

**"What A Thoughtful God We Have!"  
Jeremiah 29:11**

**Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Emmett, Idaho**

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you in the Name of the Lord God -- Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear members of the Family of God, children of the Heavenly Father, co-heirs with Christ Jesus the Son of God, and brothers and sisters comforted by the Holy Spirit through His Word,

A number of you have told me that, following a surgery or an extended illness, you wanted me to put a note in the bulletin thanking all those who have taken the time and made the extra effort to send a note of Christian encouragement and comfort. You say something like, "There are so many people who are so thoughtful during this difficult time." Very thoughtful people. Or, you open the mailbox and discover that someone wrote you a letter just because it was a holiday, or because it was your birthday, or even wrote you a letter because it was no special day at all. You might think to yourself, "What a thoughtful thing to do -- to write a letter to me. What a thoughtful friend I have."

Six centuries before the Lord God was incarnate by the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary, the same Lord permitted the Hebrew people to be removed forcibly from their land. The first Babylonian Captivity of the Church took place with the children of God being exiled aliens in that foreign land. Deported from their homes by the military of King Nebuchadnezzar, they were force marched from Jerusalem to Babylon. Physically spent, spiritually challenged, and emotionally drained, God's chosen people suffered. The psalmist conveys this mood when he writes,

By the rivers of Babylon,  
There we sat down, yea, we wept  
When we remembered Zion.  
We hung our harps  
Upon the willows in the midst of it.  
(Psalm 137:1-2).

There were the people of God ... aliens in an alien world ... sitting and weeping ... remembering church days long ago ... recollecting temple vessels used in the Divine service ... recalling hymns sung many miles away. Conflicting thoughts must have surfaced in their minds. "Where is the Lord God? Is He thinking about us at all? We are only suffering the consequences of unbelief? We have lost so many people on the journey? Does He remember us at all? I'm sure He will deliver us from here real soon. But does He know where we are? How long, O Lord, how long?"

One day a letter from God arrives. It is written by the prophet Jeremiah, and delivered by two men, Elasah and Gemariah. It is addressed to the surviving elders among the captives and to the priests, prophets, and people who had been carried away from Jerusalem. You heard a major portion of the letter in the Old Testament Reading for this day. Please listen to one verse as we meditate on the theme ...

... "What a Thoughtful God We Have!"

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

When we think of someone who has been thoughtful to us, it quickly becomes obvious that the other person has had us in mind for awhile. It didn't just suddenly happen. There was a plan involved in order to make the whole thing come about. Let me give you an example. Every once in a while one of the children will give me a drawing that was made during the worship service. Last week I received this bookmark from one of the children in attendance here. In the beginning, there was nothing on this piece of paper. What would go on it would have to be part of a plan. Now as you look the completed picture, you notice that the artist had something and someone in mind and it took some careful planning to make sure that everything would be on the bookmark just where it was supposed to be ... that there was room for the picture of the Bible that was going to be drawn ... that there was a place for the "to" and the "from" ... and, of course, an appropriate color would need to be planned.

God works in the same way. Before He created the universe and the world, He had a plan in mind and it was a plan, not only for the big picture of planets and stars, but also for you. He had you and me in mind when He made plans for this world and this place where we live. We know that this is true because the Bible tells us. God told Jeremiah, Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations. Before anyone of us were conceived and born, the Lord knew us. What a Thoughtful God We Have. Not only did He know us, God also had plans for us. Or, as He said to the people of Jeremiah's day, For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

What wonderful plans ... a future that God had for us and a hope that He had for us. But something happened that caused a problem ... a problem so serious that we didn't have a future except for hell and in ourselves, we had no hope of escape. The problem was sin. And sin is not just what we do that is against God's will; it's also what we don't do that He wants us to do. It's not just using good works in a bad way, or using bad words; sometimes it's not saying anything at all. In fact, the problem is so serious that even the thoughts that we think in our heads are sins and God knows our thoughts. In fact, sin is not just what we do, it is what we are.

