

Woody Allen is quoted as saying “If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans.” I think this quote resonates for so many of us, because we recognize the countless times when we thought we had everything all planned out, and then life threw us a curveball and all of those carefully-made plans went right out the window. This happens in big ways and small ways. Everything from a well-planned first date on the beach disrupted by a thunderstorm to major disruptions in life like illness or the loss of a loved one. Sometimes the disruptions result in a reality that is so much better than the plans we made for ourselves. My plan to be a vice president at a major retailer was disrupted by the recession and being losing my job but resulted in the awareness of my call to ministry. I’m sure each one of us has examples, both joyful and painful about times when our plans were disrupted, and we found ourselves blazing a new trail.

If you want to make God laugh, tell her your plans.” God is getting a good laugh in our scripture texts this morning. First, we hear the plans of King David. David has recently become king of a united Israel, ending an era of a divided kingdom, and he has made Jerusalem the political capital. He also brings the Ark of God to Jerusalem. This chest containing the ten commandments was believed to be the literal presence of God. Or at the very least, that God’s presence was with the Ark wherever it went. By moving the ark to Jerusalem, David was bringing God’s very self to the capital of Israel. As David is getting settled into his palace as the new king, he realizes that while he has a beautiful and grand home, God is living in a tent. David makes a plan to build a grand house for God. It makes sense, right? If anyone should live in a glorious palace, it should be God. But David’s plans are not God’s plans. God reminds David that God has traveled with God’s people and been among them through every hardship. God is the one who provides for God’s people, not the other way around. God is the one making plans and has a hearty laugh at David’s naïve and misguided plans.

We church folk are guilty some of David’s thinking as well. We sometimes forget that God isn’t only present in designated spaces. We might spend an hour a week in this building paying attention to God and then go on with our lives as if God is hanging out in the sanctuary until we come back for church again. We miss the glimpses of God

in the midst of our busyness and in trying to check off all the items on our to-do list. Or when our plans don't work out, we get so angry and frustrated or focus so much on what went wrong that we neglect to seek out the ways in which God might be revealing God's self to us in that moment.

Our text from Mark this morning is a beautiful example of seeking God's presence and God's will as our own plans crumble around us. The disciples have just returned from the first foray into ministry without Jesus at their side. Jesus plans to take them to a quiet place so they can rest, renew, and share their stories. So, they get in a boat and set out on the Sea of Galilee. But Jesus and his disciples were becoming well known for their ministry and their ability to bring healing to people. As they set out, people run to where they are going. Word spreads and when Jesus and the disciples reach their destination, a huge crowd is waiting for them. Put yourself in the place of one of the disciples. You've been hard at work teaching, healing, and walking – lots of walking, doing your best to be a minister of Jesus' teachings to people in physical, emotional, and relational pain. You are finally back with your teacher, your rabbi, looking forward to a well-earned day off relaxing at the lake. But when you arrive at the cabin, a crowd of desperate people are waiting for you hoping your teacher will do the same thing for them that they heard about on social media. Our instinct might be to back the car out of the driveway and head down the highway, watching the crowd get smaller and smaller in the rear-view mirror. But that's not what Jesus does. Yes, his plans to reconnect with his followers are disrupted, but he knows that in this moment, he has an opportunity to be the presence of God for these people. The rest and renewal will have to wait for another day.

As the day draws to a close, Jesus and the disciples set out again across the Sea of Galilee toward Bethsaida. There is a storm and it appears that they are blown off course because when they land, they have arrived in Gennesaret. The two towns aren't that far from each other – maybe 5-10 miles. But far enough that getting to Bethsaida before nightfall would have been difficult. It's already been a long day and the disciples and Jesus still haven't had a chance to relax. Not only that, but after a very turbulent

crossing of the sea, they have landed in the wrong town. How would you be feeling? Would you be angry? Frustrated? Upset? I know those are all very real possibilities for me. But that's not what happens. At least, that's not what got written down. While Jesus may have intended to go to Bethsaida, when he arrived in Gennesaret he looked around and saw he was needed there too. His plans were disrupted over and over and over again. But each time, Jesus chose to take care God's children instead of trying to force his plan through. Now let me be clear, this is not a message that says resting is not important or other people's needs should always come first. There are plenty of other examples of Jesus taking time away from the demands of his ministry to pray, rest, eat, and tend to his own needs. But this particular example, Jesus discerned that the resting could wait.

"If you want to make God laugh, tell God your plans." I used to think this meant that God laughed because God has her own plans for us and God makes those plans happen, and therefore our plans didn't matter. But I don't see it that way anymore. I think God laughs because God knows that we cannot know the future. We cannot anticipate every possibility and plan for it. I think God laughs with us when we tell God our plans the same way we might chuckle when a child tells us they are going to be a famous movie star. It's not that we have control of what that child does or that it's not a possible outcome. We simply know that life doesn't always go the way we plan it to. Sometimes that means things work out better than we would have expected and sometimes that means we are faced with tragedy and grief or deep pain. In each of these moments, we have the opportunity to pay attention to what God would have us do in that moment. God may not have planned for Jesus and the disciples to land in Gennesaret instead of Bethsaida, but Jesus knew that God would want him to use this disruption in his plans to do God's work.

I know many people believe in a God who has a plan for each one of us and everything that happens is part of that plan no matter what. This is a really popular theology and one that I have held at different times of my life. But I always struggled with how this intersects with free will. This is where my appreciation for process

theology began. Process theology would say that God has hopes and desires for each one of us in every moment, but it is up to us to discern those desires and then to choose whether or not to follow them. In these stories, both Jesus and David were attuned to God's desires for their lives and the lives of the people who followed them. As people of faith, it is important for us to learn to pay attention to God's presence, God's desires for us, and God's continual revealing of God's self in each moment. In moments and situations that disrupt our lives for good or bad, may we quiet our internal reactions and seek the wisdom and the presence of God. Amen.