

10.22.2023 Sermon

Do You Want to Know My Truth?

Jeremiah 29:11

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

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Good morning! As Pastor James mentioned, I am Sandra Anderson, and I am delighted to share with you this morning.

Earlier, I pondered if my nervousness would ever dissipate. Suddenly, an image of Pastor Tracy flashed before me, leading me to conclude: not today. How many of you enjoy making plans? I certainly do. But how often do these plans materialize exactly as you'd hoped? Rashida, I need to spend more time with you. I am passionate about planning. In fact, I create a plan for the plan, then a backup plan. I plan so far in advance that I already have my Christmas gifts lined up.

Many said they missed me last week. I'm touched by that sentiment. I was busy briefing a general about my plans for 2025. That's how much I enjoy looking ahead. While there's no harm in planning, we must ask ourselves how attached we are to our plans. How do we respond when things don't go according to plan? Woody Allen once quipped, "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans." Hence, today's topic is "The Adventure of Life."

Like many, I have a favorite scripture: Jeremiah 29:11. It reads, "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." As Miss Cindy would assertively nod in agreement, we all enjoy hearing about prosperity, hope, and a bright future. We desire all the positive aspects of life and would rather the negatives befall someone else. Not that we wish ill on others, but we naturally want to be exempt from hardships. Perhaps because we feel special. At times, I imagine our prayers

sounding something like this to God: "Make me healthy, beautiful, and wealthy. Grant me my dream job—or no job. Bestow upon me true love, a grand home, a luxurious car, splendid vacations. Let no harm befall those I cherish." This, we reckon, would be our version of a fairy tale ending. Yet, in reflection, I understand why our plans might make God chuckle.

Perhaps you're like Rashida, believing that everything always works out for you. However, when the topic of prophecy arises, what comes to your mind? Clarity about the future, hearing God's voice, or receiving blessings? For me, it's the anticipation of good news. Yet, what if the prophecy wasn't positive? What if it shared that a loved one wouldn't recover from an illness or that financial difficulties would intensify? Such truths can evoke feelings of betrayal, discouragement, and fear. But they remain the truth.

Brittany and I often have deep conversations. Sometimes she seeks my opinion, hoping for reassurance. However, when I share the unvarnished truth, her reaction is one of surprise, often exclaiming, "What's wrong with you?"

I often wonder, would you rather I just tell you what you want to hear? I know you, and you're not wrong. But I don't want to hear that right now. Even though we might know it's the truth, we sometimes aren't ready to face it. At times, it seems we want people to lie to us subconsciously. For instance, when someone asks, "How do I look today?" and you're thinking, "That jacket might be a bit tight," can you be truly honest?

No. Not unless you're willing to risk upsetting them. Sometimes it feels like we have to live by lies, simply to make someone feel better. I know today is going to be challenging; I can feel it. But it seems that's what people often want. They don't necessarily want to hear the truth, even when they know deep down it is the truth.

Consider Jeremiah 29:11. It's not just some inspirational text we refer to when we need a lift. In Jeremiah 28, a prophet named Hananiah told the Israelites in exile that they would be free in two years. But God had other plans. He instructed Jeremiah to inform the people that Hananiah was misleading them. In fact, they would remain in captivity for 70 more years. They were advised to settle in, build homes, and raise families, all while maintaining peace and looking out for one another. God assured them he hadn't forgotten them and would be with them every day.

How could one not feel forsaken in such a situation? Hananiah promised freedom in two years, and now they were hearing about a 70-year wait. Such news can shake one's faith. It's like the devastating difference between expecting freedom in the 1770s and then hearing it might not come until 1865. When faced with such challenges, we naturally question. Are these truly God's plans for us? Do they lead to peace? Is God really on our side?

My belief is that this isn't the entirety of God's plan. Remember, God is good even when life feels unbearable. Even if your prayers seem unanswered, know that nothing about God is inherently harmful. It's not in His nature to cause us pain. Some argue that God allows bad things to happen, but remember: He gave us free will. Yes, He could've intervened with Adam and Eve, but He chose to let us make our own decisions. Good or bad, the choices we make are on us.

When God created the world, all was good. I don't believe He seeks to punish us. Nor do I think it's His will for us to suffer. The pain and suffering in the world aren't merely some spectacle for Him. They hurt Him deeply. However, ever since Adam and Eve used their free will to eat from the tree of knowledge, we've been living with the consequences. Unfortunately, like them, we often shift the blame to God. Just as Adam said, "It's the woman you gave me," implying it was God's fault, we too look for someone else to pin our problems on.

