

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • AUGUST 4, 2019
“THE GOSPEL ON BROADWAY”

Litany

Based on Psalm 107

O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good; for God's steadfast love endures forever.

**We have gathered in from the east and from the west,
from the north and the south.**

God satisfies the thirsty, and fills the hungry with good things.

The Lord turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water.

The Scripture

Jeremiah 29:10-14

For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

The Message

You'll Rise Again

Nick Larson

The Musical: *Dear Evan Hansen*

Songs: “You Will Be Found”

As we arrived last night back into Columbia, after our week mission trip with Blue Theology and our sister Disciples of Christ congregation in California, I was reflecting about our experiences this past week. I thought about how many cigarettes butts we cleaned up on the beach, the amount of plastic that we know gets dumped into the ocean every single day. I thought about how much damage we, as humans, have done to ecosystems like the Monterey Bay.

As I shut my eyes and leaned against the window of the Broadway bus, the lyrics to this song from *Dear Evan Hansen*, echoed in my head. I heard the refrain, that declares, “Even when the dark comes crashin’ through.” This song and honestly the

whole *Dear Evan Hansen* musical are about social anxiety and disconnection, about how a lonely high schooler yearns for connection.

Yet, the overwhelming nature behind things like loneliness is matched by the overwhelming nature of things like ecological devastation and the violence that pervades our lives. I heard this line over and over again in my head this week as we learned about the ecological devastation that we as humans have been ravaging upon our ocean.

When we learned about the ecosystem in the Elkhorn Slough, floating in our kayaks and looking at the environmental impacts of our actions on that ecosystem. I heard the word “darkness” echo in my head as Kellen, Avery, and I were climbing over rocks gathering endless cigarette butts during our beach clean-ups.

I heard this line echo through my mind. Each felt like darkness crashing in. The darkness felt like it was crashing in as I ordered my burrito in the airport yesterday, learning about the horrific act of domestic terrorism inflicted upon people shopping at a local Walmart in El Paso, Texas, where at least 20 people lost their lives to gun violence and terrorism.

In our world today, it can feel like darkness is so overwhelming, that we are all alone, that we can feel forgotten in the middle of nowhere. I know I felt that way this week at the aquarium where I encountered a photocollage by the artist Chris Jordan, who used 2.4 million pieces of plastic to recreate the famous Japanese woodcut “The Great Wave” to demonstrate the number of pounds of plastic PER HOUR that end up in the ocean.

Pastor Dan and Pastor Deborah taught our group this past week about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Have you heard of this? It is a collection of marine debris in the North Pacific Ocean. It spans the waters from the west coast of North America to Japan. It is areas of ocean full of swirling debris that cover hundreds of kilometers. Some scientists estimate that in total this particular garbage patch could be at least the size of Texas, and some estimate perhaps even twice the size.

The amount of debris in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch accumulates, because much of it is not biodegradable. Many plastics don't wear down; they simply break into tinier and tinier pieces. It is mostly made up of tiny bits of plastic called microplastics. The area is too large to trawl (or drag a collection net around in). Plus, denser debris can sink centimeters or even several meters beneath the surface, making the area difficult to clean or even measure. Scientists have collected up to 750,000 bits of microplastic in a single square kilometer within the patch. That's about 1.9 million bits of plastic per square mile.

As I stood in the aquarium in front of art piece after art piece that were created from found plastic trash, I felt the darkness crashing in. I felt the overwhelming nature of this problem.

In fact, our biblical text this morning from the prophet Jeremiah was situated in a circumstance that matches that feeling. In 588 BCE, during the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, Jeremiah found himself imprisoned in the royal palace of King Zedekiah of Judah. He had been charged with desertion, treason, and insurrection. And on some level, the charges had merit. Jeremiah had been forcefully pleading for Israel to turn from their ways.

As is the prophetic tradition in Scripture, he was calling for the ruling elite – the powerful leaders of his day – to turn from their exploitive selfish practices and enact God’s call for hospitality and care for the poor of their nation. Jeremiah saw the gathering storm of Babylon coming from the north. He spoke God’s judgment and divine critique of social injustice and idolatry. So, King Zedekiah had good reason to lock up Jeremiah in the palace. Jeremiah didn’t stay silent in the face of injustice; he spoke up about what God was calling that nation to change.

Real hope for the people, according to Jeremiah, lay not in some immediate relief from social and communal death, but in living through that experience as faithful people, working towards the Lord’s future with hope. Jeremiah was calling for the king and other elites to let the Sun come streaming in. Let the light back into their lives, turn from the darkness crashing in.

This passage of Jeremiah that you heard, is often discussed in Christian circles, and devotionals studies as being about how God has an individual plan for you or me. When we are in personal darkness, and you seek after God, God will let us find the Lord. Yet, a more accurate understanding of this text is that God is saying that Israel, or in this case “**we**” have done devastating things, wrong things. We have taken poor actions in the world.

We have added to the number of plastics that end up in the ocean. We have furthered our own social isolationism even in our perpetually connected social lives. We have stood silently decrying violence in the public square while silently refusing to take mostly agreed upon steps to help reduce these types of attacks.

