

Dear Wollaston Congregational Church Member and Friends,

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.”

At the beginning of fall I wrote a letter, beginning with a verse earlier in the book of Jeremiah than the verse above. To refresh our memories, the people of Israel have been taken into exile in Babylon far from their homes and their temple. Jeremiah writes to them, letting them know that they are not going to return home anytime soon. In fact they will be gone for at least one lifespan. Instead of asking how long they will be exiled, they are to settle down, build houses, plant gardens, marry, have children and seek the welfare of their new community.

Now, Jeremiah comforts the people, in this message from God, reminding them that God plans for their welfare, not their harm. It is God’s true desire to give them a future with hope.

Back in early fall we compared the Israelite’s experience with our own experience of being exiled from our regular lives and ways of gathering, during COVID. I doubt any of us thought we would be in this strange new world this long, and at the same time we are learning to adapt. The word from Jeremiah reminds us of God’s desire that we have a future with hope, that our settling into the routine of mask wearing and physical distancing is not futile. God has given us gifts of resourcefulness, resilience, and creativity. We have past generations to thank for their inventions of the telephone, and more recent technologists to thank for digital meeting platforms like Zoom that help to keep us connected.

As winter begins, the COVID numbers in this and all other states are not looking good. Still, we have the hope of vaccines on the horizon, as well as all that we have learned over the past months about containing the spread of contagion. And so, we must use these last fall days to build our resilience for what is ahead of us. These will be a few months of hunkering down. Let’s make a plan for ourselves. We can look out for the milder days, when we might be able to get outside in the sunshine. We can choose music, reading material, TV and movies that will encourage us. We can write notes to friends and family members, saying “thank you” and telling someone “I love you” often.

As in any time of challenge, the strong must encourage the vulnerable. Are you feeling low? Pick up the phone or email, and reach out for encouragement. I am here, and your church family is here for you. Are

you feeling stronger, but still worry for the lonely and isolated? Again, pick up the phone, check in on members of our church family as well as your neighbors.

Experts tell us that we will be living with the coronavirus for some years to come. We will have tools to manage it, such as testing, vaccines, and managing our behaviors around the vulnerable. There have been many jokes made about the year 2020 being jinxed or cursed. People hope that things will change when the calendar clicks over into 2021. I do hope things will change in 2021, but they will not change automatically. We have a future with hope, because of what we have learned from our experiences of the past year. We have a future with hope, because of what we have come to appreciate all the more during 2020.

What will we learn from this experience? Perhaps ...

- ❖ that the health of any one member of our community impacts the whole.
- ❖ that community health depends on the availability and affordability of healthcare for everyone.
- ❖ that we can take care of one another, even while we are physically distanced, and we can do hard things for the sake of one another.
- ❖ ... what will you learn from this experience?

What will we appreciate all the more, because of this experience?

- ❖ for me, my community of faith and I hope we will never again take worshipping together in person for granted.
- ❖ the privilege of belonging to a worshipping community in which we can break the bread and pour the cup of the sacrament, a community in which we can sing and pray out loud together.
- ❖ the gift of a church family, in which each member cares for the others. That caring is not the responsibility of any one person, but is the responsibility of all.
- ❖ ... what are the things that you appreciate all the more?

Look out for information about our upcoming Advent offerings and Christmas services. If you, like me, are thankful for this community of faith, please give as generously as you can to our fall stewardship campaign for the ongoing work of the church and a future with hope.

Deep blessings to you and your loved ones this Thanksgiving,

Rev. Liz