What would we expect God to do? We probably think that He would punish us and send us to hell just like we deserved. But wait, do you remember the text for today? For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. That sounds like God wants what is best for us, even though we don't deserve it. What in the world

was God going to do? The world He had created and each person in the world was going to eternal destruction. Because of His great love and mercy, He could not let that happen.

So, He came to be one of us and we celebrate that event at Christmas time, for Jesus is God with us. But He didn't simply come to tell us to be good, or to show us how to be good. He came to take the punishment that each one of us deserved on Himself. We celebrate that awful and wonderful event on Good Friday ... the day that Jesus, God Himself, was crucified for the sins of the world and endured the wrath of God in our place. As Jesus was dying on that cursed tree, He looked down and His eyes beheld those at the foot of the cross, those who had crucified Him, including our sins and He prayed for our forgiveness and while suspended from the cruel crossbeam, earned the forgiveness that each one of us in the world needs. Father, forgive them, is what He said, just as earlier, during Jeremiah's time, He had said, For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. God had a plan for us, and in order that His plan for you might be able to happen for your good, He had to die and go to hell in your place. And that is just what He did. However, hell could not keep Jesus there and as a result, He rose again from the dead. We celebrate that victorious and joyful event on Easter because He has given us a future and a hope. Indeed, dear people, What a Thoughtful God We Have!

The Son of God did not come into the world and sleep in a manger for perfect individuals. He did not permit Himself to be spit upon, mocked, crucified, and die for human beings who were without sin. He did not rise again from the dead for perfect people. Rather, He did all of this for those like this guy right here ... a miserable sinner who was on his way to hell.

Likewise, this Church does not exist for perfect people who don't have any problems and who have got it all together both physically and spiritually. This congregation exists to receive from the Lord all the blessings of His love and forgiveness; to thank and praise God for what He has done; to tell people about the Savior and to sustain the members of the congregation on the Good News of God's love for the world through the message of Jesus Christ. The promise, as the Bible declares, is for you and your children.

On any given day, there are members of this congregation who are grieving the death of a loved one, rejoicing in the birth of a child, fearful that an upcoming medical test might reveal a cancerous tumor, worried about a teenager grandson who is heading for trouble, people having marriage problems, a little boy afraid that when he hears mommy and daddy arguing that they are going to get a divorce, an older boy glad that his football team won an important game, someone succumbing to the addiction of alcohol, grandparents thankful for another wedding anniversary, others facing a declining physical condition, a little girl afraid of being abandoned in the darkness of this world's night, someone fearful because of possible unemployment, parents who are happy about a daughter's grades in school, and a host of other conditions -- both positive and negative that the people in this world experience.

But sometimes this causes some doubts to arise. Why, if God says He is looking out for my best interests, why, if the Lord knows what I am going through, why, if He cares, doesn't He get me out of this situation that I am in? Why must I continue like this? What good can come of it?

Let's get back to the days of Jeremiah and our sermon text. The people to whom these words were written were having a very difficult time. And even though the Lord had affirmed that they were His people and He would not abandon them, they would need to get on with their lives where they were.

He tells them that while they are captive and in exile, to go ahead and build houses ... to plant gardens, to get married, to have children, and seek peace in this foreign city in which they live.

This is His way of saying the same thing He had said through another prophet. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts." It's kind of like Jesus' death. In order to work out our salvation and earn our forgiveness, Jesus had to die an ugly death and be placed in a tomb. To the followers of Jesus at that time, it didn't look like anything good would ever happen. But it did.

Sometimes it looks that way for us too, but God simply reminds us that we belong to Him and no matter what happens, He will be with us, and whether we live or we die, we belong to Him. In fact, our future with Him in heaven is guaranteed. We're just waiting for it to happen to each one of us. But while we are waiting, we are to be occupied with the work of the Lord -- remaining faithful, receiving the strength we need to continue, worshipping Him, being the best citizen we can be, being a decent, God-fearing parent, spouse, member of the community and member of the congregation. And all the while remembering what God has said to us ...

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Truly dear people,

What a Thoughtful God We Have!