

# A Plan For Hope

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good morning and welcome to church. I don't know if you noticed this, but we're still doing church. It is a beautiful day in the neighborhood, even if it's only beautiful inside. And we are so glad that you are with us in this way. I am Pastor Kathy Halstengel, and I am on my second Sunday.

How time flies. Here we are. People look at the building and they look at the doors out there, and it says the building is closed. But you know what it doesn't say? It doesn't say that the church is closed, because we are still being the church. We are still being the church in more ways than you can imagine. And I have an announcement for you, because we are still going to do Vacation Bible School. You might have thought, well, how can we possibly do that? Well, we are. The plans are underway to carry on with a virtual Vacation Bible School, and you will get all kinds of information about that. But look forward to the first week in August, when we will be rolling out the music and the fun and all of the joys of Vacation Bible School. Parents, put your seatbelt on, because you'll be a part of us making sure that this happens for our children. It is a great day to be alive, because as you'll learn from me, when you're sitting here, I'll be looking at you and I will say, wait, there's nobody dead here. There's nobody dead in here. So we are called to be alive and to join together in the worship of God. And we're going to start that by reminding ourselves that this day, whatever this day brings, this is the day that the Lord has made.

This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made. Let us pray. Holy God, we gather together in whatever form, from wherever we are with one spirit, your spirit, Lord, in unity to praise your holy name. We pray that at this time, in this moment, that we will experience you powerfully, that you will be glorified by everything that we do, and that you will be blessed in this time of worship and praise.

In Jesus's holy name we pray. Amen. Amen. Now I'd like to invite you all to stand, if you're able, as we sing together, My Hope is Built. My Hope is Built of Nothing Less Than Jesus' Love and Righteousness.

[ 3 : 3 0 ] I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand, All other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness fills His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace. In every high and stormy gale, My hope is built of nothing less than Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand, All other ground is sinking sand.

His holy covenant is brought, Support me in the whelming flood, When all around my soul is sinking sand. When all around my soul gives way, When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.

On Christ the solid rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand.

The Lord be with you. And also with you. Please be seated. Welcome. We're just so thankful that you are here joining us together in worship from wherever you are.

[ 5 : 09 ] And so we'd like to encourage all of you, if you haven't done so already, to fill out your friendship card. And with that, if you're part of our church community already, just put your name on there.

But we just want to know that you're here with us. We can celebrate that we are still unified as a body of Christ, even though we're in separate places. And if you're not part of our church community yet, we'd love to have you fill out the friendship card.

And there's a place there for you to give all of your contact information so we can get connected. There's also a place on the friendship card for blessings. So we can proclaim the wonderful things that God is doing in all of our lives.

And it builds faith to be able to hear what God is doing, the wonderful blessings, the abundance of goodness that God is giving to all of us.

And so we can proclaim that. And those blessings are projected in next week's worship service. And then there's also a section on the friendship card for prayer concerns.

[ 6 : 09 ] We are a church that knows that prayer is powerful. And we cover those concerns with prayer. And we want to make sure they're lifted up. So if you have concerns on your heart, put that on the friendship card.

And that is given out to a prayer team and to the pastors. And we are just covering that in prayer. This morning or evening or whenever you happen to be watching with us, we encourage you to have your whole family with you if you have others in the household.

Especially children. There's a section of Junior Church within this whole worship service. And there's also a children's bulletin available if you'd like to download that and they can color through the whole thing.

But we encourage families to be able to worship together. We also want to encourage discipleship in this time because we want to continue to grow in our faith.

And so if you're on Facebook, we encourage you to go to PCUMC Fellowship Group and join in. It's a large faith community. Lots of people joining together to have music and devotion and prayer.

[ 7 : 14 ] And they're supporting and encouraging one another. And it's become a real beautiful thing. We're also working on developing small groups because it's wonderful to be part of the big group.

But we also want to have the intimacy where we can really have open hearts with one another and grow in our faith doing life together. And so if you're interested in joining a small group, let the church know.

And we want to get right on that. We also want to take this time to reflect on just how good God is. Because God has blessed you.

God has blessed me. And so we give back out of our abundance from what God has already blessed us with. And we take this opportunity to have an offering.

An offering of faith. An offering of commitment. And we take this time to reflect on just how good God is. And our offertory piece this morning will be from Susan Wisseowicz.

[ 8 : 17 ] And we'll see you next time. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[ 10 : 56 ] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And Lord, we dedicate these gifts of tithes and offerings to be used for your glory and for your kingdom.

Lord, we open our hearts up to you. We open our hearts to blessings. And Lord, we pray that you would fill us today with your glory and your blessings. Bless this church.

Bless this community. And Lord, I just pray this in Christ's name we pray. Amen. Good morning, everybody.

Do you remember me? Maybe you're just watching for the first time since I got here. My name is Pastor Kathy, and I am one of the new pastors for Pendleton Center and Niagara Falls.

