

*"Does God Have a Plan for Your Life?"*

Preached on September 5, 2010

Based on Jeremiah 18:1-11 & Luke 14:25-33

I've heard people say, "I believe that God has a plan for my life." Perhaps they are facing some difficult decision. They want to make that decision in accord with their conviction that God has a plan that He wants to work out in their lives. And they want to work with that plan.

As a pastor I've often heard people say, "I'm just trying to figure out what God's plan is for me."

Perhaps because life in this present world seems so uncertain and random and chaotic, maybe that's why people of faith talk more about God having a "plan."

We can't often see that plan, and can't say for sure, when looking at any given event, that God even has a plan or that it's being worked out. We nevertheless believe in the plan, because we really need to believe that there is a plan.

As somebody said, "If you want to make God laugh, just have a plan." This little quip suggests that God is not so much the one who makes and follows plans, as the one who disrupts our plans!

Perhaps there are biblical and theological reasons for questioning the idea of "God having a plan for my life."

I really think that scripture maintains the belief that God's purposes are being worked out among us, in our time, and our history. And the Bible frequently shows how our efforts are sometimes improved by, or resisted, or brought to fruition, because of the unseen hand of God moving behind the scenes of the story. Thus, Joseph could say to his brothers, who had tried to kill him and ruin his life, at the end of the story, "You meant this for evil, but God meant this for good."

It is a great comfort to know that all of our mess ups and misdeeds may not be the last word. God has a plan, and ultimately "All things work together for good for those who love the Lord." God keeps working God's good plan, despite our human mistakes.

And yet there are moments when God appears not only to disrupt our plans but even to disrupt His own plans. For instance, Jonah is told by God that He is going to destroy the wicked city of Nineveh. That is just fine with Jonah because he hates Nineveh too.

But then, after Jonah preaches a one-sentence, dyspeptic sermon telling Nineveh what God needs them to do, Nineveh repents, the whole city repents. And God changes His previously announced plan.

This sort of thing suggests to me that if we are going to use the word "plan" applied to God, we must somehow leave some room for God to be God. In stating that God has a "plan" for our lives or anything else, we have got to allow for God's freedom and God's sovereignty.

After all, God allows for our freedom and our sovereignty or at least to a degree. The people of Nineveh change. And God shows, in this case, that God is free to change. Furthermore, by the end of the book of Jonah, we find out that Jonah changes, although it takes a bit longer for Jonah to change than for the people of Nineveh to change.

God has somehow created the world, not just with a locked in "plan" but with some room for us to grow and develop and for us to learn from our mistakes, for us to change and actually do better than maybe we, or even God, thought we could do. If God has a "plan," that plan plans to give us some degree of freedom in responding to God in our own lives.

This is what makes me troubled by some talk about God's "plan." Sometimes it is put forward as a sort of deterministic scheme in which God has already predetermined (or as we sometimes say "predestined") people, like robots, responding to God in certain ways.

1 Timothy says not that God has a plan to save all of us but that God has a "desire" that all of us should turn and fall into the arms of the loving God. The word "desire" may be a better term than "plan" when applied to the future that God has for us. God has this grand **desire** for us, not a point-by-point, step-by-definite-step plan for us. God has created us so that we can from time to time fulfill the desires of God. But God has also created us as those who can, from time to time, thwart the desires of God.

Whether we can forever, no matter what God does, thwart the desire of God is a question for another sermon! But for now, let's just say that God is not known for being so hard-headedly committed to a plan, because God is known to be a God of love. And "desire" seems so much more appropriate to speak of God, and God's great love for the world, than the word "plan."

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16). Note that John doesn't say that God has a plan...and some people may love him and some may not love him. John says that God gave, in a reckless act of love, his only begotten son, so that God's desire for the whole world might be accomplished.

And yet, when all is said and done, there is something about me that seems very faithful to the statement "God has a plan for my life." For one thing, it implies that the life we are living is not our own. For another thing, it certainly suggests that life is more than simply finding personal fulfillment, a sense of satisfaction, a sense of meaning that makes sense to you.

Life is also about obeying God, working with God, having your little life caught up in some larger purpose than your life. And that seems to me very biblical and very faithful. In the larger sense, that is one reason we come to church. You are here this morning on a quest...a journey. Worship is part of the unending discernment process in which Christians engage, in which Christians try to figure out what it is that God wants them to do with their lives.

While that may involve some step that you are to take tomorrow morning, I would think that more often that involves a larger framework, a more panoramic vision that somehow God is managing to use your life in good ways, and you are going to do all you can to move in step with the larger purposes of God.

So in a sense, I think that it can be a very faithful thing to believe that, though you may have no idea of the specifics, and though there may not be a number of specifics, "God has a plan for your life."

Which leads me to think that one of the problems with asking, "What has God planned for my life?" is that the question may not be large enough. We ought more frequently to ask, "What might God's plan be for this nation? What might God's plan be for this congregation? What might God's plan be for the whole world?" As Christians, I don't think we can adequately consider God's plan for our lives, without first considering those much larger, sweeping visions of "plan."

Which reminds me, when all is said and done, we ought to remind ourselves that none of us humans fully knows the mind of God. If God has a plan, then we may never absolutely be sure of the details of that plan.

So live your life as knowing that God is full of loving desire for your life, knowing that, while you may not always know from moment to moment just what that plan is, you know that ultimately, when all is said and done, for you and for the whole human race, God plans to continue to love us and to bring all things to a glorious consummation through the power of that love.

## Prayer

Lord, help us in all our doings to seek out your will, to prayerfully inquire not only about what we ought to do but also what you are doing in us. Then, O Lord, give us the courage to follow your will, to walk your way, as it has been shown to us. Amen.