

SERMON: "GOD IS GOOD ... ALL THE TIME ... GOD IS GOOD"
TEXT: OLD TESTAMENT JEREMIAH 29:10-14
NEW TESTAMENT ROMANS 8:28-30

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INTRODUCTION

I had my review with the Personnel committee a few weeks ago

I made it a point to tell them what I have told the leaders of this church a few times the congregation too – I'd like to stay here in ministry with you, God willing, until my retirement in 5 to 7 years (I turned 60 in March)

And when I do retire ... I think I'll run for office.

I'm already working on my platform – two things so far

One, all restaurants will serve sweet tea. Of course they should!

Two, we need to bring back the draft and/or some kind of national service

Here is how it would work ... with incentives

Students would get free in state tuition and books if they have served in the military (there are already incentives there)

Students would also get tuition assistance if they've worked jobs

you just ought to have worked at some time when you were young

Agriculture – some de-tasseling, mucking the stalls, waking up to milk at 4 a.m, etc.

Retail – something where you get to deal with angry unreasonable customers

Working with children – teaching, child care, etc.

You see I think everybody ought to have experience with the kind of work that your parents said would, and I quote, "do you some good"

You've heard that expression ... "It will do you some good"

Doesn't it always pair with something you're thinking doesn't sound that good?

No, I'm not running for office (though my platform is strong, esp. the sweet tea part)

Yes, I want to focus on a working definition of good as in "it will do you some good" as we consider the bible passages for today. Today, we have favorites from two of our elders that focus on the good God has in mind for us.

Deb Edginton provides our Old Testament lesson. She picked Jeremiah 29:11

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.

DURABLE GOODS

Kyle Frost gives us our New Testament lesson. Romans 8:28

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Both passages look forward to the good God wills and works for us
That is why I started off by offering a definition of “good”
Not ‘just won the lottery, enjoying a drink with an umbrella in it’ good
No, good as in ‘it will do you some good”

The kind of good we’re talking about here is a durable good
This is more than a moment in the sun. Nothing wrong with those moments
No, they are quite good. May even be a Godsend, needed rest
Remember how often the Old Testament lifts up the regular pattern
of sabbath rest, how Jesus often went away to rest and pray
Those good moments are indeed good

The good that Paul mentions as in all things work together for good
The plans for your welfare that the prophet Jeremiah promises
These are more lasting kinds of good, this ‘good’ is a durable good
And by durable I mean get us through the tough times good

Think about who first heard the prophet’s words
He speaks words of hope to people who really need to hear them
The when and where of Jeremiah’s words are important
The when is the lowest point in Ancient Israel’s history, the exile
The where is a foreign land, Babylon, where the exiles were taken

The exile is the portion of the bible we tend to skip over
We know the stories from the beginning of the Old Testament
Stories of creation, of Abraham and Sarah, of Moses and the Exodus
We know stories from Israel’s best days, stories of King David

But after the nation fell apart, divided into north and south (that’s familiar), not so much
After a series of corrupt leaders and all the violence of constant turnover
After the people wandered farther and farther from God’s will
worshipping idols, failing to love God and neighbor, even after
being called back to faithfulness by the prophets many times

You know how they say Rome fell from within (all great civilizations do)
That is what happened to Israel. Israel was in ruins and it was their own fault.
Yes, a foreign nation, Babylon, did all the destruction – destroyed the temple,
the heart and symbol of the nation. They carted off the people
back to Babylon to live as refugees.

“IT’S GOING TO BE ALRIGHT”

Babylon did the damage ... but it was God’s will, God’s punishment.
That is the story of the exile. You see why we might skip over it?
Let’s not do that. It is human nature, it seems, that we want to skip over
those difficult days (maybe even more so when the damage
done is our own fault like it was for Israel then)

But skipping over is not what Jeremiah does
He tells those hauled away to Babylon to settle down in their new land
He tells them to work for the good of that foreign land. That is not skipping over
And most important ... in this beloved verse he speaks with God ‘s voice
not to skip over but to keep on going, look forward, trusting God

**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.**

These words of hope, pointing to and promising a better day, are spoken
to a people who really need to hear them. They especially needed to hear about
the good that God can and will do. Verses like these speak to us too.