People aren't homeless and poor because God doesn't love them. In my opinion, people are poor and homeless because we bought into a system. We, as humans, set these conditions, and we continue to buy into these systems as how we want to be. Slavery, in my opinion, didn't come from God. It came about because somebody decided one day, "I want you to serve me." And everybody else responded with, "Well, I don't want to." It's us, and our free will deciding what we want to do. Then, when things don't turn out right, we blame God. We say, "Oh, had you not done this, God," or "If you showed up, God, then this wouldn't have happened."

I deal with severe asthma and a bunch of breathing issues, not because God is punishing me, or that he doesn't love me. It's because during one deployment, people decided to have burn pits. We breathed in all those toxins. Now, years later, thousands of veterans are having issues because of choices that were made. But, when not thinking about those choices, we think, "Oh, every time I can't breathe, the devil is trying to take me out," or "Jesus is punishing me," or "God, why are you testing me?" No, a human made this choice. I had no choice. I breathed it in. And these are the consequences.

Everything is not God making bad things happen. It's us. He made things good, gave us free will, and we make the choices. We say, "Oh, my child got hit in crossfire." But God didn't say, "In the beginning, God created a weapon." We come up with the stuff that we want. We talk about pollution; we made the car. Then we complain about the gas and the oil, but this is what we wanted. Are natural disasters, earthquakes, and such God's doing? Or is it because we are building too much on Earth that wasn't intended to be?

We need to abandon the idea that anything bad is coming from God, or that God is purposely testing us. No, in my opinion, God takes what we do and says, "Let me reel this back in; let me work this for my good." How does he use a bad situation and turn it into something positive?

I've had many bad experiences. I've been through a lot in my life. Now, looking back, I realize that had I not gone through half of those experiences, I wouldn't be who I am today. I can relate to people dealing with similar challenges.

My first advice would be to remember the testimonies of people who have lived through hard times. From the beginning of time, many people in the Bible went through hardships. Like the man at the pool who was sick for 38 years, or the woman with the issue of blood for 12 years. We don't even want to deal with minor inconveniences for a few days. We often think hardships are reserved for others, not us. People may think, "Yes, they made it through with God's help, but it's not supposed to happen to me." Life will always have challenges. Parents want to protect their children, but children will face hardships. It's a part of life. God has told us that every person will die, yet we act surprised when it happens. We've been told we'll face challenges. Yet, when we do, we ask, "Why me?" Jesus faced challenges and even asked God if there was another way, but ultimately said, "Not my will, but Your will be done." Can we say the same?

God's plan is to restore us to his original plan of eternity and goodness through salvation by Jesus. The future promises a beautiful end of everlasting life with God. But because it's a lifelong journey, we often don't want the pain that comes with it. We only want the good parts. What do we do when God says a situation won't change? Do we still have faith? Do we still trust him? Jeremiah 20:11 is my favorite scripture. I have it tattooed on my wrist. Not for the highs of my life, but for times of doubt. When I can look down and remind myself that even when I don't understand God's plan, I trust that he does. Jeremiah said things might not be okay right away, but we can have peace knowing God is with us. So, when I'm in despair and reflect on this, I know that God hasn't forgotten me. Even if things don't improve immediately, it doesn't mean he doesn't love me or isn't listening to my prayers. Jeremiah also said that if we seek God with our whole heart, we will find him. So, in times of confusion, instead of complaining, why don't we seek God and ask, "What do you want from me in this situation?"

How do I still find peace in this? How can I plant gardens and have children in this world? That's what God was saying. Even though your circumstances might not change, you can still plant gardens and live life. That's what life is truly about. It won't change until Jesus returns. Many of us have this idea that life is supposed to be perpetually good, but what really defines "good"?

Brittany is always so upbeat. In the mornings, she greets with such cheeriness, saying "good morning." And my response is often less enthusiastic. I see checks from work, already indicating people who aren't going to be punctual. It's not necessarily a "good" morning in that regard. Brittany wonders why I can't just say "good morning." But everything doesn't have to

be good. Sometimes, it's not good, yet I'm okay. We often oversimplify by saying things are either good or bad, happy or sad. We forget about the in-between states.

I might say, "I'm okay." I don't always have to be "good" or "bad." I believe that's why many of us don't grasp the depth of the stories we carry. I might be experiencing challenges right now, but when others see me, they might think, "Oh, her life is good." They might not know about the struggles, but I choose to trust that God has me covered. I won't wallow in negativity, knowing he's with me. Yet because others aren't aware of this, they may not grasp that there are ways to navigate life even amidst challenges. It's vital that we communicate to each other. Instead of always saying, "Yeah, I'm good, blessed, and highly favored," it's okay to admit when we're not okay.

