

God Makes Plans, We _____.

“For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” Matthew 16:23b

We make plans, God laughs. How many of you have heard this before? We make plans, God laughs. Here's a more important question, how many of you have experienced this before? While this simple statement isn't an actual Bible verse, it certainly connects to some verses in the Bible and it most definitely sums up many accounts in the Bible. It's hard to deny how relatable these words really are!

But what if we rearranged the words? Consider this version, God makes plans, we laugh. It might not be as familiar, but it certainly is just as relatable as the previous statement. In fact, one of the best Biblical examples of the truth of this rearranged statement is Sarah from the Old Testament. Many of you might remember the account when Sarah hears God reveal to her husband, Abraham, the news that they will have a son. When Sarah hears God's plan, she literally laughs!

God makes plans, we laugh. Truth be told, this rearranged statement could have many different versions. God makes plans, we _____. Well, we could fill in the blank with a variety of words! God makes plans, we don't trust them. God makes plans, we complain about them. God makes plans, we make excuses in order to ignore them. God makes plans, we think our plans are better. God makes plans, we run from them.

I think you get the point, we struggle with God's plans. So, we aren't likely going to fill in this statement this way, God makes plans, we follow. Honestly, the only way we could sincerely answer on our own, "God makes plans, we follow," is if it went more like this, "God makes plans, we follow kicking and screaming the whole way." Our sinful nature is built to fight God's plans.

Now there are no excuses for our sinful natures, but there certainly are reasons why our sinful natures are so quick to fight against God's plans. And all the reasons that we might list boil down to this reality, we fight against God's plans because His plans include sacrifice and ultimately, God's plans include the cross. None of our plans willingly include sacrifice and the cross, that's plan Z, never to be considered because plans A-Y are going to work, we're determined that they will! Yet, like it or not, we find ourselves facing plan Z frequently. Sacrifice and the cross aren't something Christians can escape! And this sobering reality is something that all three readings this weekend reveal.

Jeremiah, from our first reading, was the Lord's prophet in a very challenging time. Jeremiah was called to speak a message that was difficult, a message that the people of Israel didn't want to hear. Even though the Lord had told Jeremiah what was to come, actually going through the intensity of rejection from his own countrymen wore on Jeremiah and created lots of struggle for him. While we likely can't relate to all of Jeremiah's situation, we can understand his outcry. After all his sacrifices and doing what the Lord expected of him, Jeremiah wasn't seeing any good, his situation continued to be negative and discouraging. Jeremiah began doubting God's plans and even was tempted to accuse God as failing him.

Like Jeremiah's outcry, we too have found ourselves frustrated, defeated and dejected when we think we've been following God's plans, but our circumstances remain dire. We know situations that lead us to cry out to God, why is this happening? What is going on? And as doubt creeps in, we too are tempted to think God is letting us down. We struggle to give up our timeline for answers and explanations and instead rest in God's timing. It's not a sacrifice we like to make.

Our Romans reading highlights another sacrifice that causes us trouble; sacrificing our opportunities to retaliate and be self-serving instead of showing genuine love for the neighbor. Reading through the list of actions that Paul calls his readers to carry out, we have to admit that we're so quick to do the opposite. We don't like to live sacrificially and would rather sacrifice the relationships around us for our own gain. It's challenging to sacrifice self-serving opportunities that the rest of the world sees as commonplace rights and privileges and instead leave those opportunities in God's hands.

Then, there's Peter in our Gospel reading. After such a bold confession of faith, after being connected to the rock of faith, he quickly becomes the stumbling block with such a bold rebuke of the Lord's plans. As

well-intended as Peter's rebuttal may have been, he struggled to sacrifice the things of man, human values and plans, for the things of God, divine values and plans. He was convinced his plan for Jesus, for the Messiah, was best. And like Peter, we often struggle to sacrifice our plans that we value so highly for the plans God actually has in mind.

God makes plans and one way or another, we fight them. From Jeremiah, to Peter, to the believers in Rome, to us right now, there is a long record of God's own people resisting His plans for them. Living a life of sacrifice isn't our forte. We often only want to do it if we can use it to gain some sort of reward. Bearing the burden of our cross is wearisome and eventually we look to get out from under the weight. Bottom line, God makes plans, we can't follow them.

That's why we need to rearrange this statement one more time. God makes plans, Jesus followed. This is the lens that unlocks from our readings the hope, comfort and strength God provides as He carries out His plans in the lives of His people. In view of the mercy Jesus would win for Jeremiah on the cross, God beckoned Jeremiah to repent, to return to Him, and be assured that he wouldn't be abandoned, but he would be delivered from his persecutors. Likewise, for Peter, Jesus stopped him in his wayward tracks, leading him to repentance. Instead of listening to Peter, Jesus continued on God's plan to win mercy and forgiveness for Peter and the world. Even with the believers in Rome, Paul's charge to them to be living sacrifices full of genuine love was established completely on the mercy of God in Jesus who was already the ultimate sacrifice of genuine love for them.

Throughout His ministry Jesus made the sacrifices that we hesitate and even avoid making. In our place, Jesus followed God's timing and not His own timeline even when the people around Him wanted to speed things up because of His miraculous deeds. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, when other human plans seemed ideal, Jesus clung to God's plan asking that God's will be done in His life. And soon after, for our sake, Jesus didn't retaliate or serve Himself as He was betrayed and crucified, but instead He commended His life of genuine love into His Father's hands. Yes, thanks be to God, Jesus took on God's plans even though they included sacrifice and ultimately the cross and He humbly and perfectly followed them on our behalf.

And so, through Jesus, we have hope in which to rejoice. We know the final outcome even in the intensity of the sacrifices through which our God leads us. Even if nothing else seems to be improving as God carries out His plans in our lives in the present, we know that the final goal is not the crosses that we bear but Jesus' kingdom. Jesus' own resurrection is our assurance that there is an end to the crosses we bear and that His kingdom is ours now and for all eternity.

Through Jesus, we also have the Holy Spirit guiding and leading us to be patient in our tribulation and constant in prayer. Even now in the sacrifices that we endure, we are not alone. Our Savior is with us and He knows well the sacrifices that we experience. In His patience and longsuffering, He allows us to vent so that He might lead us to repentance and back to His enduring promises. He is constantly listening so that we might be encouraged to constantly pray for His deliverance in every time of trouble.

Through Jesus, we have been given genuine love. And He delivers His genuine love to us through His Word and Sacraments. And day by day, we are being transformed into living sacrifices by this genuine love we have received from Him. And as the Lord presently calls us to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, may He grant us courage and assurance that He is leading us and His love supports us. And by His genuine love, His mercy, His forgiveness, His grace alone, we can trust that this statement actually becomes true of our lives too, God makes plans, we follow. Thanks be to Jesus! Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan