

Sunday, October 13, 2019
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FPC, Corning
Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7
Psalm 66

Thanking and Seeking

A year. It's been a year. 12 months. 52 weeks. 366 days – as it's a leap year. An entire year that I've made my home here in Corning and been growing into relationship with all of you as your pastor. As I said in my newsletter, I've gone between asking, “how has it already been a year?” and “has it really only been a year?” Yet the turn of the calendar pages and the change of the seasons are evidence enough to show it has really, and only, been a year.

As I looked at what to preach this Sunday, as we celebrate this anniversary together, I came to this psalm, one of the psalms of praise. The author opens by calling all the earth to shout joyfully to God and sing praises to God's name. They remind the reader to see how amazing and marvelous God's works are and have been—that we are to look and see God's deeds as God's works for human beings are awesome.

The Lord's works for us are awesome and amazing and as I look back over the year—I see some of those awesome and amazing things. I see the way God worked in and through the PNC, as they did the work of discernment for your next pastor. I see the way God worked in and through my life as I was seeking my next call and how God brought me to all of you.

As I settled in and began to get to know you and this community—I learned of God's amazing works in your different ministries. The wonderful growth and support for Fostering Hope. The way you all came together, continuing your day to day ministries, even as you were required to move out of this building. And we remember that God is found at work not only in the larger things, but in the smaller moments, the things that we don't always notice or think

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about. For instance, when people ask me how things are going here, one of the things I almost always mention to them about all of us, is how our worship service truly is intergenerational. All ages are welcome and those from the youngest to oldest know they are safe and loved in this worship space. And I see that in how the little ones are welcomed into different pews, by different people. I see it in how we share in each other's joys and sorrows. I see it each time we gather around the table, becoming one body, the community of faith.

The Lord's works are awesome and amazing! And the psalm tells us to declare that to the world—all that God has done and is continuing to do. For when we look at God's handiwork, as we give thanks, we know that a year is a small piece of the larger picture. We celebrate 150 years of ministry this year! And we hope and believe that there will be 150 years to come.

Which brings us to the passage from Jeremiah. The 29th chapter of Jeremiah is well-known for its eleventh verse, "I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope." The verses we're focusing on today come shortly before that, and are not necessarily as familiar, but they are as important as that eleventh verse.

Jeremiah is sending a letter to the Jewish people who are living in exile in Babylon. So, it's vital to remember that the people reading this letter are living in a foreign country, barred from returned to their homeland. Not only are they barred from returning but they were forcibly taken in the first place—their temple, God's place here on earth, destroyed. This was not a move done willingly and now here arrives this message from Jeremiah, a piece of home in this foreign land.

And I'm guessing, the words he now offers to them from the Lord, have to come as a bit of a surprise. For he tells them the Lord says to settle down in Babylon. Treat this foreign land

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they've been force into as home. In fact, do even more than that, get married, find spouses for your children so they may be married and have children. Then, in the final verse read today, "Promote the welfare of the city—for your future depends on its welfare." Probably not what the people in exile were expecting to hear, which is basically, make this new place your home and help the people and area to grow and succeed.

But here's what's found in those few verses, and why I chose them for today, this day of marking one year of time—God wants God's people to settle in where they are—to become part of that community, to connect and seek to make it their home. And if God asks that from the people that have been sent into exile—that they seek to make this foreign land their home—how much more must God ask that from us, we who have made choices about where to live, or felt called to a particular place. God calls us to settle there, to make it our home, and to seek its welfare, that it might continue and grow and be a prosperous location—which means connecting to and becoming part of the community of people that make that same place their home.

For at the end of the day, it doesn't seem to be about the land, or the businesses, or the location, but about the people. Jeremiah tells the Israelites in exile, get to know the people of where you are now living, settle in, to the extent that you are seeking good for them, and making them a part of your family. For your welfare, your future, is dependent on the welfare and future of the place you are to now call home; dependent on the welfare and future of the people who are now your neighbors and will be your family.

As we remember and thank God for all that God has done, we're also called to remember that our lives are dependent on those around us. Whether we are in exile, or in a place we love, our welfare, our future, our well-being, is not solely determined by us alone, but by the welfare, future, and well-being of all the people we are in community with, all the people we make our

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home with. And so, as we thank God for the past year, for the past 150 years, we are also called to remember that we are to be seeking the health and happiness of all the people who surround us, of our community. We are seeking to be the shelter within which all others, and ourselves, may prosper and live into a future full of hope and joy.

Oh, friends, what a year it has been! I thank God for how God has worked in my life, in your lives, and in the life of this congregation and community. And as we enter this second year together, I hope you will join me in continuing to seek the welfare (or put another way—the health, happiness, and fortunes) of the community of which we are a part. For, as the song we will sing in a moment says, in the shelter of each other, we will live. Thanks be to God!

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