We may not be refugees in a foreign land ... but we know about needing hope
We too have been in painful places where things did not look or feel good
We know about being stuck in messes of our own making
We’ve known those moments when though all grown up, we felt like children
wanting to hear someone who loves us say, “It’s going to be alright.”

That is what the prophet is telling the exiles, what he is telling us
We hear much the same thing from Paul in his letter to the Romans
His original audience was in a better place than the exiles,
but still not that good, not a place we’d describe as good

The early Christians weren’t an established bunch with tax exemptions
and an accepted place in the larger cultural context, a place on the corner
They too had reason to worry about their future, about the future

Paul’s words of hope to them and to all of us who still worry
are very much about the future, a future of God’s design

**We know that all things work together for good for those who love God,
who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew
he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order
that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he
predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified;
and those whom he justified he also glorified.**

PREDESTINED

God is very much at work in the present, working for good,
working for and working toward a future with hope like the prophet said
working toward a future – predestined, justified and glorified
There is another sermon right there with those words (maybe three)
predestined, justified, glorified. They all speak to the good God has in the works!

I've had a good bit of experience worshipping in the black church
The services in those churches tend to include more vocal congregations
There is some back and forth in the service and in the sermon
One of the refrains I've heard used there (it's used in other setting too)
is the title of the sermon "God is good ... all the time ... God is good"

It works like this. I say "God is good" and you respond saying "All the time"
I then respond back saying "All the time" and you say "God is good"
You see the pattern and, I pray, the theology behind it.
That is what Paul is saying when he says ...

**We know that all things work together for good for those
who love God, who are called according to his purpose.**

God is good all the time and all the time God is good ... and working for good
That does not mean that it is always going to be good.
That does not mean that everything that happens is God's will
I've heard that well intentioned expression, "This is part of God's plan"
said at the wrong time, in the wrong place, too many times

No God did not make something bad happen because it was part of the plan
That is not pre-destination. Pre-destination is about 'destination'
not about the detours between here and there. That is pre-determination.
God is in all things working for good as in working to get us through
Again, think "destination"

Let me say it this way. It is my favorite story, a true story about my dad
You may have heard me share it before. I humbly think it is worth hearing again

My dad was a US Secret Service Agent, first on protective detail with Lady Bird Johnson
Then in the field offices in Richmond, VA and in Atlanta. In 1976, an election year,
he was put in charge of security for the Republican National Convention.
It was in Kansas City. He was on his own there for about a month.
He raised three boys who love to cook. But he could not cook, not a thing.

He ended most evenings at a local tavern with a burger and a beverage.
1976 was also an Olympic year. Same time as the convention.
He'd watch the Olympics each night on the TV behind the bar

SUMMARY

About my dad. He loved this country very much, loved basketball too
My dad was a fan (as in short for fanatic). One night the US team was playing
and losing. They were playing Puerto Rico, led by point guard Butch Lee
There were just a few minutes left and we were down by 8 points.

Quick aside here. This was before pros played in the Olympics
before the Dream Team. Our team was all college players. And the US,
at that time had never lost an Olympic basketball game.
No God-fearing American fan would count the 1972 Olympics as a loss
when the Soviets had the officials in the bag and replayed the final seconds
three different times until they scored the 'winning basket'.

Anyway, back to the game and my dad in that bar. He was beside himself.
Normally a quiet guy, he was yelling at every bad call, pounding on the bar,
urging the other people in the place to help lead the guys to victory
Much to his frustration they didn't seem all that interested
The place was quiet. "What's wrong with these people?" he thought

I guess the guy at the other end of the bar picked up on my dad's frustration.
He calmly asked, "hey buddy, don't you know this game is on tape?
We already won."

When we talk about the plans God has for our welfare
When we talk about 'in all things God works together for good.'
When we talk about pre-destined, justified and glorified
This is what we are talking about!

"Hey, buddy, don't you know we already won?"