

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7, 11
God Has a Plan
Sunday September 13th, 2015

I had a fascinating time learning about the history of Vista Church. The actual “Birthday” of the church is September 9, 1990. This was the date of its first worship service in Coronado Middle School. Part of the reason for the ongoing mission and ministry to that school through the Snak Pack program is a way of saying thank you to the school and place where Vista was born!

In fact, I want to say first and foremost, thank you to the people who worked so hard and sacrificed so much to make sure we can worship in such air-conditioned comfort, on soft comfortable chairs in a beautiful sanctuary on an incredibly beautiful site. It hasn't always been this way and it has taken great sacrifice and effort by those in the past for us today to enjoy what we have here at Vista.

Once again I want us all to say thank you to the charter members and those who have gone before us, whose shoulders we stand on to do our present work and catch a glimpse of the future! Let's give a clap offering to God!!!



Today we celebrate a birthday, but like all births there was a long pregnancy. In 1988 Rev. Jim Starkey, a retired United Methodist Minister from the Kansas East Conference who had settled in Saddle Brooke, began expressing the desire to start a church in the Catalina area. When discussing the idea with Rev. Jerry Haas the Sr. Pastor of St. Mark's UMC he was informed that there was no money to start a new church in this area. But the very next year our Annual Conference began the “Building Our Future” campaign to start new churches.

Some funds came from that campaign as well as several unexpected places. A phone campaign was begun as well as many

other behind the scenes actions and work. A great many people sacrificed a lot of time and money to begin this church. You can see what hard work it is to start and grow a church from our Timothy passage. **“Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy**

life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.”

The effort it took every Sunday when this church started was amazing! Every Sunday people had to set up and break down chairs and Sunday School equipment and sound. They had to find this site that had no power, electricity or sewer and then built literally on the remnants of the Cold War. That was an amazing work. It was in accord with God’s “own purpose and grace.” That was the work of the Holy Spirit using a people who were open to build, plant and pray!

Vista Church is a place where the prophecy from Isaiah 2:4 is partially fulfilled, **“He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”** As a motto of our church says, **“Once a missile site, now a church with a mission.”**

Well as you all know the Church is not a site or a building, the Church is a people!

And who are we as a people, as Vista Church? First we’re all from somewhere else. Raise your hand if you were born in Arizona? Raise your hand if you were born in another state or country?

We are a people gathered here from the four winds, which is part of why I picked today’s scriptures. We are gathered here by the winds of the Holy Spirit. I almost used the Apostles Creed today because the 3rd section speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit which is, **“the Church, the communion of saints...”**

This creed recognizes that the Church is a product of the work of the Holy Spirit. In other words your presence here today, this church, is part of the plan of God for all creation. It is part of the spreading out of the Kingdom of God. You are here on purpose! It is part of God's plan.

I want to explain this scripture a bit to show how it informs and guides our lives here. We'll listen to what God is saying here and then respond.

This passage from Jeremiah is part of a letter he wrote to the exiles in Babylon, which is roughly where Iraq is today.

His message to the Jewish exiles wasn't "You're coming home soon, you're just visitors in Babylon", but "get used to things there, settle in because you are going to be there for a long long time, in fact 70 years."

Now Israel was taken captive into Babylon because of their idolatry, moral failures and the evil they practiced. God sent them "on purpose" to Babylon as punishment, as discipline. They had listened to false prophets and worshipped foreign gods while practicing all sorts of evil, so the temple was destroyed, the offerings ceased and the people were deported from the Promised Land. In the face of the failures of the Israelites this became God's plan.

They were there in Babylon on purpose and in many ways it was miserable. Psalm 137 was written in the Babylonian captivity and records their misery. The 1st four verses say, "By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.

On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors required songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying,

"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

You can hear the sadness and longing for Zion. You can hear the anger that gets worse at the end of the psalm. But God had sent them to Babylon on purpose and it felt and was absolutely miserable!

Many today feel like exiles in this city, this state of Arizona and even in this church or even any other church in this area. No we are not “exiles” here. We haven’t been sent here by God to atone for our sins, but as we have seen almost all come to this church from somewhere else, from other ways of doing and being church leaving friends and family behind often along with the snow.

My wife felt very much like an exile when we moved here to Tucson 10 years ago and verse 11, which we’ll get to, very much held her together for several years.

