Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

 We have had a few sermons on Jeremiah in the past and as always he is an interesting prophet of God to speak about. In the beginning Jeremiah’s ministry was under good King Josiah and what a wonder and joy that ministry was. With good King Josiah on the throne, reforms were made and the people were wonderfully encouraged to get back to the true God with his awesome promises and love.

 And then King Josiah died!

 Immediately things began to fall apart because in truth the people didn’t really care about the Lord and his promises. A succession of kings quickly sat on the throne and then lost the throne all because of the ungodly way these kings behaved. God had promised his people that should they follow Him and uphold his ways and laws, then He would bless them beyond their imaginations. But God had also promised that should His people turn their back on him and worship and follow other gods (who really are not gods at all) then He would turn his eye on them in judgment.

 It was judgment that the people pursued. Oh, they had help. The majority of the priesthood of the Jews, men who were supposed to be faithful and true to God’s Word did just the opposite. These men, these false religious leaders kept telling the people that everything would be okay. They promised the people that God had told them of blessings and wonders yet to come because after all, they were Jews, descendants of Abraham that God could do nothing but love. They encouraged the worship of false gods on the high places and in the false temples they built and promoted. Of course, they kept telling the people that God told them this style of religion was good and wonderful. All this worship, in places not the temple of God, was good and was just an extension of their spiritual selves. It was horrid, blatant and damnable lies.

 Can you imagine how Jeremiah’s ministry was going in this atmosphere? Remember Jeremiah was a true prophet of the Lord. Jeremiah’s message of repentance from sin was truthful and seemingly harsh to a group who believed they were the apple of God’s eye. Jeremiah’s pronouncement that judgement was coming, that God was going to fulfill his words of doom and gloom against these people, just like the prophet Isaiah had said would be, brought him nothing but persecution, hardship and eventually death. From a ministry that seemed the answer to the problems of the kingdom of God to a ministry of trial, tears and terrors Jeremiah had seen it all, endured it all, and felt it all.

 By the way, that is one of the wonders of Jeremiah. Listen to his lament in Jeremiah 7:3-8: **This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. 4 Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" 5 If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, 6 if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, 7 then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. 8 But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.** What power and emotion in those words.

 Now why do I tell you all of this? Because you need to understand the context and truth of the words of our text. The words of our text are from the latter part of Jeremiah. All that Jeremiah had said would come true has come true. The Babylonians have invaded and conquered the land of Judah. The people of Judah are being carried into exile or being put to death. The nation is in shambles. The people are in misery. It is then that Jeremiah, under the guidance of the Lord God writes these words found in Jeremiah 29. They are words of hope and promise. They are words that actually show the compassion and grace of God even in the midst of unbelief and sin. Let’s look closer at these words under this theme: **God’s Promise to Believers. 1st. God knows what goes on. 2nd. Stay faithful to the Lord. 3rd. Know God’s plans for you.**

 What is unique about the words before us is that they are words written to those who were exiles in Babylon. Jeremiah is writing, as the Lord tells him, to these people to bring them guidance, comfort and hope. All of this is not going to depend on the people but rather on the wonder and marvel of God.

 So what do you say to a people who are no longer living in their “homeland”, the land of their dreams and hopes? That is really the first part of this letter, the first nine verses. God in these words gives his people direction while they are in exile. Do you know what God says? In a nutshell God says, “Okay, sin got you there. Repent. Do the best you can here. Make sure the city you live in is prosperous because then you will prosper. Settle down, get married, marry off your kids, have plenty of kids. Pray to the Lord to bless you.” As God is giving this advice a few things stick out. That God tells them increase, don’t decrease in numbers is interesting. That God tells them to work and pray for the prosperity of the place they live in is interesting. Think about that. Wherever we go God doesn’t want us to be a burden but a blessing to that place. In other words, make that place work for you by being a blessing. God also in this section reminds them to make sure to not listen to the false prophets and their lies, follow only those who are God’s true prophets.

 Now I do want you to think of all of this in connection with our own lives, because you see, in a way we are also exiles of the Lord. We are exiles in that sin still keeps us separated and apart from the Lord our God. We are exiles in the sense that we have to endure this sin filled difficult world of ours, yes, we are away from the Lord and struggle with it. So what does this say to us? It says, “Follow the Lord. Put your trust in Him that He knows what is going on and that He has a plan. So, make the best of it. Be a blessing to those around you. Bring prosperity and goodness wherever you are at. Pray for God’s blessing in your lives that others may be blessed through you.” Here is God’s plan for our lives today.