The promise of Jeremiah is often misinterpreted as being about us individually, that God has a plan for “you,” as in you or me individually. Yet the “you” in verse 11 isn’t singular; it’s plural. It’s more like “y’all” than “you.” The future, the hope God gives, isn’t a thousand plans for a thousand individuals, but to the people of God, one plan.

I want you to hear this plainly; this is good news. This doesn't make God's plan less personal but actually more personal. If you are a part of a family or a team, it isn't less personal that you are one among the others. There is more love, meaningful sharing. You don't have to bear life alone.

Jeremiah is promising what the song promises, that when we need someone to carry us, when we are broken and, on the ground, when our individual and collective actions are distancing ourselves from the types of lives our Christ envisions for us, then God will find us.

Jeremiah, and God's plan, is for all of us. Not you or me individually, but collectively us. Jesus, like Jeremiah before him, is calling for God's people to turn from our collective wicked ways, and instead choose to be a part of the beloved community where all are cared for, where health is the priority, and where each can have a spot and the endlessly large table of grace.

Dear Evan Hansen is a musical that you may not be very familiar with, and honestly, it is one that I wasn't. Yet, through listening to it, I have grown very fond of it. I have grown fond of the music as evident by the fact that I drove around with the CD of it blaring in my car the last few weeks.

I have been touched by the story of Evan Hansen, who is a young man with social anxiety disorder who writes himself a letter as a part of a therapy assignment. A classmate of his, Connor, commits suicide and a copy of Evan's letter is found in his pocket.

Connor's family thinks that the letter is written by Connor to Evan and as Evan gets attention from Connors family, he finds himself the unintended face of loneliness and this 'friendship.' As his social currency skyrockets, Evan is drawn deeper and deeper into his lie about this fabricated friendship. Evan who had always felt invisible discovers that through this lie he might finally land the girl of his dreams, and most importantly, he no longer feels invisible.

Yet in the musical he is forced to make a decision: Will he give himself over to the individual fantasy he's created, or will he bit the bullet and risk losing everything he's ever wanted for the sake of not lying to this community that now surrounds him?

This is the type of choice we face, do we as the collective church, find a way to keep promising individuals who come seeking after God personal deliverance, since that's the nature of faith that has emerged in our society? Do we continue to promise that God will find us individually in the midst of our own personal darkness? Or do we claim the biblical truth of Jeremiah which tells us that God's hope is a collective one, where 'y'all' of life will be found?

The promise of God, of Jeremiah, and of Jesus, is not that everything will be bright and cheery tomorrow. Mass shootings will continue to happen in our nation. Tons of plastics will continue to be dumped into the ocean each day. Social isolationism will continue to plague our children and our society.

God's steadfast love that endures forever is not about deliverance from these tragic circumstances.

The good news of God for us this morning, comes in a promise that God will restore us, collectively, as we continue to do the work of reducing the amount of plastics that end up in our ocean and devastating the ocean ecosystems.

The good news of God for us this morning, says that God will be with us as we take steps to reduce gun violence in our nation and our lives.

The good news of God for us this morning, comes from Jeremiah in a promise that God will restore us if we seek after God with all our hearts.

The good news of God for us this morning comes in a promise that God will help us create the beloved community, through genuine expressions of Christ's love and welcome in our broken and fragmented world.

The good news of Jesus Christ is that gun violence, ecological devastation, social isolation, will come to an end. As famously quoted by Martin Luther King Jr, the arc of the universe does bend towards justice.

We will be found; the choice is really about how we are going to spend our energy.

Are we going to be satisfied only decrying the aches of our world? Are we going to be just another person who is more concerned with if the next mass shooting is going to take the life of someone we know? Are we going to be someone who says the issue of 2.4 million pounds of plastic going into the ocean every hour is just too big to be fixed?

Or are you, church, going to join into the work your high school youth did this week, collecting trash on beaches, educating yourself about how to reduce single use plastics, and learning about how our hubris needs to be curbed so that we care for marine sanctuaries rather than devastate them.

Are you going to be a follower of Jesus, who calmly and insistently declares that we as a nation can do something about the systemic gun violence?

Are you going to be the followers of Jesus, who each day reaches out to those around you in real and honest ways, telling the truth, and embracing that when someone needs a friend to carry them, and telling them that it will be you?

God's promise to us, my friends, is that the sun will come streaming in, we will be found, we will rise again.

If we look around, we can see that there is a lot of work to be done, and as morning breaks and all is new, we can realize that we are not alone. Particularly if we make our lives together lives already a part of God's beloved community as God intended from the very beginning.

The type of community that cares for our earth and our oceans rather than devastates them. The type of community that reduces violence in all forms rather than grieves it. The type of community that includes those socially isolated rather than promising them an individual solution that may never come.

God's promise to Jeremiah, and to the people of Judah and Israel, is that y'all will be delivered. The end destination is set.

Are we ready to choose to live into it before it is fully here?

Amen.