[ 12 : 18 ] And I'm so excited to be here. I learned from Pastor Lisa that one of the things that you know that I didn't know how to do before was that we know that with God's love in our hearts, we can love everybody.

So God's love is here in our heart. And that helps us to love people. Last week, I asked people to remember that Jesus loves me, Jesus loves you, and you are just the way you're supposed to be.

That God wants you to share love, to be loved, and also to feel safe and to know that Jesus is with you all the time.

We also talked about a song. I talked about a song that maybe you know, that I know. We might know different motions to it, and it's called Jesus Loves Me.

Do you know that song? Well, here's how I know the motions. Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me.

[ 13 : 36 ] This I know. For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong. They are weak, but he is strong.

Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me.

The Bible tells me so. And I have my Bible right here. And I was reading in the Bible from Jeremiah.

Do you know anybody named Jeremiah? I know that there are kids named Jeremiah and grownups. But there's a book in the Bible called Jeremiah. And one of the things it says in chapter 29, verse 11, is that God has a plan for us.

God has a plan for you and a plan for me. And the plan is for good. Do you hear that? The plan isn't for bad.

[ 14 : 42 ] The plan is for good. So that means that God wants something good for you. God wants something good for me. Not good like candy and dessert and video games or whatever it is that you like that special treat.

That's not the kind of good plan that God has for us. God has a plan for us to grow strong and healthy. To know how much we're loved and not forget it.

And God has a plan for us to do good. We talked a little bit about that last week. Telling other people that Jesus loves them.

Doing nice things for other people. And also sometimes just saying, I know that God loves me. I know that God sent Jesus so I could have that love in my heart.

Sometimes those are the things that we do. Well, I said last week that I just moved here. And I got all the suitcases empty. My pillow is on my bed.

[ 15 : 53 ] The clothes are hung up. They're not in the dressers yet because I have to wash the dressers and then I'll get the clothes put away. So I'm working on it. So one of the things I thought, I imagined that when I came here that I might plant something.

You know, I've got dirt and I thought, well, I could get seeds and I could plant some things. But then I looked at the calendar. I looked at the calendar and I saw it's already July.

And it's hot. And there hasn't been enough rain. Maybe this isn't a good time to plant something. Maybe next year. But still, God wants for us to be like a plant.

And I have a beautiful big one right here that somebody else planted. And it's got flowers. And it's growing. And the flowers are coming out more and more.

Somebody planted that, though. It started out with just dirt. And then somebody grew the plants. And they came up out of the dirt. And they grew into something beautiful.

[ 17 : 12 ] And then they put all these different kinds of plants together in this pot. And there it is. So do you think that God wants it to be taken care of?

Have you noticed how hot it is? And it's been a while since it rained. So God's plan is for good. And God wants this plant to grow and get bigger and stronger.

But what am I supposed to do? Should I tell the plant, Jesus loves you? Should I tell the plant that God loves me so I can love everybody?

Maybe some plants like to be talked to. But let's think about that. Maybe the plan that God has for us, for you and me, that's good, is to get some water and feed the plant.

To help it to stay cool and a little wet. Not a lot wet, but a little wet so that it doesn't get all dried out and something bad happens. That's what God wants for us.

[ 18 : 27 ] God doesn't want bad things to happen to us. God never wants bad things to happen to us. God wants us to know that God is with us all the time.

That God loves us even when bad things happen. Because sometimes they do. Sometimes plants die. Sometimes one of our fish or one of our pets die.

And we're so sad. I had a dog that died a few years ago. And it made me cry because I was so sad. And then sometimes people die.

They get sick. And we are so, so sad. But God wants us to always know that we're loved.

To know that even when we're sad. Even when there's not enough rain and it's so hot. God wants us to have a safe and a good life.

[ 19 : 32 ] God wants to water us. Oh wait. I just watered the plants and I got all wet. Do you think that's what God meant? I don't think so. I think what God meant is that there would be people like me and like you in this world together.

To remind each other. Don't forget you're loved. Don't forget that God wants good things for you. Not good things like lots of money and toys and fancy cars.

It's not that those are bad things. But what God wants for you is to be healthy and strong. To feel loved. To be smart and learn things.

To grow and to figure things out. When we're little, God wants us to learn how to crawl and walk. Some people it takes a long time and that's okay.

Some people are in chairs. Have you seen them? They're wheelchairs. Sometimes that's the best that they can do. And that's okay. God still wants them to be strong.

[ 20 : 40 ] God still wants them to be healthy. Because God wants good things for us. God wants us to sing and dance. I'm not a very good dancer, but I do like to sing.

God wants the earth to be taken care of. God told us that's our job. Pick up the trash. Recycle.

Do good things for the earth. God wants us to take good care of each other. To not say bad things about each other.