Not everyone feels close to spiritual beliefs all the time. It's perfectly fine to admit that we're not always okay. We must move away from the idea that life should always be good. If I have a bad day and it affects how I interact with you, it shows how narrowly we focus on the idea of a "good day." Such a minor altercation can send us spiraling. But that's life. We need to be prepared. For instance, I won't buy a car and pretend it'll never need gas, oil changes, or tire replacements. Yet, when I woke up one morning a few weeks ago and found my battery dead, I didn't immediately attribute it to some external force or "the devil being busy." It's just life; batteries eventually die. But because I prepare for unforeseen events, I was able to handle it. If we plan ahead, unexpected challenges don't impact us as significantly. It's all about preparation.

Every moment I spend with someone, I cherish it as if it could be the last. Because the truth is, tomorrow is uncertain. And if we don't live today like it's precious, we might find ourselves filled with regret later on. Many don't plan for the unexpected, assuming it won't happen to them. This lack of foresight can lead to challenges, like being caught in a storm unprepared. However, if we understand and prepare for life's ups and downs, we can navigate them better, knowing that God is with us every step of the way.

I received a puzzle for Christmas. Anyone who knows me understands how much I love puzzles. This particular one was based on my favorite scripture. When I looked at it, I realized it's symbolic of God's plans for us. He provides a picture, showing us the end result, and we get excited about completing it. But when we start and open the box, faced with the myriad pieces to assemble, it becomes clear: this is life.

This is like a box of pieces that you're supposed to put together. You might think, "I don't even know where to start." I like to begin with the borders. To me, it indicates what's not part of the plan. If I put my borders up, anything outside isn't part of my plan. However, the kids once told

me – Matt, in particular, said, "You know what, in my family, if I start with the borders, it means we cheat." So, if you don't want to start with the borders, that's your choice.

But in life, sometimes we sit there and observe, "That piece doesn't fit." At times, life is just us trying to piece things together, thinking they don't match. But, I won't discard a piece, because eventually, it's going to fit, just not right now. I'll try another piece until things start to align, making me think, "Hey, I might be headed in the right direction." I haven't gotten far, but I'm closer than I was before. Sometimes you have friends like Kev and Erica who help. They might pull some puzzle pieces together. They're the only people I know who, once they start pulling, will stick around to finish with me. God brings such individuals into our lives to sit and assist in piecing our life together.

Pastor Tracy has a favorite verse which says "Everything we could ever need for life and godliness has already been deposited by His Divine power." Every piece that I need to assemble this puzzle is in this box. God isn't playing a game, hiding pieces to make our lives challenging. All you need is present. The question is, are you willing to put in the work?

Many claim they want to assemble a puzzle with me, but after a mere five minutes, they leave. We all want to see the completed image, but many don't want to put in the effort. Some puzzles I work on are so large that I must lay them out on the floor, and it's painful. But I persist because it's what I enjoy, regardless of the challenges. I'm dedicated because I believe God has equipped me for this. However, many of us don't want to endure any hardship; we simply want the rewards.

Consider Joseph: if God had informed him he'd be king but would spend two years in jail, would he have accepted? Yet, those two years led him to fulfill prophecies, guiding him to his destiny. Similarly, if David knew he'd spend 13 years evading Saul, would he have endured it for a kingdom? Often, we seek rewards without wanting to face the challenges. However, God has already provided us with everything we need. It's just a matter of facing these hardships.

Here's some advice: be cautious of individuals like Brighton, who appear when you're close to finishing, wanting to place the final piece and then claim credit. Watch out for those who only join in during the good times, wanting recognition without contributing to the hard work. When things seem easy and the future is clear, they'll jump onboard. It's essential to recognize such people.

However, not everyone seeks to join the party. There are those who might merely observe and offer encouragement. Just because someone isn't actively participating doesn't mean they can't support and cheer you on. The motivation from others, like Kev asking, "Are you almost

done?", can be the push needed to continue working through challenges. It's heartening to know there are people cheering for us as we navigate life's puzzles.

God has a purpose, plan, and destiny for each of us. Trust in Him, even if you disagree with the plan. Seek Him wholeheartedly and acknowledge Him in everything you do, and He will guide you. Dismiss the falsehoods and accept life's truths. Despite our human flaws causing division, those who choose God have hope for a future filled with peace, love, and eternal life with Christ. Even in challenging times, remember that God is with us, for us, and is a promise-keeper. That promise will be fulfilled, and we will ultimately witness the glorious end He has prepared for us – an everlasting bond with Him through Christ. Amen.

I had the pleasure of reading this poem last week. It was very inspiring to me because it showcases witnesses and what I heard of people telling their testimonies. These are stories of how when life gives us challenges, God can turn these situations into blessings. One of my very own, Sarah, wrote this spoken word. It resonated so much with my message that I asked her to share it today. This came out of a challenging situation and touched me deeply. I pray that it touches you too. Because that's what God can do. He can make beauty from ashes.

