

January 2, 2022

**“A Vision for 2022”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

Jeremiah 31:7-13

For thus says the Lord:

*Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
“Save, O Lord, your people,
the remnant of Israel.”*

*See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
those with child and those in labor; together;
a great company, they shall return here.*

*With weeping they shall come,
and with consolations I will lead them back,*

*I will let them walk by brooks of water,
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;
for I have become a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.*

*Hear the word of the Lord, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, “The one who scattered Israel will gather them,
and will keep them as a shepherd a flock.”*

*For the Lord has ransomed Jacob,
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.
They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.*

*Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.*

*I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.*

Sermon “A Vision for 2022”

I have heard so many jokes over the last couple of days about how horrible 2021 was. One comic said that in Ireland they always open up the front door to make sure the old year can get out. This year they opened up the front, back, all the windows and the garage door.

Another one said many people stayed up not to say hello to the new year but to make sure 2021 left. There were a lot of awful things that happened last year and Covid claimed many lives so I'm not making light of that for many of you are among the people who have lost someone dear. But, I'd like to ask can anyone to name something good that happened?

Now don't get me wrong I'm not saying we need to look at the bright side. I won't ever do that to you. Saying that to someone doesn't ever help them. What that usually says is that I'm uncomfortable with your sadness and don't know what to say or do.

But what I'm saying is that there isn't just a bright side and there is never just a dark side. But as most of you know, life is often a splendid mix of all of it.

If we look at it honestly and embrace all that life is, we do better, we cope better, we recognize that even our really hard days won't last forever just as our really good ones won't either.

What helps me the most when things are hard is to have a vision of a better day and know that it's coming. That's exactly what Jeremiah does for his people. He gives them a vision of a brighter tomorrow when their really hard days will be over.

You see Jeremiah was a prophet in a very critical time in Jewish history. For a good portion of his life he spends a lot of his ministry being very critical of the leaders of his government, the religious leaders, and the people themselves saying, "We have got to get back to making our faith the center of our lives folks."

He warned "I don't like the looks of where things are going, we are in for some hard times ahead." He urged people to get back to their faith because they are going to need it. And he was right, all kinds of things went down in his lifetime; empires rose and fell, battles were won and lost, kings rose and fell, and in the end Jerusalem laid in ruins and many Jewish people were exiled by the Babylonian empire.

What is interesting to me is that by the time we get to the text that Gail read this morning Jeremiah has taken a really different turn in his ministry. He moves from judgmental condemnation of the people to being a great comforter to his people. And he does that by giving them a vision of a better day.

See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame, and pregnant women.

He promises them that God will be with them in their weeping and that God will lead them home again and God will lead them and walk with them along the brooks and won't let them fall. Jeremiah says to his people, God's got us and it's going to be okay, maybe not today but things will get better.

and then Jeremiah says that the young women will rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.
and that God will turn our mourning into joy,
and God will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

Jeremiah helped his people to find a vision when their whole world had fallen apart that they could cling to, that would give them purpose and a reason to go on. Even with all that is going on in our world, we know we are still a lot better off than the Israelites were 2500 something years ago but...

If we turn off our head for a minute and do a gut check we also know that we stand at several crossroads in history and the US and her citizenry will be judged by history by what we do next.

We are at a tipping point with the health of our planet, we are at a tipping point on whether or not this great experiment with democracy continues it's clumsy evolution and many of our families and churches are in precarious places as well.

If there was ever a time to create a vision that will help guide us, heal and sustain us it would be now. I want us to give that some thought, all of us, to give some thought to what are some attainable and sustainable goals that we can create, all of us, not just me or the council.

What can be a vision to guide us that 1) gives us hope 2) helps us to participate in a wider vision in our community and country and 3) makes us relevant in our time and place to what is going on around us.

Here's the sticker though, it can't be a vision that is of the past. We can always honor and be proud of our past but it isn't our future. It has to be ours, not our fore-parents but ours, and it has to be a vision that includes God, that is loving and kind and full of hope and promise. May we all reflect and pray on this and be a part of this important moment in time.

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