To not think that because someone's different from us, that they're not as good. God made us. Because God made everybody.

No matter our size. No matter how well we walk or talk. No matter how strong or fast we are. God made us. No matter whether the color of my skin is white or pink or a little tan.

[ 21 : 48 ] Or yours might be really white because you've stayed out of the sun. Or yours might be really dark brown. Even black looking.

Or kind of dark tan. But that's the way you always are. Because that's how your skin is made. God made us all.

God made us all. And God loves you just the way that you are. And that helps us love other people just the way they are. Even if it's hard.

Sometimes it is hard. So I want you to remember that Jesus loves me.

This I do know. Because the Bible tells me so. And God has a plan for your life.

[ 22 : 44 ] And it's good. It's good. God's plan for your life is good. So don't ever forget that. Don't ever forget that. And because God's plan for our life is good.

Then we can have hope. Hope. Hope. Is when we believe that good things will come. Hope. Is when we believe that even when we make mistakes.

Even when I get all wet watering the plants. Or maybe I forget to water a plant. I still believe. That I can try to make it better. And I can always believe that no matter what I do.

God will never leave me. God will always love me. And so I hope that you will remember that this week.

And maybe what you can practice this week is not only saying those words. I know that Jesus loves me.

[ 23 : 48 ] And I can love everybody. But also I know that God is good. There's something we say sometimes and I want to try it with you.

I say God is good and you say all the time. Then you say all the time and I say God is good. Let's try that.

God is good and you say all the time. And then you say again all the time God is good. Or I say God is good you say all the time and I say God is good and you say all the time.

It doesn't matter how you say it. God is good all the time. Let's pray. Do you remember this is me this is God nothing in between.

Dear God help us to know how loved we are. Help us to know that we can love other people.

[ 24 : 54 ] We can love plants and animals and the earth. And we surely can love everyone even if they're different. Thank you for making us all God.

Thank you for loving us so that we can have your love in our heart. Amen. Thanks for being with me. I will see you next week.

Take care. The world is searching for an answer A ray of hope in a hopeless world Who can we turn to?

Where is our rescue? There is someone He's the answer He's the light and He'll light the way His name is Jesus He's the light He's the light He's the light light light light of the world And He shines shines shines all over the earth Shining bright bright bright He is the light of the world He is the light light light light of the world And He shines shines shines all over the earth shining bright bright bright bright He is the light of the world He is the light He is the light He is the light He's the light He's the light

He's the light And He'll light the way Who can we turn to? Where is our rescue?

[ 26 : 54 ] There is someone, He's the answer He's the light and He'll light the way His name is Jesus And He came to save us He is the light, light, light He's the light of the world And He shines, shines, shines All over the earth Shining bright, bright, bright He is the light of the world He is the light, light, light He's the light of the world And He shines, shines, shines All over the earth Shining bright, bright, bright He is the light of the world Oh, oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh, oh

Oh, oh, oh He is the light, light, light Light of the world And he shines, shines, shines All over the earth Shining bright, bright, bright He is the light of the world Good morning, friends.

It is a joy to be with you as always. And as we come to our time of prayer, I wanted to share a prompt for you to think about as you go into your prayer time this week. One of our scriptures comes from the book of Jeremiah.

And I'd like you to hear from Jeremiah 29, 11. To help you as you think about your conversations with God over the next few days. Where it reads in verse 11, I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord.

They are plans for peace, not disaster. To give you a future filled with hope. And as you come to your time of prayer, I would encourage you to ask God to strengthen you as we move into that hope.

[ 29 : 12 ] One of the things we're talking about today is uncertainty. One of the things we're talking about today is looking towards a time where we're not sure what's going to happen. And so as we move to that future, to stay hopeful and to be encouraged and to be strengthened as we follow where God is leading.

So as we come to that time of prayer, I would ask you to think about those things and talk about that with God to see what God might reveal in your prayer time together.

I'd also like to share that one of our beloved members, Audrey Albert, has passed away. And we want to be in prayer for all those who are feeling her loss, especially closely today.

And to be in prayer that they will feel God's comfort and feel God's healing as they move forward during this time of grief. So with that in mind, let's come to a time of prayer together.

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the ways in which you continue to move and work among us. There is so much for which we must come with attitudes of thanks.

[ 30 : 23 ] We know that every sunrise, every step, every breath, every loving hello from a friend, every opportunity to be kind, every day we get to see, and all the times we get to smile are all gifts and graces from you.

We come also grateful that we know the joy of what it means to have been forgiven for our sins and for our transgressions. We thank you for the gift that is your presence in the Holy Spirit with and among us.

Lord, as we come, there is so much that would seek to overwhelm us. So much when we look out with our earthly eyes, it can be ways in which our hearts can break or be worn down.

But as your people, we can come knowing that you are still with us, that you are still at work. And no matter how it looks from our perspective, you are still in control.

