



Jeremiah 29:11

"For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and hope." (RSV)

It is so funny how the best laid plans almost always go wrong—or maybe not wrong, exactly, but not "according to plan."

Nate and I met at the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth back in 2010. We both felt a strong connection to Duluth and wanted to stay after graduation, but God had different plans. My first job was in Howard Lake, Nate's first job was in Waconia. Before long we were married, owned a home, and had Margo and Logan. Returning to Duluth someday always got moved back another year and then another. As a kindergarten teacher, Nate knew which childcare centers he wanted to send Margo to, but it wasn't until far too late that we realized how long the waiting lists were for those centers. Nate spent nearly a year researching business models to start our own childcare center and it felt like this was going to be the path back to Duluth. In 2019, he was on his way to sign a lease when the landlord backed out at the last minute. We decided to teach one more year and try again next summer, and that year ended up being the COVID year. The Lord helped us sidestep being 6 months into running our own business at the start of a pandemic.

We were once again putting off plans to return to Duluth for a year, and then another, and then another, when out of the blue Nate got a call from Molly Nett. The center where her girls went was looking for a director. She said she would like to recommend Nate to the board. Sometimes signs are hard to interpret and other times they are clear. After years of finding it difficult to create the community we were looking for in Waconia, we moved into a well-established one here in Duluth. Nate and I both are doing the work we feel called to do. I am able to walk to work through the woods every morning. The kids have made a pile of friends. We have a future and a hope, not from the plans we worked so hard to make but from the one that was laid out for us. We couldn't be happier with the outcome so far and can't wait to see what comes next.

Prayer

Lord, prepare our hearts and minds so that we might better hear your voice when you call to us. Help us to recognize when things that feel like obstacles or setbacks in our own path might really just be you guiding us onto the path you had intended all along. Remind us that our forever home and our ultimate destination is with you. Wherever you are, we can never be lost.

—Amanda Byrne



2 Corinthians 9:8

"And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work." (RSV)

It's not my best quality that I can see the world around me through what I don't have rather than my abundance lenses. Not enough time, patience, money, energy, serenity, wisdom, and on and on. Often its only through the clarity of looking back I can see all the glory around me was always there and will always be there. It's become a daily practice to notice and say prayers of gratitude for ALL the blessings, noticed or not. I like how I feel when I do this.

Peace has been such a precious spiritual home for me for almost 40 years. I'm grateful I raised my family here, and I have deep and sacred memories of time spent together with so many. I'll never forget how good the pew felt when we could finally worship together again after COVID. I want the air we breathe here to be safe and the temperature throughout the building to be comfortable and predictable. God has provided me with so many blessings. I pray that I am as generous.

Prayer

Holy and generous Creator, I pray that you will hold Peace Church and our capital campaign in your loving arms. Help each of us give what we can as we carry on the life and mission of this congregation doing such important work in our neighborhood, in our city, and in the lives of all who spend time here.

—Cindy Macaulay



Matthew 5: 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago..."

"You have heard that it was said..."

"It has been said..."

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago..."

"You have heard that it was said..."

"You have heard that it was said..."

Speaking to the crowd in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus directly confronted the wisdom of the day that was said to have authority from long ago. At essence, Jesus seemed to be saying: *you've been told to live according to this standard, but I'm telling you that there are deeper, more meaningful ways to live.*

When our family comes to Peace Church, we feel this refrain and invitation into another mode of living. For much of our lives, *we had heard* that right-belief was the mark of a Christian, or that a Christian (wo)man behaved in this or that way. And today, *we hear* that we need to be earning this much or acquire that thing to be doing it right, or that the kids need to be this active in that many things to keep up. Through message, relationships, and actions within the community, Peace tells us *deeper, more meaningful* truths about living.

Prayer

Loving God, interrupt the noise and nonsense we may be hearing, and lead us in our living. Amen.

—Matt Dangler



Romans 12:4-6

"For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them."
(NRSV)

In wasn't unusual in our house to have the telephone disconnected for a few days because we couldn't pay the bill on time. When my uncle butchered a cow that had been retired from milking, we were given the kidneys, heart, tongue, and some ground beef, all of which my mom made into delicious meals. Mom made most of our clothes and the rest we got from rummage sales or hand-me-downs. Although we existed on the lower rung of the economic ladder, Mom was a leader in our little town and our church community. She believed everybody had a part to play in making a community strong and healthy. We were all parts of the same body and every person had a role to play. She cleaned the church and the altar linens with the members of the Altar Society and organized rummage sales and spaghetti dinners with the Ladies' Sodality and planned fundraisers for the seminary with the Sierra Club. From the age of 4, Mom took me along when she visited the assisted living facility, which we called the "Old Folks Home." As I grew up, I learned to navigate wheelchairs and listen to stories and feed those who could no longer feed themselves. At every Sunday and holiday dinner there was at least one person from the "Old Folks Home" at our family table. Simply put, I grew up asking myself, "What part am I being called to play?"