Frankly, the feeling of not belonging of being out of place is common to all human beings and for Christians we acknowledge even that we are exiles here on earth and that our “forever home” is in heaven.

So for all of us, there is a certain unease, a feeling of, and sense that this place is not quite where we belong, but it is where God has called us on purpose for a purpose!

So what do we do? Listen again to God’s word to the Jews in exile in Babylon, “**BUILD houses and settle down; PLANT gardens... Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage,...**

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. PRAY to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

Did you hear that: **BUILD, PLANT, PRAY!** Take the circumstances that you are in and make the most of them. “**Bloom where you are planted.**” Vista certainly has followed this for the last 25 years.

The Jews went into exile as punishment. Why are you here? Why are we here? Certainly not as punishment, but sometimes we wonder when its 110 outside. I believe God has called you here as a way and means of healing for yourself and others.

As we have seen most people are here from somewhere else seeking the God and the religious experience they had back “home.” But here now is where God has called you to BUILD, PLANT, PRAY. In some sense we are all exiles here and we need each other to have a sense of peace, family and home. We are here to create a new home for ourselves and others!!

Part of the reason for God destroying his own temple and the religious practices of sacrifice was to say, “Worship style, music style, and place don’t really matter, but I do.” He said to the Jewish exiles “You’re there now and he says to us, you’re here now: worship me here!” Have a relationship with me here and now. Make a commitment to me here and now and to the new brothers and sisters I will call here to this place.

The Temple was torn down and destroyed because the Temple and the sacrifices had become more important than God! But the Jewish exiles bloomed where they were planted in Babylon, and so it was there that the synagogue worship began not attached to the Temple or animal sacrifice.

The question I think God asks us when we read this scripture is, “Does style and worship tradition and building count more in your spiritual life than Me?” Have you dropped out of corporate worship or thinking about it, because things aren’t the same as they were back there where we came from? If you are feeling such, maybe it’s God asking you, “Do you love me more than these?” Am I, as your God, more important than the externals?

Have you ever thought that when you feel alienated, alone or abandoned within the church or community God can use that to focus us on him and no one and nothing else?

And when we personally get beyond the sadness of psalm 137 we realize there are lots of lonely people in this area we need to reach out to and bring them into a new family our Vista Family.

This scripture is a call by God to fully commit to where you are; to be “all in”. Even if we could go home, where ever home is, it wouldn’t be the same now. People and places have changed. And our forever home is in heaven and Vista is but a taste of what is to come. Make this your home; I believe is what God is saying.

IT HAS ALWAYS
BEEN GOD'S PLAN
TO ADOPT YOU
INTO HIS FAMILY
AS HIS OWN CHILD.

God has a plan and a purpose for Vista and you. Continue to BUILD, PLANT, PRAY. Build new relationships. Continue to make Vista your family, a blended family with brothers and sisters from everywhere. Continue to work for the welfare of the Oracle road communities from Tucson and Oro Valley to Sun City, Catalina, Saddle Brooke, Oracle all the way up through Winkelman. Continue to seek this area’s peace and prosperity through your mission program.

There is a Yiddish proverb that says, “Man plans and God laughs”.



I believe we keep God really entertained at times, but the Spirit is truly given to the church. We can find God’s plans for us when we do it together. We can live out 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.”**

Jesus has given his Spirit, the Holy Spirit to the church and when we gather together and seek the Lord and his plan for us and our lives together, I believe God’s plans can be found. So today we are going to begin a process of filling out a survey that addresses some immediate practical issues like what sermon topics and series would you like to

hear about, to very practical applications of God's plan for you and your life. In other words where would you like to serve in the life of the church this coming year?

I also would like to hear from you as to your vision of what God has planned for us together as a church.

Birthdays and anniversaries are times to look back and say thanks, but also times to look forward. Today, I truly and deeply want to hear what God is saying to you; so that we as a church can move into the future that God has for us together.

I have gotten a survey together for you to fill out. I want to give you about 5 minutes in the service to do this and then you can either turn it in this week or take it home and bring it back next week.

I will walk you through some of it so you can be pretty sure what I am asking in this survey. I will share with you what it says. Don't forget your name, especially if you want to volunteer for something.

USHERS PLEASE PASS OUT THE SURVEYS AND PENCILS.

USHERS PLEASE TAKE UP THE OFFERING AND SURVEYS.