So Lord, as we come today, we are thankful that you are who you always promised you would be. That you have never let us down.

[ 31 : 38 ] You may have made different decisions, but you have never let us down. And so help us to see how you are moving. Help us to see how you are working.

And even when it's not clear in our hearts and minds, even when the way seems too steep or too rocky or too hard, let us remember these words, that your plans for us are good, that you have a future filled with hope in store.

Lord, we come today also mindful of all the challenges that we see facing, not only our church, but our world.

We pray for all of those who are struggling with COVID-19. Those who are facing serious health problems of any kind. But as we as a people continue to wrestle with this pandemic, we are seeking your hand in extraordinary ways.

That those who are struggling might be able to see that healing. That those who are far into deep, hard battles with the disease will know your presence and your comfort.

[ 33 : 18 ] That those who are on the front lines providing care will be strengthened, will be encouraged, will have your wisdom to guide them as they continue to make the best decisions possible.

We pray for all our first responders as they continue to put themselves in harm's way. And Lord, we pray for those who are struggling and have needs of any kind because of the economic struggles that are facing so many of us all.

Lord, we pray for those who are struggling and have needs of us all. Lord, we also pray that as we see an awakening and a movement towards justice around so many different ways in our society, that we will continue to be indeed the people of love and grace that model Jesus.

Let us listen to one another. Let us continue to work towards what we know to be true and right and create fairness across this great way of living together in community that you seek.

Lord, it can be struggle. Lord, it can be hard. But best of all, we know that you are with us. And for those who do not understand.

[ 34 : 31 ] For those who do not know you. Let your people be willing to tell your story. Let your people be willing to walk as an example of what strength and love and encouragement can be to this broken, hurting, and sinful world.

Lord, as we come, we are mindful of those who are missing Audrey today. We pray a special prayer over those hearts as they need your special healing.

As she has gone on to receive the gift which she was promised. And Lord, for all things that are not known and have not been spoken.

We seek your will. We seek your face. Help us to understand how you are moving and what you are doing. And to trust even if we do not understand.

All this we ask in the mighty and loving name of Jesus. The one who makes all things possible. Amen. Thank you.

[ 36 : 12 ] Today's scripture is from Jeremiah chapter 29 verses 10 through 14 and Romans chapter 8 verses 18 through 28.

The Lord proclaims, when Babylon's 70 years are up, I will come and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord.

They are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope. When you call me and come and pray to me, I will listen to you.

When you search for me, yes, search for me with all your heart, you will find me. I will be present for you, declares the Lord, and I will end your captivity.

I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have scattered you, and I will bring you home after your long exile, declares the Lord. I believe that the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory that is going to be revealed to us.

[ 37 : 24 ] The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God's sons and daughters. Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice.

It was the choice of the one who subjected it, but in the hope that the creation itself will be set free from slavery to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God's children.

We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. And it's not only the creation.

We ourselves, who have the spirit as the first crop of the harvest, also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free.

We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see? But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it with patience.

[ 38 : 31 ] In the same way, the spirit comes to help with our weakness. We don't know what we should pray, but the spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans.

The one who searches hearts knows how the spirit thinks, because he pleads for the saints, consistent with God's will.

We know that God works all things together for good, for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose. This is the word of our Lord.

Thanks be to God. Well, you just heard about the plan that God wants for us, which is for good. And my question to start with is, do you love plans?

Are you the kind of person that loves making plans, making a checklist? Do you like to follow the plan? Do you like to read the plan? Are you the kind of person who reads the entire instruction manual before you start putting something together?

[ 39 : 34 ] Well, I can tell you right now, if you want to know something about me, is that I usually reference the manual when it doesn't go together the way I thought it should, or when it doesn't work.

That's kind of my use of instruction manuals. But we all do it differently. And then the other question is, what do you do when the plan doesn't go the way it's supposed to go?

What do you do when the plan falls apart or something gets in front of it? Well, we're going to look at the scripture this morning and see what God has to say to us.

But first, let me tell you a story. When our children were little, old enough to talk and walk and do those kinds of things, but young enough to be impressionable, my husband Matt would tell them that we had a parent book.

We did. That's what he would tell them. We have a parent book. And it's the manual that parents get when they have a child. And it had all the answers, all the right answers, all the right things to say, all the right things to instruct, all the right things to share with children.

[ 40 : 44 ] They wanted to see it. And Matt would say, oh, no. Oh, no. You can't see it. Only when you have children will you be able to see the parent book. And then you'll be able to see that that's how it works.

And so that was fun. And there was a lot of teasing. And it was mostly lighthearted. But time went on. And we stopped talking about the book.

And you realize, if only there had been such a book. That moment when somebody puts a baby in your arms or when you drive away from the hospital or someplace where you receive a child and you realize it's all you, it's all your responsibility, the safety and well-being of this child.



