**Coronado Community Church**

*Living the Dream*

Jeremiah 31:27-34

A message by Pastor Eric Smith

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Perhaps you have heard of a Chinese proverb that says, *May you live in interesting times.*

Actually it is an English expression said to be the translation of a traditional Chinese curse.

We thought it a blessing … but the expression is used ironically because life is better in "uninteresting times" of peace and tranquility than in "interesting" ones, which are usually times of trouble.

Important point here: there is actually no such saying in Chinese. The closest expression translates … *Better to be a dog in times of tranquility than a human in times of chaos.*

No matter the origin or the meaning, we do live in interesting times. We read or watch media reporting of the news with attendant speculation and opinion about political circus, climate disasters, war, expanding gender awareness, digital currency, artificial intelligence, tiktok escapism, and… the Padres beat the Dodgers! These are interesting times!

What I want to explore with you today is *how we transform the curse of interesting times and turn it into something else.*

You remember the movie called Wedding Crashers? Chaz Rheinhold? Who crashed weddings and funerals and lived with his mother? He said *I’m living the dream!*

Wouldn’t it be great if we all could say we’re living the dream?

Well… Jeremiah said it can happen.

Here’s the question for starters… Does God have a dream for you?

I think so… I think God dreams. I think God has a dream for you. That’s why you and I are here right now… because God dreams. God imagines things. God dreamt you up. Who else could’ve done that? God has an *imagination that is awesome, marvelous, detail oriented, magnificent, and has a sense of humor.* What is even more incredible is that God makes dreams happen.

I heard someone say that creative imagination is another description of prayer. That when our hearts and minds are in right relationship with God, and we imagine a future that is congruent with God’s purposes, that future tends to manifest, like we imagined it. When we dream in this manner we practice creativity. Since God is the Creator (with a capital C) our practicing creativity is an expression of the divine.

Do you recall the famous speech of Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior, delivered from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C.? It was a 17 minute speech calling for an end to racial discrimination and equal rights for all – an end to be pursued non-violently. Historians say that Dr. King’s speech resembled a sermon… well, it was a sermon.

We know he had a title for it, he called it *Normalcy Never Again…* but history gave it a different title… history called it *I Have a Dream.*

The power of that sermon, of that dream, is that it represented God’s dream for the world.

And, like Jeremiah, Martin King dreamed God’s dream, and, while we’re collectively not fully experiencing it, we carry on, we know what the dream is and what we need to do to share it.

God’s dream for the world has carried from Jeremiah to Jesus to Martin King to this moment.

God’s dream is compassion.

Here is the dream:

*I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts;*

*and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

Jeremiah *qualifies the dream* with another comment that we religious type folks always need to hear.

*No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other,*

*“Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me,*

*from the least of them to the greatest…*

It reminds me of the story about a Bishop and a young man who sat beside each other on an airplane flight. The young man carried with him a thick Bible with an artfully crafted leather cover. He was a young man on a mission to bring salvation to everyone he talked to.

He struck up a conversation with the Bishop – who wasn’t wearing a clergy collar and so his vocation wasn’t obvious. It didn’t take long for the young man to get to the topic of Christianity and, with the boldness of his youth and the conviction of young faith he looked the Bishop in the eye and asked, “Are you saved?”

After an appropriately thoughtful pause, the Bishop replied simply, “You’d have to ask my wife.”

That’s both funny and beautiful. You know why it is funny. It is beautiful because *the truth of faith is revealed in relationship*. No need to ask if a person has faith … just watch them. See how they treat people.

The downside revealed in that story are some of the negative experiences we have had when experiencing people *using religion for judgment or control.*

While I was working on this message I read an article and this was the title… (from Buzzfeed – October 15, 2022)

# *Former Christians Shared The Experience That Made Them Quit the Religion,*

# *And They Had A Lot To Say*

The article consists of stories from people who are no longer Christian – what they said about why they are no longer Christian.

Here are a few examples…

"In high school, I went to church three days a week until one of my friends killed himself and I turned to my church for support. My youth pastor said that I was sinning for mourning him because suicide is a sin, that he was also going to hell because he was Jewish, and that it was all my fault because I didn't bring him to church to save him.

