

## ***Hope for a New Day***

For several years, our synod has sponsored an annual event called *Renew*. It was created to equip the synod's churches and members for leadership especially congregation councils. The focus this year was incorporating adaptive change. The keynote speaker who would illuminate this topic for us was the Rev. Dr. Joy Moore. Dr. Joy is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church and serves as Associate Professor of Biblical Preaching at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. The date for this synod-wide event was supposed to be Sunday, April 26. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the event has to be postponed until a later date. The planning team for the event wrote a devotion for church councils to use to prepare for Renew 2020. Providentially, it speaks powerfully to the situation we all find ourselves in because of the coronavirus crisis. Here is ***Ministry Together -- Hope for a New Day***. — Pastor Kerry

### **INTRODUCTION**

The prophet Jeremiah's words to the exiles in Babylon are most unexpected. He is writing from the city of Jerusalem, which is physically and metaphorically in ruins. One would think Jeremiah would be encouraging the exiles to come back home and start rebuilding. But instead, Jeremiah tells them to stay right where they are. God has a different plan for them. Jeremiah's words show us that finding hope in the future starts with living in the present.

### **BIBLE TEXT: JEREMIAH 29:1, 4--14 (NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup>These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. <sup>4</sup>Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup>Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup>Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup>But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. <sup>8</sup>For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, <sup>9</sup>for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the Lord. <sup>10</sup>For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. <sup>13</sup>When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, <sup>14</sup>I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

### **REFLECTION**

The ability to show resilience in the face of adversity takes energy and ingenuity and grit. Many churches today are certainly facing challenges that test this ability. And if we're honest,

many church leaders don't always know what to do about it. Is it better to take big risks, or try smaller, safer experiments? How can we embrace our traditions while still adapting to a changing landscape? Where do we find a word of hope?

In the face of their own adversity, God's people in Babylon get a surprising word of hope from Jeremiah. He tells them to simply live their lives: to plant crops and get married and be the best residents of Babylon they can be. As they commit themselves to their present reality, Jeremiah says, they will affirm their trust that God does, indeed, have plans for them. And that will give them strength and help them be resilient.

A quote often attributed to Martin Luther captures this idea: "If I knew the world would end tomorrow, I would still plant my apple tree today." Sometimes the most hopeful thing we can do is fully participate in the little acts of humanity that make up our lives: cook a good meal; hug a child; listen to a stranger. By doing those things, we acknowledge that God is still present in our world and is still worth trusting. After all, small steps still bring forward motion. And by clinging to faith in God, we can ensure we won't be taking those steps alone.

The same is true for the church, isn't it? Every one of the 167 congregations, five South Sudanese worshipping communities, and two campus ministries in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod is facing a future that does not necessarily look like its past. And only God knows God's plans for our synod. Yet perhaps by joining together to share ideas, offer words of encouragement, and stand in solidarity, we can remember that we are on this journey together. And that can give hope for a new day.

### **REFLECTION CONVERSATION**

- Jeremiah 29:11 is a familiar and comforting text. How might you read it differently knowing that the word 'you' in this passage are all plural, not singular?
- What is one concrete way that we as a congregation affirm that God has called us to this community?
- What gives you hope for a new day – personally, or for the church?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

God of hope, we look to you for reassurance when the future seems uncertain. Ground us in the promise of your presence. Give us strength to press on. And fill our hearts with gratitude at all times. Amen.

SOUTHEASTERN MINNESOTA SYNOD, ELCA  
<http://semnsynod.org>

**For a video presentation of this devotion, go the synod's Facebook page, [Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA](#); click on "Videos" in the left-hand column; then look for "Hope for a New Day". The creation date is "April 28". The video was made by Kathy Chatelaine, one of the assistants to Bishop Regina Hassanally, and was posted on April 29.**