 Kate, you have the same calling. Look at you, lone confirmand this year. It’s not that there aren’t other kids your age connected to our congregation but their parents didn’t think learning God’s Word was worth it. So, here you are Kate. You go out and be a blessing. You go out and be a child of God that others might see and grasp the goodness of the Lord. Kate, you conduct yourself like God tells these exiles to behave. In essence Katelyn, you serve the Lord and bring glory to his name even though your path and your life is in this sin filled world. You are just like those exiles. All of us are. And we are called upon to serve the Lord and bring glory to his name exactly where we are in life.

And then comes that section where the words of our text are found. Let me share that whole section with you. Jeremiah 29:10-14. **This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."**

Do you get the sense of power and promise in those words? Do you get the sense that the Lord wants to make sure his people get this, that they grasp the wonder and marvel of what He is revealing here? If you don’t then you have truly missed something.

Now on the outset, God is telling his exiles that in 70 years he is going to bring them back from their exile to the land of Israel and that with that exile at end God is going to be specially and uniquely with them. In verse 12 God is promising to hear them. In verse 13 God is promising to be with them. In verse 14 God is promising to end their captivity, to end the captivity of all the world. That is the obvious meaning of these words to God’s believers then. But there is more.

There is more because in these words are shadows of a Savior. In these words is not just earthly deliverance but also spiritual salvation for all the world. As you contemplate these words you will see how everything that is going to happen is going to happen because of the goodness and the graciousness of the Lord our God.

Verse 10. Babylon represents the world and its horrid penchant for sin. We God’s people are trapped there. But notice that after a time God is going to take action. Our text speaks of 70 years, but in this case we can take that number figuratively and spiritually. 70 is 7 times 10. 7 is the number for God working in the world. 10 is the number that expresses completion. God is telling us that a time is coming, a time when everything is right and ready and when that time is upon us He is going to act. He says, **“I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.”**

Do you know that Gal. 4 declares: **“When the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law.”** That’s what Jesus did. When the time was right Jesus, the fullness of the deity in bodily form, came to be with us and to deliver us to his kingdom of heaven. These words, I believe a shadow of the Christ, a promise of what God will do for us in the Savior. God in Jesus walked among his people. God in Jesus by his atoning sacrifice brought eternal life and salvation to all the world. Well, we understand that Jesus paid for all the sins of the world but that the only way to get the benefit of that salvation is to have faith in Jesus, to believe he is the Savior. So here is this promise of a Savior and then comes verse 11.

**“For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”** Dear people, this is our Christian faith. God has come and shown us his plan of salvation in Jesus. God’s desire is to save us, to bring us treasure and with that treasure hope and a future.

God’s plans are for our salvation. God’s plans are to make us rich in life and salvation. Don’t you see, this is why Paul speaks in Ephesians of, **“the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us.”** And again Paul says, **“I pray that you may know the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.”** Paul is talking about the awesome gift we have in Jesus. He is described as the greatest treasure, the most awesome riches there is. All of this in Jesus and promised to us by God. God does not want to harm but to enrich us in Christ in every way. And hasn’t God done that? Hasn’t God shown time and time again that he works for the good of his children and the glory of his church? God does not want to harm but to bring his riches to our lives.

And of course, the end result of the riches of Christ is none other than our hope of eternal life and a future that is forever. What is there to fear with such promises of deliverance and freedom? What is there to worry about when God says that in Jesus everything is taken care of and we have the sure and certain hope of eternal life? Don’t you see, if you continue to look at these words as the promise of what we will have in Jesus there is nothing but hope and future to see!

Kate, I pray you and everyone here can grasp the wonder of these words. They are wonderful words for you and all of us to live by. To put ourselves into the hand of the Lord. To trust God’s plan for us. To know that no matter what you face, the challenges of high school, dating, your whole future life in this world, and so many things we can’t even comprehend yet, Kate, you know you can trust the Lord. And the rest of you. No matter what you face, political intrigue, fears for our country, concerns about work, worries about persecution and so much more, don’t you know that God has a plan and it is for our good and wonder? God has a plan, and that plan truly speaks only good for us. Honestly, no matter what happens, when God is on your side, you and I can never lose….we have his hope of eternal life and salvation in Jesus. Nothing else matters.

Katelyn, you know what God has done for you. He has sent his Son to be your Savior. Stay faithful to Jesus. Stay blessed in Jesus. Keep your faith alive and well so that the true meaning of these words will always be yours. And then when the time is right for you, God will deliver you from this earth of exile to his heavenly and eternal kingdom. It is his plan. His plan in Jesus for all of us. Amen.