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First Presbyterian Church of Ware Shoals

## Trusting the Plan

Our scripture today is 1 Samuel 3:1-10 and Jeremiah 29:11-14

3 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 3 the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" [a]and he said, "Here I am!" 5 and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. 6 The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 8 The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Jeremiah 29:11-14

11 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. 12 Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. 13 When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, 14 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.

Have you thought about how much can changes in a year? I'm sure all of us have thought about this at one point or another. I know for me, this year has held more transition than I expected it would.

A year ago- I was living in Kansas City, Missouri. I was doing an internship at a camp and a church, and we were starting our preparations for staff to come for the summer.

A year ago, I was preparing to go to Georgia for Seminary. I was packing up all my stuff and planning my drive back to the East Coast from Kansas City.

I had just gotten back from an incredible trip to Israel.

My grandfather had just passed away.

Yesterday, one of my friends got married and I was in her wedding.

In a couple months I will be in another wedding. In the next year, I will learn Greek and start taking exams for ordination.

My point is, a lot changes in a year. There is no way to anticipate most of it. I did not know, a year ago, that I would spend this summer with all you lovely people. I did not know how my grades would turn out for Seminary, and I didn't know some of my best friends yet.

If I were in charge of my own plan- there is a very real chance that I wouldn't be here this summer. When I was in high school, I wanted to go to Davidson College, I wanted to be an art teacher. Right now though, I am glad none of that happened. Not that that is a bad way to go, or a bad plan to have, it just happened to not be God's plan.

Instead of Davidson, I went to Winthrop University. About 2.5 years into College, I realize Art Education was not for me. By this point, I had been a counselor at Camp Bethelwoods for about 4 years and spent every weekend working at Bethelwoods as a hostess. I knew I didn't want to spend even longer in college, so I figured I would finish up my Art degree and then figure out the rest later. During my Junior year, I heard God telling me there was a reason I couldn't stay away from Camp. If I had gone to Davidson, I may not have realized that call.

That single call lead me into camp ministry, it told me that my path had been clear all along, that I was simply not paying attention. I was following the wrong path, and assuming that I could make my own plan instead of following God's. When I told my parents that I wanted to do something completely different than my degree implied, they were not surprised in the least. My mother has always been more inclined to hear God's plan than I have. When I told her about my call she said to me, "well of course you're going to do camp ministry. I knew that 4 years ago." But while telling me "I told you so," she, and my dad, supported me moving hundreds of miles away twice, first to Tampa, Florida and then to Kansas City, Missouri.

I imagine this is how Samuel felt when he was hearing God call to him. Instead of answering, he kept going to Eli. In 1 Samuel, chapter 3, we see that Samuel is trying so hard to please the people of this world. He gets up from his bed three times before Eli was able to tell him that it was God calling Samuel. That he was answering the wrong call. "Here I am." Samuel was able to hear God before he even knew God was calling him. My dad has always said, if you hear the same thing 3 times in a day, it is probably God leading you in the right direction, and I truly believe that. Suddenly, as we are answering calls from people around us, God is working into the plan for our lives.

That is often how God's plan works. We realize we are walking in the path we were supposed to be in all along, and suddenly look up and realize God has been in control, that everything has worked out in a way that we needed. That God had a greater plan than we could ever have. Even without knowing, God is working in our lives. When we hear it or not, there are things God is doing to move our lives along the path God has planned for us.

Without being at Winthrop and my home camp for so long, I wouldn't have been in the space

to hear God's call. I don't think I would have been so willing to see camp as an option for my life. And therefore, I wouldn't have ever considered Seminary as the path that could take me to my goals. Because trust me, when I entered college, there was never a moment that I felt like 4 years of graduate school was going to be the best plan for me.

Luckily, God knew more than me. I realized God had been calling me to ministry for a long time. Even luckier, is that I am not the only one this all applies to. God's plan for everyone's life is so complex and involved that we have no choice but to wait it out and see what happens.

The same thing happened to Samuel. He had been raised in the house of the LORD, so that one day he could hear God. God knew when Samuel would be ready to receive the call that God had for him. Samuel may not have heard the call if he wasn't in the temple that night. This could have been a completely different story. But instead, Samuel made the decision to listen to God.

In everyone's life there are 100 decisions to make every moment of the day. Samuel could have ignored the calls of what he thought was Eli requesting his help. He could have simply gone to sleep. Instead, he got up three times, and eventually he listened to his mentor, and created a space to hear God. In the end, Samuel made the right decision by listening to the voice of the LORD. Though, sometimes, it is harder to hear those calls. There is no way to know if we have made the "correct" decisions, or the decisions that will make everything work out in the end. This is where the Spirit comes in. We have the Spirit to provide guidance and support in the moments of decision making. And thank God for that. Because without the support of the Spirit, I for one, don't think I would have made it this far.

Clearly- as we see from our scriptures, God makes it quite clear what we have to do to find God. We simply must call upon God, search, seek with our whole hearts. The LORD states clearly, as we seek the LORD, we will find the LORD. That seems like such a simple instruction, and yet, it seems so difficult to do sometimes. When things are going well, the way we want them to go, the way we believe our plan is headed in, it seems so easy to thank God. To know that clearly, we are headed in the perfect direction.

But what about when it is harder. When we are being pushed or pulled in a different direction than what we had planned originally. Or into a direction that we have no preparation for. Even better than the simple task of seeking God, God is already calling us. Just like God was calling Samuel, God is specifically calling each and every one of us to follow the unique plan that has been laid out for us.

I told yall my mother had no doubt in my eventual ministry work. But it took a long time for me to see it. It took quite a bit of time to realize the unhappiness I felt in college wasn't simply due to college being hard. It was due to the fact that I wasn't in the same plan as God. I was ignoring the Spirit and I was trying to create my own path instead of letting God lead me.

I believe this is what Jeremiah was trying to warn against as he wrote these words to the people who were placed in exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. When those people were trying to find meaning in this exile, when they felt they were being pushed and pulled into different directions than the paths they wanted, they needed to be reminded that God had a plan for them. They

wouldn't be wandering aimlessly forever. God is in control over our lives.

Luckily-I am not the one in charge of my journey and I do not need to know everything that will happen in the next year. We do not need to worry about getting everything perfect. We do not need to worry about finding the right path. God is in charge of all of that. Without any planning of our own, we have been gifted this wonderful plan that we cannot mess up. There is nothing that we can do to make ourselves unworthy of this plan.

We all need these reminders, like Jeremiah sent, some days. There are times that it is harder to see the plan that God has for us and there are times when we see so clearly the plan that God wants us to follow. Jeremiah acts as a brief reminder that we cannot always know what plan God has, but we can rest assured that God does indeed have one. We can trust in that.

If you would, pray with me.

God-

You alone hold the ultimate plan for our lives. You have been planning since the dawn of time and will continue long after we die. Often, we look for ways to further our own plans instead of following what you have set out for us. Lord, please keep us in your hand, keep your plan in our hearts and your Spirit in our ears. Please continue to guide us and protect us throughout our days. In your holy name, Amen.