

The Church of the Covenant

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**WHAT IF IT DOESN'T?**

Jeremiah 29: 10-14

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*"I know the plans I have for you...to give you hope and a future." v. 29: 11*

"For this is what the Lord says - 'When Babylon's seventy years are completed, I will take note of you and will fulfill my good promises to you by bringing you back to this place. For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for well-being, and not for calamity, in order to give you a future and a hope. When you call out to me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. I will be found by you,' declares the Lord, 'and I will restore your security and gather you from all the nations and all the places to which I have driven you,' declares the Lord. 'I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.'

Before I begin, I'd like to express my utmost gratitude to Pastor Stu for extending to me this opportunity to preach this morning. It's a tremendous honor and has honestly been a really enjoyable process. I hope I don't butcher it too badly.

Funny story, I've been looking forward to this Sunday all week for reasons aside from standing up here - there's no mail on Sunday. At some point I made the mistake of signing one of those college search forms and for the past three years schools have been sending typecast letters by the dozen every day. Of course, that's not enough - my mom and I have been uncomfortably travelling the Northeast in her minivan to see some institutions in the hopes that, sometime soon, I'd get a degree at one of them.

At the risk of embarrassing her and myself, she has a very distinct pattern visiting all of these schools. When we first arrive, she's very optimistic and assures me "You'd get in to this place just fine! They'd basically pay you to go here. What's there to worry about?" Then we hit the admissions office. At this point I've heard a few variations, but all of them pretty much boil down to "Sam oh my gosh maybe you should just consider something else you'll never get in there."

Thankfully that tends to dissipate later on in the visit, but it's something that's always stuck in my head - what if I applied to a thousand places and all of them said no? My first reaction, aside from "Gee, my mom would kill me," was "Well, that'd be it, my life would pretty much be over." But would it?

I'll back up - all of us live fairly busy, very important lives in our own perspective, and we fill these lives with things that are meaningful to us. But I think we can all recognize that, from time to time, our very important things consume our very important lives to a fault, and the line is "blurred" between the lives we lead and what occupies that time. We can become so terribly focused on just one thing, so much so that it's hard to imagine our lives without it. For some of us, it's our evening trip to the gym, or going to work, or listening to music. None of these are bad things, but if we're not careful we become dependent on them. We start treating our time with these things, which are just that - very mortal, ephemeral activities or belongings that bring us temporary joy - as our "true purpose" in life.

So what happens if, one day, we just couldn't? What if, one day, that gym that we spent every evening of every day of every week closed? What if, one day, the job that we poured sweat and tears into suddenly fell through? What if, one day, all the music that we spent hours and days on end listening to stopped sounding beautiful?

It would feel very empty, wouldn't it? Like everything we'd worked for meant nothing at all. Some of us would say it's like a door in our face. Like God and Jesus and the whole universe decided in an instant that, "well, that Sam character just can't be happy anymore, we're going to ruin his life forever, end-of-sentence, amen."

Except that's very wrong, and very arrogant, and no man knew this better than the late Charles Krauthammer, a man who I think everyone could aspire to. Mr. Krauthammer led a pretty spectacular life - he had a PhD in psychology, he had served as a director in psychology to the Carter administration, he wrote speeches for vice presidents and heads of state alike, and his political commentary was rivalled by none. He did all of this completely paralyzed from the neck down - as a young man, he hit his head on the bottom of a swimming pool and shattered his spine. At that point, he seemed confident and sure that his future lay in general medicine and surgery and as a promising tennis player.

When Charles dove in that pool, and when his head hit the tile and when his neck broke into a dozen tiny pieces, a door in life that he so confidently assumed was his was shut. He could have done what some people do and "pound on that door," living in anger and denial and frustration that their "perfect life" was ruined by a spiteful act of the divine.

But that's wrong. God doesn't close doors, he opens new ones. The door that we see slamming in our faces was nothing but an illusion - that wasn't the way God intended us to go in life. Charles could have lived out the rest of his days depressed and alone in a hospital bed, pounding on that door that shut before him, but he didn't. When God says "I know the plans that I have for you," we cannot even begin to anticipate the way in which his holy vision could manifest. Our arrogance and confidence and disillusionment pale in comparison to the divine might of God - who are we to assume that our vision for our life that God himself made is the right one? Who are we to assume that our vision is the best one, one made not in evil but in peace?

I've spoken in detail about Mr. Krauthammer, but there's a young man much closer to me with a story so tragically similar to his. I've known him almost my whole life as one of the best friends I could ever have or ever hope to have. I've known him as a runner that could leave me in the dust without breaking a sweat and as a student that makes his teachers scratch their heads. But, two years ago, I met a new person in the same body. I met him then as a quadriplegic. I met him as the boy in the halo, who was embarrassed when the screws bled in his forehead. I met him as the friend I could barely see because his schedule was so packed full of physical therapy and remediation. I met him as the friend that had to explain to the college coaches that tried to recruit him as a high school freshman that, no, he couldn't run at their school anymore because he couldn't run anymore.

He could have given up, and by God he had every excuse to. The door to the life he thought he wanted shut and caught his fingers in the door and I can say without a doubt that, if he were a less faithful or ambitious or motivated person, he might have been stuck pounding on a door that would never open. But he didn't. In the face of frustration and confusion and depression, God says "I know the plans I have for you, plans in order to give you a future and a hope." To find hope, trust in me. Be faithful in me.

All it takes is faith. Faith that, despite our own reservations about the life ahead of us, a creator as benevolent and kind as God should know the best for us. Faith that, even through hardship and pain and disaster, God has not abandoned us and rather stands to bide with us. Faith that, when we ask "what if it doesn't," God will answer "It will. Have faith." Amen.