



***World Day of Prayer***

***March 4, 2022***

***celebrated at Hannover International Worship on March 20, 2022***

*Sermon on Jeremiah 29:11 by Pastor Viola Chrzanowski*

*The complete order of service as provided by the World Day of Prayer committee can be viewed [here](#).*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

"I Know the Plans I Have for You".

What a sentence! When I first read this sentence from Jeremiah in the context of the World Prayer Day, I was totally under the impression of two years of Covid, and I am sure so were the women of the World Prayer Day committee when they chose this motto.

"I Know the Plans I Have for You".

Many of us have hardly been able to make plans during these past two years. Trips were canceled, weddings were postponed, and in our congregation, oh my goodness, what a mess our planning of congregational events has been during the past two years, with constant canceling and rescheduling and rules and regulations changing all the time. People are becoming tired of all this, and understandably so. We want our normal lives back!

I cannot even begin to imagine how much the people of Ukraine must have this wish. We want our normal lives back! Stop this war, stop destroying our cities, we don't want to be forced to flee, we just want to live peacefully in our towns.

I want my normal life back! Or rather: I want a normal life to begin with! This is what the three women long for whose stories we just heard. A life without poverty. A life without abuse. A life without being excluded from communication.

We want our normal lives back! That is the greatest wish of the exiled people in our scripture reading. They are yearning for "freedom day". And there are those prophets who promise them "Soon! You won't have to wait much longer!" Those prophets are popular. Those who tell them, as Luther would have it, what their ears are itching for.

Enter Jeremiah. His message is of a very different kind: These so-called

prophets are not prophets at all, they're fraud. God never sent them. Their message is no message God ever gave them. What they say is simply fake news!

Now look at that. And we thought fake news was a modern thing. No! It's as old as mankind!

And the people back then had just the same problem people have nowadays: How do we tell true news and fake news apart? How do we KNOW who to believe?

There is not, and never has been, an easy answer to that question. Or, to put it another way, if someone tells you an easy answer to that question, THAT's probably fake news. False prophets love easy answers. Easy answers make them popular with the people. People tend to choose the comfortable path. Easy answers do not require us to use our brains. They will explain the world in a black and white and divide it up into good and bad. But that's the easy truth of fairy tales only.

The real truth will be not black and white but some sort of grey. It may require us to THINK. To use our brains and understand a more complex reasoning. Or worse yet, it may require us to ACT upon it.

Jeremiah's message is not a comfortable one: This is God's word, he says: Prepare to live with this situation for much longer. Make the best of it, take good care of each other. You will have to stay in exile for seventy years.

Wow. What a message. That's not a message people like to hear. Not a message that will get Jeremiah a lot of friends.

Certainly not a message we would want to hear applied to the Covid situation! Seventy more years, oh, please. And certainly not a message we would even think of giving to the three women who told us their stories. "Lina, get ready to live in poverty for the rest of your life." "Natalie, stay with that abusive husband." "Emily, your deafness is just your tough luck." NO!

Or are we going to tell the people of Ukraine: "Stay put. Stay where you are and tough it out." Well – absolutely not!

Fake news, again! There are those people who will take words from the bible and make an easy literal transfer to a totally different context. NO! Our brains are a gift from God, and God wants us to use our brains when reading the bible, not just take things and apply them in a literal manner to a totally different context.

And God wants us to act. That is not always easy, and it may not be comfortable. To help women like Lina get out of poverty. To be sensitive to women like Natalie and give them courage to leave their abusive partner. To reach out to women like Emily and help them out of their isolation.

I have been extremely happy to see many people take action these days, donating and actively helping refugees who are arriving from Ukraine. It will take not only short-term action but a lot of perseverance to keep this up.

And it will take just as much perserverance to keep on taking good care of each other and protecting each other as we continue to navigate through this Covid situation.

In all this, Jeremiah has a message from God for his people that is worth so much more than cheap promises:

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.

*Jeremiah 29:11*

God has a plan for our future that is not going to be canceled. A future with hope. And this plan is not fake news.

Amen.