Witnessing Mom's generous and unflagging service, and trying to follow in her footsteps, I soon learned that playing my part brought a great sense of joy, community, and meaning. Far from being a burden, when I did my part I felt like I belonged, I was part of the body. And I felt blessed.

Prayer

O Holy One, you have loved us into existence. Each day you sustain us with your unconditional care. Continue to call us into deeper community and active engagement by doing our part. You have given us gifts and talents and resources to be shared. Give us the wisdom to be generous with our time, talent and treasure. May we live with open hands and an open heart. Amen.

—Gary Boelhower



Ephesians 2:8

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that now one may boast." (NRSV)

The Christian Gospel is a message of grace. Grace is God's love, mercy, forgiveness and new life, given to us freely and abundantly in Jesus Christ. We neither earn it or deserve it. Grace is like a new fallen snow you didn't expect. Or being surprised by a restored relationship you thought was over. It's new life when you anticipated death. Grace is God's way of recreating us, again and again and again.

Grace is God's initiative and comes to us from God's side, asking nothing in return—only that we receive it in faith. In a culture of self-help, optimization, and results, the message of grace is radical. It says, "Relax, it's neither about you, nor up to you!" Jesus puts it this way, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That is grace. Grace is how God prepares the way for us. On our own, we are lost. Without grace, we're bound to "sin, death and the devil," as classical theology puts it. The good news is, God has found us. By stooping low in humility, God has come to us in Jesus Christ, and given us new life. That is what it means to be baptized into Christ—we live anew under God's Grace.

It took me a while to learn this. But when I did, I felt truly free. Free to love life and serve the neighbor. Free to take risks for the Gospel, like moving my family to East Timor, visiting the imprisoned and spending my days with the sick and dying. On my own, I neither could, nor would, do those things. But grace prepared the way for me to love and serve, and to do so with joy. And Peace Church has been there for much of that journey. We do not need to save the world friends. God is already doing that in and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But we are richly blessed, by God's grace, to be part of it. Thanks be to God!

Prayer

Creator God, who's grace prepares the way for all we do as a community of faith, illuminate the path that lies ahead as we care for the property you have entrusted to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

—Tom Liddle



Psalm 121:1-2

"I lift my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made Heaven and Earth." (NRSV)

Life has a way of bringing about experiences that I refer to as "Life According to Plan B." To me this means, you start out thinking that the day, or the time period, is going to go one way and something happens to totally turn that on its head. For example it could be something as minor as a flat tire or a red light that makes you late for something important—or as serious as a life-changing diagnosis for you or a loved one, or the death of someone very significant in your life. For me, my first Plan B was the death of my mother when I was 12 and then my daughter's cancer diagnosis when she was 2.

How we deal with these types of minor or major events is critical. For me, I turn to God, for I believe God will carry us through what we are facing. This is done in so many ways—through people reaching out and helping, prayers being said by many (even people we do not know), medical personnel, social workers, counselors . . . It could even be the voice of God, which I believe I heard once, calming me when I needed it most.

The important thing is to try to take in what is going on around us when we are in tough times, believing that God is there. God is there!

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for being there for us when we are in tough life situations. Help us to recognize the supporting gifts around us that are instrumental because of You; helping us through grief, fear, uncertainty. Fill us with the Faith we need so that we can ultimately feel the gift of Hope that can carry us through. Amen!

—Laurie Berner



Micah 6:8

"God has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (NIV)

When I was a little guy visiting my grandparents' farm, I remember my Grandma Minnie walking up the steep steps of the stairway in the old farmhouse, using her strong hands on the steps to help her up. At the top of the stairway there was a small, ceramic wall-hanging, shaped like a scroll. The words on the scroll were, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last." That wall-hanging was an early challenge to me into what it would mean to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Over the ensuing years, I have often thought of the words on that ceramic scroll and have attempted to do things in my life (frequently, quite feebly) that I thought were being done for Christ. Throughout my faith walk, I have been touched and motivated by many people, including early Sunday School teachers, friends, pastors, my elders, and my Grandma Minnie. Throughout my life, what I have noticed in the people who seem to be in a close walk with God is a "glow" as they live their lives—humbly serving God, with no need for accolades from fellow sojourners.

In my nearly two years getting to know people in the Peace congregation, I have met many more of those people who are helping me grow in my faith to live out the Gospel. There are so many opportunities to live out the words of Micah 6:8 both within and outside the walls of our church. As we continue to live out the Gospel—as we plan for the future of Peace Church—I look forward to more opportunities to grow together and to serve others with you as the beloved community.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for giving me opportunities to serve others in your name. Help me to be still and listen to your voice to recognize and act on those opportunities. Also, please give me the courage to act justly and to truly love mercy in all that I do. I ask for your continued blessing of Peace Church and all those we touch. In your name, I pray. Amen.

—Craig Lilja