"I worked with a teacher who was arrested and convicted of six assaults with a student. At the sentencing, his entire church showed up to show him support. No one showed up for the survivor."

"I’ve known a lot of good and bad Christians. The bad started overpowering the good in terms of politics, but I was still stuck in there. Then I took a class on Hinduism and Buddhism. They made sense to me more than Christianity because they had a greater focus on self-improvement. I knew that there was no way I could be a Christian anymore if TWO religions sounded more appealing."

"I was 9 years old and finally able to join my church's Scout group. In one meeting, they gathered us all and asked everyone individually if they were a good person. Most children said yes. Once they’d asked everyone, they told us that we were all wrong and that the only good person was Jesus. I was only 9 years old, but even then I thought that was *bs* and a pretty cruel exercise to do with children. I left the church at 13 and have been an atheist ever since."

"My story started in 2020. I had just been assaulted, and I felt that God could have done something. I also came out as genderfluid. I realized that the assault wasn’t my fault and that I was raised in a really abusive household, and I left the church because they said everything I was going through was punishment and God trying to help me find a new path."

Last one…

"I told a counselor at my Christian college that I was deeply depressed and suicidal. Her advice boiled down to 'pray more, and trust in God.' I told her I’d been trying that and it wasn’t working. She told me that if I had really been trying, it would be working, so the problem was my lack of faith. This was, suffice it to say, not helpful in dealing with my depression."

You know what was missing in each of these troubling stories… *compassion*.

God is not the problem, we are. The good news and the bad news is that *God has made us free to get it right and to get it wrong.*

Our historic human tendency has been to take *whatever insight of God we find and codify it.*

We describe it in words we call doctrine and pronounce it to be unchanging truth. There is nothing wrong with trying to say what God is like… *but the effort has to be held in balance with our recognition that we’re trying to say something that can’t be said.* God is beyond us.

We can and do learn of aspects of God… preferences of God… attributes of God… but there is always more that is beyond us.

On June 19, in the year 325, Bishops of the church gathered for the First Council of Nicaea. The culmination of their council was a statement which we know as the Nicene Creed…

It goes like this…

*We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father; God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God; begotten not made, one in being with the Father…*

There’s more… it continues on from there.

Now… this was the best that learned men (they were all men) could write about how they understood God through Jesus in 325 AD. That’s fine when we understand their work as *a snapshot in time – a moment in history* – a moment that captured their best collective thinking about God.

Remember, also, that those men thought the world was flat! It was a different era.

We can recall the Nicene Creed, the Apostle’s Creed, and doctrines of the Church as important markers in the history of Christian Faith… but it is wrong to call them the unchanging truth of God. We know the world isn’t flat… we know that God is not “up” in heaven, sitting on a throne with Jesus on his right side. *That’s historic metaphor employed to express theological truth… but it’s not literally true.*

Then… when people start *fighting* to protect their belief systems – and they do - whether with words or with weapons - real faith is lost.

Let me remind you of God’s dream –

*I will put my creed within them, and I will write it on their hearts…*

Wouldn’t it be great if we could all live the dream?

You can.

In the realm of Christian faith (and let’s be clear that there are other possibilities) this is how *we* do it.

* We follow Jesus.
* We pay attention to what he taught.
* We act like he acted. With compassion.
* We live with his vision called the kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is not a place.

It is not a particular *thing*.

It is a movement…a dynamic.

It is this journey in and toward the wholeness and the fullness and the goodness of God that is revealed in one moment by a kind word;

in another moment by a healing touch;

in another by the gift of your treasure;

in yet one more …by self-sacrifice for the greater good.

When compassion is expressed and experienced, the dream become reality.

You won’t always get it right. We all fall short of the ideal. But that doesn’t matter.

When you walk in the compassionate way of Jesus the Kingdom of God has another opportunity, to kindle the flame of humanity’s hope through *your* life.

God’s dream for this world is made real every time you respond to a need, or a challenge, or an opportunity by acting as much like a follower of Jesus as you can in that moment.

Then you bring about God’s kingdom.

Whenever you do this… you are living the dream.