

Date: January 4, 2026

Texts: Jer. 31. 7-14 / John 1. 10-18

Title: "This Is What the Lord Says..."

Intro -

cf. - when a text begins with: "This is what the Lord says..."

it seems almost futile to try and add to it

cf. vs. 7... vs. 10...

but then...

being used to "what the Lord says..."

we sometimes don't pause to let it sink in...

to give it our full attention...

so -

as we enter a new year...

as we welcome new Deacons and Elders...

as we remember -

(re: Jn. 1.14 in the sacrament of the L. S. ...)

let's pause a moment and celebrate what it is...

that the Lord has said

I) Homecoming

this text is all about good news for God's people...

it's all about God's plan for them...

God's plan to bring them home

cf. - they need this homecoming because they hadn't

really appreciated what it meant to be God's people, and...

wound up in exile...

far from home...

defeated in war...

not in a good place (from a mental health perspective...)

but... let's not dwell on that (other than to be "passing aware" of it...)

instead -

let's pause... and focus on this promise of a homecoming

this promise of coming back...

... to where we belong

relate - for a lot of us, this experience is somewhat fresh in our minds...

following on with holiday gatherings...

family coming to us...

us going to them...

but bottom line - being together...

perhaps, with the house bursting at the seams

home...

Michael Grantzen wonders how we can speak of it...?

and offers this:

Robert Frost helps me in the impossible task with his poem,

“The Death of the Hired Man.” Silas, a single man, an ordinary and not particularly outstanding man, has come back ill and ready to die to a farm home where he has worked as hired help before.

Warren, the decent owner of the farm, is not happy that Silas has come back; Silas has let him down in the past. He relents only so far as to admit that “home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.”

But Mary, his wife, goes further, and she says of home,

“I should have called it:

something... you somehow... haven’t to deserve.”

because -

If we have to earn our home, our true home, what chance have we got?

cf. - as it relates to the ever-popular query:

Why do bad things happen to good people?

Surely we've heard that one enough...

Instead, the real question here is:

Why do good things happen to bad people?
(and again, not to dwell on it, but - these were not good people...
hence - exile...)
- are we any better...?
and yet -
what we celebrate here is that we have a home...
that somehow... "we haven't to deserve..."
rather -
we have a home...
solely due to the goodness and the grace of God

II) The Goodness of God

it is the goodness of God that makes the whole homecoming happen...
it is because God is full of goodness and grace
that we have a place to come home to in the first place...
a true home where we belong
this is God's plan - for his people...
for us...
this is how God's plan works -
not because we are good... or worthy... or deserving...
but because -
God is
this is what we are pausing for...
to hear it... to let it sink in... to celebrate it
this is the ground upon which we stand as we enter a new year
(or - as we look back on the old one...
or - as we do anything, for that matter...)
- "God's grace" is what the Lord has to say
if we are wondering about why good things happen to bad people
(or - let's just call them "undeserving...")
the answer, it seems, is because God is good...

... because God is full of grace

cf. - I've shared this before, but it's worth repeating (again and again...)

I've found this helpful in dinner conversations, when

(on occasion) the topic of religion comes up...

During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith.

They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation?

Other religions had different versions of gods' appearing in human form.

Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death.

The debate went on for some time until C.S. Lewis wandered into the room.

"What's the rumpus about?" he asked, and heard in reply

that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions.

Lewis responded, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace."

After some discussion, the conferees had to agree. The notion of God's love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity.

The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of karma, the Jewish covenant, and the Muslim code of law -- each of these offers a way to *earn* approval. Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional.

relate - (per Philip Yancey):

Aware of our inbuilt resistance to grace, Jesus talked about it often.

He described a world suffused with God's grace: where the sun shines on people good and bad; where birds gather seeds gratis, where untended wildflowers burst into bloom on the rocky hillsides.

perhaps... if we paused long enough to hear what it is that

the Lord has to say...

we might be less resistant -

and more inclined to celebrating this -
in hope and joy, because...

God pulls us back to where we belong, and provides us a peaceful home
in this world and the next.

He shows us goodness and grace when he creates a community out of
what was once a ragged remnant, and plants us in a place where
life can become like "a watered garden"
a place where our deepest desires are met and we are given the
gifts we need for an existence that is abundant.

what more could we hope for this year...?
what else could bring us such joy...?