says, I want to believe what I want to believe!” This is a metaphor for everything that is wrong in America today. The Apostle’s Creed isn’t debatable here in Western PA... As I say --It is good to be home.

Many years ago when I was serving a church here in Western PA in God’s Country, I was going through a very troubling time in my life and ministry. Another woman made an appointment to come in and to see me and she said that the Lord had placed a particular Bible verse on her heart and that she believed the Lord had urged her to come and to share this Bible verse with me. It is our scripture lesson for today from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah the prophet. And the words are these:

“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. For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope...You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29: 10-13)

And from that moment onward I have held onto those Bible verses as a promise from the Lord, spoken through the prophet, spoken through the scripture, spoken through that woman, and given to me as a gift from the Lord. In ministry, through many dangers, toils and snares we always come, but that scripture and the promise that God was not going to harm me but had a plan for me filled with a *“future and a hope”* sustained me through many a dark day in life and ministry. God had a plan for my life. And whatever else happened to be going on around me at any given moment that plan was to bless me and that plan was to give me a future and a hope. But it has been just in the last couple of years that I realized there is also another part of the scripture verse, one that I had never focused on before. And this portion of scripture was the part where God promises to *“visit you”* and promises to *“fulfill to you my promise”* and promises to *“bring you back to this place”*.

Does anyone else here today hear the Lord giving them a promise of a future and a hope?????

The context of this scripture is that the people of God have been carted away in bondage by the Babylonians and held in a time of 70 years there afar off in Babylon, often referred to as the Babylonian

Captivity. So this a promise from God to the people of God that He will visit them, and come to them, and fulfill all His promises to them, and bring them back to the Promised Land, bring them back home, bring them back to very place where they started from, bring them back, yes, physically to a particular place, but also bring them back spiritually to a place of close communion with their Lord and God. God had a plan. Even in the midst of the travails of bondage and captivity God had a plan. God's plan was to give them a future and a hope and bring them home. He would bring a time of visitation, of the visitation of the Lord's Spirit upon them, and bring them back to a place and time of "Promised Land".

Does anyone else here today hear the Lord giving them a promise of a future and a hope????

So the Lord brings me back to Western PA. And I serve Westminster Presbyterian Church here, the same name as a church I served in Northern Virginia. And the church buildings even look exactly the same, same brick, same architecture, same steeple. And I complete all that was left incomplete when I left Virginia. And then the Lord called me to First Presbyterian Church in downtown Pittsburgh and I was there for a while and felt like it was a déjà vu kind of experience and all of a sudden I realized that this church was almost the exact duplicate of the church I had served in Iowa, same building, same ultra traditional people. I walked into the church office one day and was stunned to discover on a giant poster the exact wording from this Bible verse from Jeremiah – "*I know the plans I have for you...to give you a future and a hope...*" And if you were to come into my office today you would see a large framed copy of that poster; it represents for me God's fulfilling of God's promises to me and of God walking with me through every hardship in life, and God's perfect ability to fulfill God's plan in our lives. Mere coincidence? No, never! God incidence. And I completed so much there in downtown Pittsburgh that had felt incomplete and truncated and shortened from my call to that church in Iowa.

Does anyone else here today hear the Lord giving them a promise of a future and a hope????

Then the Lord called me here; back to the place I began. Back to serve a church 4 blocks from where I was born. Back to serve my people, the very people the Lord had placed upon my heart from the very beginning. Back to Washington Presbytery where my home church is located; back to this Presbytery where I was under care and was ordained and came to faith many years before. Back to God's country. Back to Western PA. Back to complete ministry that was incomplete when I left the church in Hickory some 20 years ago. The two churches, Hickory and The Church of the Covenant, O their buildings may look different, but our people feel very much the same. God promised to me –when the time of your Babylonian Captivity is over, I will bring you back to Western PA, I will bring you back to God's country, I will bring you back to the place you belong, I will visit you, and I will return you to the place where you began, and there I will fulfill the plans I have for you, plans to bless you, and plans to give you and the church you serve a future and a hope. The Lord has brought me home. The Prodigal has returned. The Babylonian Captivity of being away has ceased. I have returned to my first love. I have sought the Lord with all my heart and I have found Him, right where He has always been, here in my beloved Western PA, here in God's country, here at The Church of the Covenant. It is so good to be home again, and in so many ways...

We celebrate Reformation Sunday today. It is always "coming home again". We celebrate Homecoming; people coming back to The Church of the Covenant; people returning for Homecoming at W&J. Reformation is always returning to that place where we began. It is always a returning to first principles and first loves and to things lost along the way. It is recapturing the place where we began with God long ago the hour we first believed. It is re-remembering all the faithful promises God has made to us over the years and choosing to believe that those promises never change but are fulfilled

even though their fulfillment may seem impossible. Reformation is a time of visitation from the Lord. It is a return to scripture and values forgotten. It is re-finding the Lord by seeking Him and when we seek Him with all our heart, He promises we will find Him with all of our heart as well. Reformation is completing all that may feel incomplete; it is fulfilling all that is in our heart to do, all that may feel cut short and truncated, all that can become complete and fulfilled through the promises of God.

And even if there are things that may feel incomplete in life; even though there are things we may have wanted to do that we do not get the opportunity to do in this lifetime. God also promises us, elsewhere in His Word, *“For I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that HE is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me”*. (2 Timothy 1: 12) *“Everything will be brought to completion in the Day of Jesus Christ”*. God has a plan for us. God’s plan is to bless us. God plan is to give us a future and a hope. God’s plan is to bring us back home, spiritually and in every other way, and to allow us to complete as much as we can in life and in ministry. But God’s plan is that whatever feels truncated and shortened and incomplete, that God will bring it to completion in the Day of Jesus Christ, at the end of all things, all things that feel incomplete will be completed by the grace and the mercy and the power and the promise of God.

Does anyone else here today hear the Lord giving them a promise of a future and a hope????

You can come home again. It is a place of completeness and wholeness. It is a spiritual state of being promised by God. It is Reformation. It is Homecoming. I am so glad the Lord has brought me home to a place of STARTING ALL OVER AGAIN...

Seek Him with all your heart and you will find Him. Come home, come home to HIM today. Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*