Sarah Kacala:

They say "let go, and let God"
But what does that really mean?
When you're staring into your darkest moments;
when you're tearing limb by limb, at the seams?
When all you can see, is the light you don't have.
When joy is illusive, and happiness doesn't last.
Who and where is God, in the midst of all of that?
When your innocence has been stolen, and you haven't been allowed to fight back.
Let go and let God; they continue to say.
But you are the one, inside your body every day.
You are living proof, that a soul that's been abused, can rise up, and out of the grave.
But the depth of this healing has the greatest of costs; so much more, than you can afford to pay.
Over and over and over again, around in a circle you spin.
You vow to yourself, to live in silence forever; never again, to let anyone in.
You put up your walls so high off the ground, that no one will be able to see.
They won't catch a glimpse of the shell of a person your trauma has taught you to be.
You shut them all out, as you shrink yourself down; as you curl into the smallest of spaces.
And nothing can bring you the peace that you crave. It doesn't matter what you do; you can't erase this.

The damage cannot be eradicated. It can't be snuffed out, or undone.
And deep down you feel it; the truth is so dark; the reality of who you've become.
You stare at your mirror, but you don't know yourself.
You still see the shadow of somebody else;
of a child who's abandoned, afraid and alone. She never feels safe, or seen, or loved.
She's never felt like she had a home.
Until one day, He came knocking. He knocked gently, on her door.
She opened the gate, her eyes filled with hate. She didn't know how to do this anymore.
She let Him inside, as a last resort. He gently sat down beside her. He cradled her close, in
his arms.
He told her how deeply He loved her, and how He wished He could have kept her from harm.
She had shut herself completely off from the world.
Just the frail and feeble body, of a tattered little girl.
With tears in her eyes, she grabbed on tight. She held on so tightly, to Him.
He told her that healing was possible, but she didn't know where to begin.
He took her on a journey; a painful one at best.
She came to a place, where she had to lay it down. She was exhausted, with nothing left.
She was all poured out, with nothing left to give.
And every time she felt this way, He met her in the midst of it.
He held her so tight, through all those sleepless nights.
He gave her safety, in the midst of her pain.
He met her in the dark, and made a home inside her heart,
and she knew that things would never be the same.
As she got to know Him more and more, the deeper her love for Him grew.
She danced in the darkness, completely unafraid. He had strengthened her, and made her
new.
He drew her closer every day. He showed her the depth of His love.
He told her over and over again, that she was more than enough.
And one day, she finally woke up.
She saw the reality of the pain in her life; how it defined her, for far too long.
He wanted to place so many dreams in her heart. He wanted to breathe His life into her.
He wanted to give her a new song.
Now she holds joy in her heart, in the middle of pain. She laughs at the devil. She dances, in
the rain.
She knows who she belongs to; she knows that will never change.
He came and He died, to rescue her soul.
He called her out, by name.
He won her heart, with His kindness. He captivated her soul, with His love.
And nothing can ever separate them. No force beneath the surface, or above.
I stand here amazed, at what He has done;

How his love has transformed me, from the ground up.
He built back my temple, just as it should be.
Now we dance through the darkness; just Him, and me.
His hands are open to all of us. We need not look too far, to feel His love.
He wants us to choose Him, when push finally comes to shove.
We are His children. He breathes life, into our lungs.
“Let go and let God,” is what they say. I have to let go of it every day.
I have to die to the trauma inside me.
I can't let it get in my way. I have my Heavenly Father beside me. I will listen to what He has to say.
Every day I wake up, is a blessing; as I touch my feet to the floor.
I will live my life professing His goodness. For I am not a victim, anymore.

Sandra Anderson:

I want us to take this moment. I'm going to ask you to do something that might be uncomfortable. I believe in coming up to the altar. I used to think that if you approached the altar, people would assume something was wrong with you. I was afraid to let people know I was struggling. But today, when I approached the altar, I felt God's presence in unique ways. It was like having a song sung over me. I needed to be reminded that I was chosen, that I am enough, and that I've been called for such a time as this to speak before you.

Sometimes in relationships, it feels like you're always chasing someone. And then you wonder, when will someone chase me? God is always chasing us, always pursuing us with goodness and mercy. Can we take a step towards him? Because I believe he desires us just as much as we long for him. I'm not here to bring doom and gloom or make empty promises. But I can tell you the good news: if you seek him, you'll find him because he's already there. If you're going through life feeling forgotten, betrayed, or questioning God's plan for you, know that he has a great plan in store. And if you want to experience his presence, know that he's with you. Step out in faith, and I believe you'll feel his presence, gaining everything you need to continue on your journey. Amen.