And you think about, where's the book? Where's the instruction manual? Where's the instruction manual for this age and this age and this age and this age? And you wonder, I wondered, how am I supposed to do this?

God, what's your plan for me as a mother, as parents, as a child, as a wife, as a daughter, as a pastor, or a pastor during COVID?

[ 42 : 01 ] Where is the instruction manual? I have an email address. God, I'd be happy for you to send it. As people of faith, we talk a lot about God's plan for our lives.

And in fact, Jeremiah 29, 11 is probably right up there in terms of popularity. And you'll find it in so many places, almost like John 3, 16.

Why? Why would that be the case? Well, the scripture readings this morning tell us about God's plans for us. And we want it to be good.

We want it to be good. Jeremiah is a messenger of God's word. And God uses Jeremiah to tell the people of Israel who, listen, have been exiled.

They are in Babylon. They are slaves in Babylon. And Jeremiah is to tell the people of Israel as the voice of God to say that in 70 more years, they will be free.

[ 43 : 05 ] And to have peace. 70 more years of slavery and to have peace where they are.

And that the plan would be for good. Can you imagine putting all that together? In Romans, we hear Paul speaking of the groaning of all creation, recognizing and speaking out loud that people of faith will encounter difficult times.

When we become people of faith, we don't get an exemption for all the things that can go wrong in this life as much as we'd like that to be the case.

And we hear in Romans, God will be with us. And God will pray when we don't even have a single word to offer.

God will groan with us. And again, God invites us to be people of hope. So let's look a little deeper. And we'll start with Jeremiah. If you really want to understand Jeremiah 29, read the whole chapter.

[ 44 : 10 ] Then you will get the bigger picture of what was going on. Was that little verse really all that God wanted us to hear? How can we apply it to our lives?

Well, let's look at the bigger picture. During this time, the Israelites are living, as I said, in captivity in Babylon. They are slaves. And it's important to hear that this word of God was addressed to people in slavery, to a whole group of people in slavery, not just one person.

In this time of captivity, there were false prophets going around, and they were proclaiming that God was very soon going to liberate the people of Israel.

Soon. And God in Jeremiah 29 is saying no. No. No. They are false prophets. And he is telling his people that they're going to have to wait 70 more years.

And so twice I say that because I want you to hear the impact. God asked the people of faith to wait longer than they thought would be possible.

[ 45 : 22 ] In Romans 23, we read that we are not left alone in our waiting and struggle. For the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Even though we don't know how or what to pray, the Spirit intercedes for us with inarticulate groans.

The NRSV translation says, With sighs too deep for words. Those places when it hurts so much that we don't even have words to say.

And Romans 8, we read that it doesn't matter if we don't know what to say. Because the Holy Spirit will pray for us.

The Holy Spirit will pray. All of creation will groan alongside of us. The Spirit intercedes for us and with us according to the will of God.

Our grasp of God's will, and I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but the reality is, is that what we know of God's will is so often so limited.

[ 46 : 27 ] We sometimes can't see it beyond the door or beyond the steps or beyond what we know for this very day. Sometimes all we know is the next right thing.

And I'm really excited when I know the next right thing. Because the reality is, is that sometimes we're called upon to pray and believe for a future that we can't even see.

And we surely can't imagine it. And the Spirit gives voice to what we cannot articulate, but we hope and long for in our innermost selves, in our communities, in our families, and in our church.

So God's message is hope and plan for good for those who are in captivity. And we hear in Romans that the Spirit groans on our behalf, praying when we don't have words, the message that we can, we can be people of hope.

Do you hear the groaning? Do you hear the groaning of all people and all God's people and all of God's creation?

[ 47 : 36 ] Does it feel as though maybe we are living in a season of captivity? You see, you and I, we know what captivity feels like.

We know even without COVID, without the cruelty of racial injustice, we know what captivity feels like because we've been there.

Who among us hasn't watched helplessly while someone we love becomes desperately ill? Who among us hasn't prayed desperately for that parent book I was talking about?

To help us to know, what do we do? How do we know what to do with our children? Maybe not even my child or your child, but maybe a child of our community.

How do we know what to do? And it feels like we're trapped. Who among us have not been held captive by what somebody else thinks of us, but by what someone decides we are without any input from us?

[ 48 : 44 ] How many of us do not know seasons of captivity when we ourselves forget? We forget who we are.

We forget where we came from. We forget the faith that has given us this foundation of telling us who we are. More than ever, we are living in a time that feels like captivity.

In our homes, outside of our sanctuaries, jobs changed or sometimes gone, and everyone's feelings of frustration and loss and anger and feelings of not being heard are finding their ways even more than ever, from inside to outside.

People are angry about wearing a mask. People are angry about not wearing a mask. But what's really going on? Have you heard the phrase, hurting people hurt people?

We might ask ourselves, why are people being so aggressive about so many things? Why would a person in a store become physically and verbally abusive to a store employee who simply is asking them to mind the rules about distance and masks?

[ 50 : 09 ] Let me be clear, that behavior is not okay. It's not appropriate. And I think we probably all agree about that. But let's talk about what is going on.

Where does that behavior come from? Think about the Israelites Jeremiah is talking to. They've lost their homeland. Many have lost their families.

They are being treated in ways that we, you and I, we can't even imagine. They were desperate for hope, desperate to believe that they had something, anything to look forward to beyond the slavery.

So for some, 70 years, at least it was something. God did not beam them out of their suffering. We often say among my family that when things are tough and you don't want to do it anymore, you say, beam me up, Scotty.

Some of you will understand where that comes from and some of you won't. But it means, get me out of here. And God did not do that. God offered a word of hope.

[ 51 : 13 ] God called them his own. God told them he did not want disaster or harm for them. Without hope, without a sense of future and purpose, we all flail about.

Some of us might not do it with our arms or with our words. We sometimes lash out, not because we're bad people, but because we've lost our place.

We've lost our sense of, where am I standing right now? Nothing is the same as it used to be. Who am I? When things aren't the way they're supposed to be, when we don't have a sense of what God's plan is for our lives, or we don't see the path ahead, when it feels like sometimes we really are at that place beyond where the sidewalk ends, we get into a place of anxiety and we start demanding that things change.

We start asking for things that might not be what we would ask for in a different day and time. And we sometimes forget that we are surrounded by people, however close or distant, that are feeling the same way.

Because, as you've heard from so many places, we have not done this before. We have not done a pandemic before. We have not been in a place where we've had to close the doors of our building other than for a snowstorm or some kind of an emergency.

[ 52 : 54 ] So how are we? Us in these two church communities. Here we are, and maybe it feels like what we need or want most desperately, it isn't available to us right now.

Maybe it feels like we've been exiled away from our community for a long time. With those doors closed, we might be angry and sad and frustrated.

Sad. Or we might feel like we're safer at home. Some people have said that they miss church activities and groups, but they're quite happy to be at home in their pajamas, watching church with their coffee or whatever they drink in the morning.

And good morning out there. The wilderness. The wilderness that the people of Israel were in.

The wilderness that Paul was preaching in, trying to get people to understand God and the saving grace of Jesus Christ. It's not new to our story.

[ 54 : 11 ] The people of Israel were in wilderness. Prophets were in the wilderness. John the Baptist was in the wilderness. Jesus went out into the wilderness. The blind, those with special needs, physical or mental, widows, lepers, and so on and so on, they were out in the wilderness because they weren't welcome to be a part of the community.

So what is the plan? Do you know what God's plan is for us, for our congregations? I'm pretty sure that God knows and we might be asking, so what is our path?

Personally and in a church and a community and a nation, what's our path out of the wilderness? There are a lot of things that we don't know.

A lot. And there are a lot of things that we do know. Here's some of what I bring to you this morning because we're going to be talking all summer based out of Jeremiah 29 11.

What is our future? And reminding ourselves that God's plan for our future is a future of hope. A plan for hope. Number one, the call for us is not that we suddenly go back to the things, way things were before this virus struck.

[ 55 : 38 ] The call for us is not that we pat down racial injustice or any form of violence and just tell it to be quiet. Just be quiet. Because together, we're called to find a new way to follow the call of God on our lives, whatever that might be, with open ears and open eyes and, my friends, with open hearts.

Number two, let's trust each other. We've just met. We've just met. And wait, we haven't met, so many of us.

But I think we're called to trust each other because you know a lot of things. And your neighbors know a lot of things. The church and the pastors around us down the road, they know a lot of things.

But sometimes, just like the people of Israel, we have to be okay with not having all of the answers all at once. Not today.

We don't always get to know everything. I'm sure there are people who think they know everything. And sure, okay. But the reality is, the Israelites and the people of Corinth and the people in our neighborhoods, in our state, in our county, we don't know everything.

[ 57 : 01 ] We bring what we do know. And I'm counting on you bringing what you do know. And I'm asking that we be willing to receive what each other knows.

And to believe. To be reminded. A, God's plan for us is for good. B, that while we are groaning in the waiting, God groans with us.

The Holy Spirit lifts us up when we don't even remember how to do it ourselves. C, that God has called every one of us to be both hearers of God's word and doers of God's word.

And D, know that God does not want us to be harmed. Not at all. I said when we began the service, we are not closed.

The doors are closed. The building is closed. But we are very much open and alive. People are caring and calling, feeding and praying, preaching and proclaiming, comforting and encouraging and managing the books and the mail and all of that.

[ 58 : 17 ] Just the building is closed. We're not stopping being the church. God knows it's not the same.

It's so much not the same. And there are so many things that are not the same. But our foundation, what we stand on, the bedrock of our faith and our purpose and our hope and faith and God who brought us Jesus Christ and made us known and helped us to experience the Holy Spirit, that doesn't change.

COVID doesn't affect that. I would like to challenge you this morning, tomorrow, throughout the week, read these passages.

Read the passage from Jeremiah and from Romans. Read them first as they are with the people of Jeremiah's time and the people of Corinth Paul is talking to.

Read them and try to imagine what those lives, what those people might have been going through. And then read it again. This time, I invite you to read it and look around your home, your life, our community, and see yourself in there.

[ 59 : 41 ] See where you are in that passage from Romans. See where you are when Jeremiah is telling the people the message from God.

Are you Jeremiah? I bet some of you are, being the voice of God's hope. Because we have a lot of encouragers and maybe that's you. Are you the one who can barely lift your head because life feels so lost and hopeless?

Are you the one saying, get out of my way. I am out of here and I know better. God, you're wrong and I'm going to get out of this slavery. I'm not waiting 70 years.

Frustrated and desperate. Are you the brave one? I think this is a lot of us. Are you the brave one?

Standing in the front, looking and appearing as though you are ready to go, but also hoping that nobody sees that maybe there's some of those feelings inside of you.

[ 60 : 49 ] Nervousness, chaos, family, job, all of those things. And yet there you are, standing ready and brave. When you can imagine that God's plan is for good, where is your place in it?

What is the call on your hands and feet, your lips in fulfilling the plan for good? Tell us. Let us know.

Email me. Call me. Let anyone you want to know. What do you think God's plan is for you that's for good? Because it's way more fun and it's way more fruitful when we're in this plan together.

I don't want to do it by myself. I want to do it with you. So as we can figure this out, it will be such a fruitful and God-given plan for us.

When you read the message in Romans, do you believe that even when you can't pray, the Holy Spirit will pray on your behalf? When I first became a person of faith and I was in a church, I didn't even know the words to the prayers.

[ 62 : 02 ] I thought you had to know the words. I thought the Lord's Prayer or some of the other prayers that people in the church said, I thought they all knew them. And they did know.

They knew the Lord's Prayer probably and some other things. And I felt so inadequate. Did I know that the Holy Spirit could pray on my behalf when I didn't have words?

When I felt like my life was in turmoil and trouble? Did I realize that God had sent the Spirit and was praying on my behalf?

Maybe not in the moment, but I sure figured it out. When you think that God can't possibly want you and what you've been called to do?

Or you feel that God has abandoned you because you haven't gotten what you thought was your plan in this life? Or you just hurt too much? Can you hear?

[ 63 : 02 ] Can you hear that you are not alone? Even if you're listening to this in your home and you are by yourself, you are not alone. And maybe you feel angry or hurt.

And I've told people in hospitals and homes and churches, it is okay to be angry. It's okay to be angry with God. Just read the Psalms. Psalm after Psalm after Psalm.

Where are you, God? What's the deal here? Why aren't you giving me what I'm asking for? Why aren't you giving me what I'm asking for?

We are overwhelmed and make too many decisions or can't make a single one. When we can't see the steps ahead that we thought we knew.

That we thought were the right steps and the right path. But they're not there anymore. We are not at our best. When we can't see because we've gotten beyond where that sidewalk ends, we often either move into overdrive and try to fix things and take on everything, or we simply shut down.

[ 64 : 41 ] I know there's a lot of middle. When I was surrounded day and night by COVID ICU patients, my supervisor would see when I was overwhelmed way before I saw it.

And he would encourage me and the others to recognize our overwhelm. Don't fix it. Don't say it's wrong.

Just recognize it. Go walk around this giant hospital. Go sit in the garden. Go sit in the chapel. Go sit. Go be.

And just be. And remember, that is not God's plan for you. The overdrive, the overwhelm, all of that. God's plan for you is to find the space and time to just breathe.

To not have everything right. To not have a plan for every little thing. And certainly not to have all the answers. Because sometimes when we name it, we give ourselves permission to just be.

[ 65 : 45 ] When I get overwhelmed, and this is what my supervisor saw, I lost things. And I don't lose things. But suddenly I was leaving my phone on the top of a paper towel dispenser, forgetting what was coming next.

Where was I supposed to be? It wasn't dementia. I was reassured. Just overwhelmed. It's not tragic and desperate, but it's telling me something.

God is telling me something. And I believe God is telling you something. God says to me, Kathy, I've got you. I've got you.

You do not have to do all these things by yourself. Because you've been appointed to the Pendleton Center United Methodist Church and Niagara Falls First United Methodist Church.

And they got people. We are not in this alone. I am not. Thank God. I don't have to be the church by myself. Thank God you don't have to do the church by yourself.

[ 66 : 48 ] I don't have to have all the answers. Thank you, God. I have you, and you have me, and we have each other. Remember that children's song? I am the church.

