

Sermon – August 29, 2021
“God Knows the Plan”
Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Rigby, ID
PASTOR DAVE SCHILLING

Grace, mercy and peace be to each of you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. We begin in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

I invite you to pray with me as we open ourselves up once again to the teaching of God's Word.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for the gift of your Son, Jesus the Christ, who through his faithfulness, gave us an example to follow as we live in obedience to Your will. We pray in Christ's holy name. Amen.

The year is 1997, Crown of Life ministry is very young, only 10 years old. I was a newly licensed Deacon, having completed all the required courses to assist with ministry at St. John, IF. (I was much older than 10.)

Phil Meyer was serving Crown of Life as pastor and he asked Naomi and I to come to Rigby to help with the ministry here. Phil had lots of great ministry ideas, and it was exciting to work with him and the congregation. Fast forward to 2003, we sold our home in IF and moved to Rigby.

God had brought Phil here, with all his amazing gifts to share the love of Jesus with this wonderful community. Phil was a musician, singer, songwriter and a really good extemporaneous speaker, who often formed his Sunday messages on the 12-mile drive from IF to Rigby.

But God had another plan for Phil, another church who needed him and the gifts he brought to expand a different ministry. So, Phil left in August 2001, and that left me here to carry on the work we had begun.

I was asked by the congregation to stay and serve as pastor to Crown of Life. The Moses in me kept telling God I was not Phil. I don't sing, I don't write Praise songs, I'm not equipped, I'm not ready, I don't play keyboard or guitar...oh wait, does playing the accordion count as a worship instrument?

But God said I need you here. And God had prepared me, despite my feeble protests. And I answered God's call to ministry.

At Crown of Life, we follow the Son...not the man.

So, here we are 20 years alter in August 2021, roughly 1,050 sermons, 800 Bible Classes, 50 funerals, and 30 wedding services later.

Those first months at COL in 2001 were a little rough. The adults loved Phil, the kids loved Phil, the community was warming up to him, and some chose to leave. But those who stayed were dedicated to moving the ministry forward and to building a presence in Rigby.

I told Naomi over and over that I was not Phil. To which she responded, "You're not supposed to be. You're supposed to be Dave, and God has called you to serve this congregation and this community. God has called you to use your gifts in ministry."

I am so humbled that God let me be part of His plans for this church and this community over the past 20 years, which leads me to say right now ... God is good. All the time. And all the time. God is good.

The question we are all asking ourselves now is what's next for Crown of Life? What new and exciting things lie ahead? Where will our ministry take us? Let me be very clear, I have no earthly idea.

But this I do know; God has a heavenly idea that will be revealed to us when the time is right. God has selected a new pastor for us, and He will bring him here in His time, when He is ready, when we are ready.

Now is our time of preparation. God is preparing us to receive the man He sends. We know this to be true because God has told us in His Word...

"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." Jeremiah 29:11

This is a frequently quoted verse from the Bible. It is filled with reassurance about our future. God has a plan for us! And His plan will be perfect ... it will be exactly what we need!

This was our theme verse on Palm Sunday in 2009, when we dedicated this building. We talked then of how God had blessed us to be able to afford this beautiful Worship Center, and how He had plans to prosper us and give us hope for the future.

God is faithful to His promises, and this gives us strength and resolve for what is yet to come.

But as is true for all of scripture, I believe there is more to the story, if we but take a few moments and look at the context of God's whole message in this section of Scripture. For example, "This is what the Lord says..."

"When seventy years are completed ... I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. "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. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

So, the future of God's people lies with the exiles, taken from Jerusalem to Babylon in 587 BC. God's judgment fell upon His rebellious people for their unfaithfulness.

Yet, because God's nature, He must always fulfill His promises. So, God's favor still rests upon His people even though they are in exile. He will eventually restore His people to continue to be a blessing to the world as His chosen people.

But His people are encouraged to settle down for a long stay, after which God will return them to Jerusalem and the Promised Land. In addition, God will ultimately bring from their descendants a Savior for all the people ... again to keep all His promises ... that Savior being Jesus Christ.

So, there was indeed a future and hope in God's plans for the exiled people. Do you really think the exiles believed they had a future and hope to be anything other than slaves to the Babylonians? I suspect many of them had lost all hope along the way, and they assumed they were destined to die a slave.

So, many generations pass ... seventy long years to be exact. And this entire time was designed to be a time of change and preparation for the Israelites attitudes and beliefs. God simply wanted them to turn to Him again with all their heart, and mind, and soul. And He would keep His promise to bring them back to their homeland, the promised land.

So, here WE are today, His people, exiled on an uncharted course for a time. Oh, we are not slaves, as the Israelites were, with the exception of perhaps being a slave to our patience and longing for stability and normalcy as we move forward. But we are exiles, just the same.

So, while being exiled, what change in us do you imagine our great God desires ... before He restores US? Is God looking for more patience, humility, and love from us? Or does God simply want us to turn to Him again with all of our hearts, minds, and souls?

My suggestion today is for all of us to renew our devotion to God as the most important thing in our lives, renew our devotion to the first commandment, which says you shall have no other Gods. We are to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, and soul period.

We pray, Lord, help me put Your will and Your purpose ahead of my own. We have been chosen to set aside our own interests, let go of our own ambitions, and face the future head on.

At times, we may struggle with the feeling that God is not present and active. But hear this, He is active in every detail of our lives.

God is preparing a new Shepherd to lead Crown of Life. God has an extraordinary future planned for this congregation of believers. We can trust this promise of God.

During the 2020 Covid year of lockdowns, masks and distancing, each week I prepared my Sunday messages for you for live streaming. For the hardest 7 weeks in the March-April timeframe, I came to the church on Sunday morning, and met Jonathan Ellis here. He set up and ran the live streaming. But the church was empty.

Everything I loved about being here was stripped away. No greeting you, no shaking your hand, or giving hugs to the kids. No singing, no corporate prayers, no Bible class. It was a type of exile. But amid all of that, with the camera running, I would simply imagine you here.

I could see Gayle and Sonny over here, the Demmer family over there, Gordon and Melody in front of the Rodriguez family, Carol, Kathy and Sheila back there and the Howe family behind them.

I missed the lay readers...Norma, Christy, Janet, the Kori's - Ellis and Walstad. I missed ALL of you, and the gifts you bring to this ministry.

I missed getting to know the newcomers and visitors. In my head, I could hear the Praise Team making beautiful music to our great God.

I missed receiving Holy Communion with you. I missed the children happily heading off to Jesus and Me Jammin' Time. And I was thrilled when we were once again able to gather together in His Name starting last May 3.

God restored us and brought us back to Him, here, to this place of worship. As we go forward, I will see you...and you and you and you.

I am simply joining you in the chairs. I will continue to worship alongside of you. God is not finished with us yet. We have work to do.

So, I suggest we roll up our sleeves and do the work God has prepared for us. Let's continue to serve our congregation and community in meaningful and extraordinary ways.

After all, we are God's love in action.

At Crown of Life, we follow the Son ... not the man.

And all God's people say AMEN!

(please rise as you are able and pray with me)

"Dear God, we thank You for calling us into Your Kingdom, and for opening heaven for us through our faith in Jesus. We pray that you would show us the quiet times in our lives, teach us to pray unceasingly, and let our amens be calls to action. We pray in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen"