

More hope for our world

HOPEFUL PLANS

I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about a future full of hope (GNB – alternative reading).

Jeremiah 29: 11

DISASTER DAY!

Do you sometimes have days when everything goes wrong. The children wake too early and quarrel, the car won't start. When eventually you get to work, the email system is playing up and your boss is having a bad day – and don't you know it. Then the phone call reaches you at work from school – is one of them being excluded, you wonder? When you discover that they have been taken to A&E you don't know whether to feel relieved or upset!

Everything had gone seriously wrong for the people of Israel who received this note from God via Jeremiah – who was one of God's prophets. They had lost their homes and they were refugees living in a far away land where everything was strange and uncomfortable. Not surprisingly they felt completely miserable and abandoned. God said to them – I haven't given up on you, so don't give up hoping!

'IT WILL BE ALL RIGHT!'

OK, so when we're children it's great to have someone to pick us up and rub our grazed knee. Then the words, 'It'll be all right' actually work and restore our balance.

But in the real world? Sometimes it helps get us over a crisis, but we know such words are pretty empty, unless... Unless the person who speaks them has a real and effective plan. Whether it's the roadside assistant who can get us to the wedding on time or the financial adviser who can deliver a mortgage which frees us from debt and costs us less each month.

That's what God's words told these desperate people long ago and that's what God is telling us now. He can do what to us is the impossible. His words, these words, call us to look away from our problems and look expectantly to him, not for comforting words but effective plans.

A FUTURE FULL OF HOPE

Whether it's loneliness or guilt, feeling life is pointless or overwhelming, seeming to be trapped or exposed, God says that he intends to fulfil our hopes and dreams. That's what God said to these people through Jeremiah and that's what God says to us through Jesus. Jesus said he came to rescue those who were 'sick', those in serious need of rescue. He not only said it, he did it and still does.

He has a caring and loving plan for us all. But to benefit we do have to let him help us. This means hearing him call to us, looking up in response and being willing, with his help, to live his way. None of this is necessarily that easy, but it does work. What Jesus holds out to us is his hand of rescue and he promises to hold on to us and never let go – as long as we open our hands and heart to him.

Father, help us, like Jeremiah, to be honest messengers of real hope to all the needy people we meet today. Help us also to be those who receive your hope in our own lives. Amen.

God's big hope

HOPE FOR A BROKEN WORLD

Yet there was the hope that creation itself would one day be set free from its slavery to decay and would share the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Romans 8: 20–21

ECOLOGICAL DISASTER!

Our world is in serious trouble. Global warming, shortages of basics like oil and water, deforestation – we could all extend the list and almost every day some event which embodies this gloom is projected into our homes on the TV. Living with this drum beat of despair is sometimes annoying and sometimes really scary.

The Bible recognizes our kind of world – it doesn't encourage an escapist approach but it does play a different rhythm! Facing up to all these problems it tells us that God has not given up on our world and offers us hope. Not sentimental hope, but a hope that is based on Jesus. Jesus came to rescue us not only from our personal sins but to set the world free from its tendency to 'self-destruct'. 'Slavery to decay' is how it's put – with us all as the main sponsors! So all of us can work with Jesus and make a difference now.

SIGNS OF HOPE

Why should we pay any attention to what the Bible is saying? How do we know it's not simply 'more spin' or, as was said many years ago now, 'opium for the people' – a calming drug to mask the pain and the threat?

The Christian answer focuses on what happened to Jesus, who mirrors for us the whole world! Human greed, deep-seated fears and the passion to dominate others are key factors in the meltdown threat the world faces. These are also among the things which put Jesus on the cross. We can appreciate how difficult it is to get away from the impact of these things; globally we don't seem able to escape.

Jesus couldn't escape death either, but the Christian faith is about God raising Jesus from the grip of death. And while Jesus' resurrection is about him returning to his friends and the joy that brought them, it is also about God starting a new creation.

THE COLOURS OF HOPE

So, Jesus' resurrection means that God has committed himself to sticking with our world and eventually sorting it out. Of course it doesn't appear that way to us now as we look at our world – as Paul points out a few verses later (Romans 8: 24–25). But this is still the case.

So, what clues do we have about this future? Our world is to share 'the glorious freedom of the children of God.' No more sin, sorrow, corruption, deceit, violence, abuse and so on, but also music without dissonance, dancing without fatigue, love without the parting, renewal without the struggle and peace and joy and freedom and laughter and ... the list is inexhaustible.

So every time we can show these qualities to others, in however diluted a way, we ourselves become beacons of God's hope. That's why Hope 08 matters so much! Not only for our villages and cities but for our world.

Our Father in heaven, may your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as in heaven. Thank you for revealing to us your hope for our world and thank you for using us to help deliver it here. Amen.