You are the church. We are the church together. It's the only way to do it. We will remind each other that God's plan for our congregation congregation is that we will be provided what we need to keep spreading the good news of Jesus Christ, to be the good news of Jesus Christ.

So read the passages. See yourself in the stories. See us in those passages. And believe and have hope.

Because that's what God's plan is for us. Let's pray. Wonderful God, convince us. Convince us to step back on the gas pedal and realize that you are with us, that we are with each other, that you will help us when we don't know what to do, and that you will guide all of the leaders of this church and all churches to find their way to being the church of Jesus Christ.

Not the same. Not the same. But new and bright and hopeful and together. We are together saved by Jesus Christ.

[ 68 : 30 ] Amen. Friends, I can preach the gospel and I can pray the gospel and I can believe with all my heart that this book tells us what to do and how to do.

But I fall short and I think we all do. Maybe just in little ways. So I'm inviting you to join with me.

We're going to pray a prayer of confession together and it's going to be on your screen so I invite you to just join with me in this prayer. Oh Lord, your ways are not our ways.

Your thoughts are not our thoughts. When we have prayed only for what was possible, and hoped only for what we could see. When we have taken your grace for granted and expected instant answers to immediate requests.

When we have allowed waiting on your spirit to slip into lethargy and waited on the kingdom to be replaced by apathy.

[ 69 : 37 ] When we have borne false witness against one another and clouded it with claims of righteous indignation. When we have thought only of ourselves waiting on you and never pondered how you wait on us.

Keep holding us and forgiving us. Keep guiding us and teaching us. Hear these true and heartfelt words as the words of God.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. Gloria be to God. Amen. All this pain I wonder if I'll ever find my way I wonder if my life could really change at all All this earth Could all that is lost ever be found

Could have gotten common from this ground Now all You make beautiful things You make beautiful things You make beautiful things Out of us All the ground Hope is springing up from this old ground Out of chaos Out of chaos Life is being bound With you You make beautiful things

You make beautiful things Out of dust You make beautiful things You make beautiful things You make beautiful things Out of us Out of us You make beautiful things You make beautiful things You make beautiful things You make me new, you are making me new You make me new, you are making me new You make me new, you are making me new

[ 73 : 14 ] You make me new, you are making me new You make beautiful things, you make beautiful things out of the dust You make beautiful things, you make beautiful things out of us We will wait upon the Lord

We will wait upon the Lord Take the righteousness, we wait upon the Lord We will wait upon the Lord We will wait upon the Lord You make for living, a hope, a strong deliver You are the everlasting God, the everlasting God You do the things, you won't fall with me You are the everlasting God, the everlasting God You are the everlasting God We will be the everlasting God You are the everlasting God You are the everlasting God We'll wait upon the Lord You do the everlasting God You make new, you are the everlasting God Strangles rises, we wait upon the Lord, we will wait upon the Lord, we will wait upon the Lord.

Strangles rises, we wait upon the Lord, we will wait upon the Lord, we will wait upon the Lord. We'll wait forever, a home, a house- rebuilt.

Never You are the everlasting heart The everlasting heart You do the things you want So weary You're running from the love of me You hold the doors to me You lift us up on things like eagles Strengthful rises we wait upon the Lord We will wait upon the Lord We will wait upon the Lord And God will raise you up On eagles' wings Bear you on the breath of dawn

Make him shine like the sun And hold you in the palm of God's hand How might we respond to the proclamation of God's good news today?

[ 77 : 22 ] I'd like you to repeat after me God is good All the time All the time God is good So let's go find the hope Let's remind each other that we don't go alone And we, not me We, not me Are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ Let's live like we believe it Amen God gave us the Lord's Prayer So that we could have a prayer to hold on to Let's pray together Our Father Our Father Who art in heaven Hallowed be thy name Thy kingdom come Thy will be done On earth as it is in heaven Give us this day our daily bread And forgive us our trespasses As we forgive those who trespass against us

And lead us not to temptation But deliver us from evil For thine is the kingdom And the power And the glory Forever Amen That's where the heart of melody Jesus wants to sleep and love Fear not, I am weeping Peace, be still In our own life's heaven flow Jesus, Jesus, Jesus Sweetest name I've got Fills my every longing Keeps me singing as I go

Beasted on the riches of His grace Resting beneath His sheltering wing Always looking on His smiling face That is why I shout and sing Jesus, Jesus, Jesus Sweetest name I know Fills my every longing Keeps me singing as I go Brothers and sisters Brothers and sisters We have come to this sacred time together And we have heard the good news So as you go forth From this place Whether it's to the other room in your house Or to work Or wherever it is that you're going Take all that good news with you Know that God's plan for you Know that God's plan for you is good

Because you are beloved We are beloved Remember who you are And know That we go together No one is alone On this journey So let us Be The church In the name of the Father The Son And the Holy Spirit Amen min min min Amen.