

# CHURCH IN TRANSITION

17th JANUARY  
2021



17th JANUARY 2021 - A FUTURE AND A HOPE  
JEREMIAH 29 v. 1 - 14

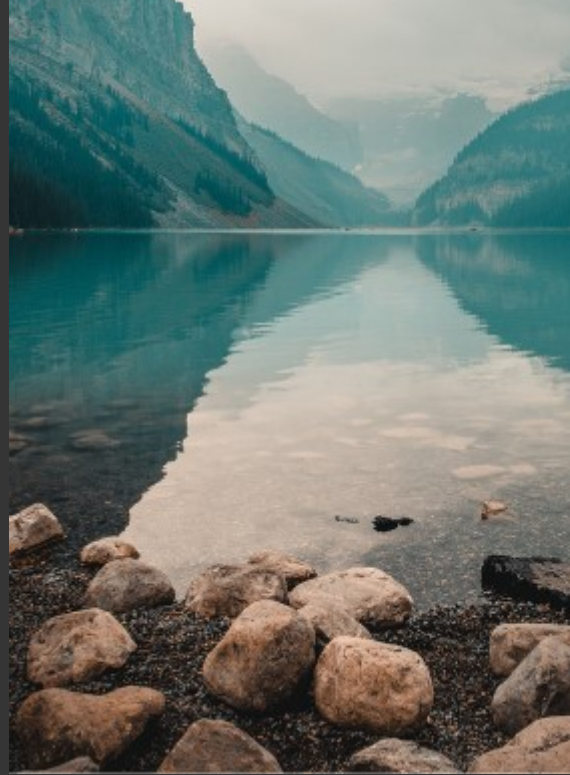


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# WELCOME

Welcome to Church In Transition. Even though Coronavirus is still with us, our new, flexible worship pattern will still blend on-line services, home deliveries and e-mailed copies of Church In Transition. This week we will be looking at: Jeremiah 29 v. 1 - 14 and How we have both a future and a hope with God.



## CALL TO WORSHIP

### **Psalm 113 v. 1 - 5 NLT**

Praise the Lord!

Yes, give praise, O servants of the Lord.

Praise the name of the Lord!

Blessed be the name of the Lord

Forever and ever.

Everywhere - from east to west -

Praise the name of the Lord.

For the Lord is high above the nations;

His glory is far greater than the heavens.

Who can be compared with the Lord our God,

Who is enthroned on high?



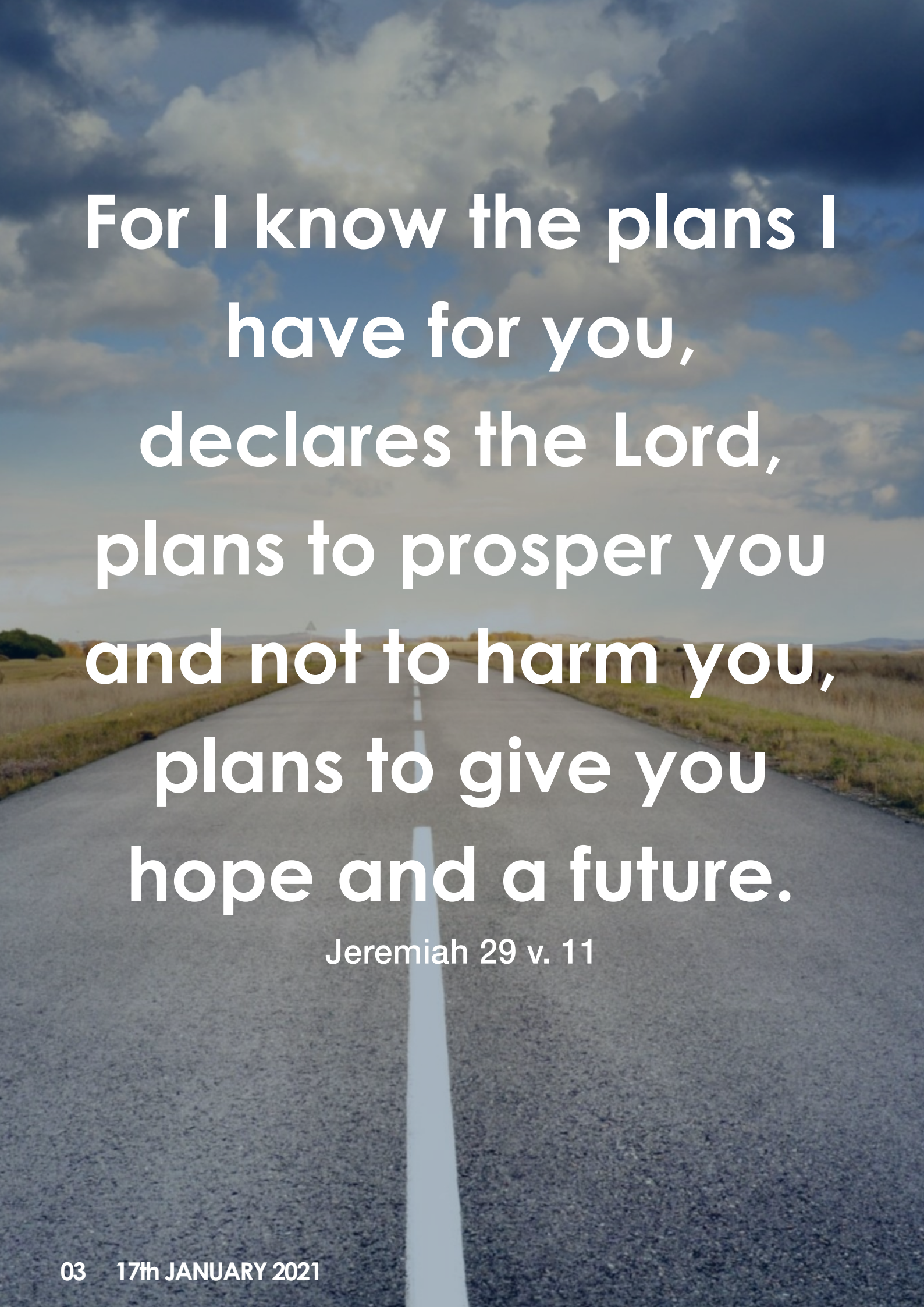


# OPENING PRAYER

Lord God, creator of all things, for your love for humankind: for your love for each person: for the great and mysterious opportunity of life: for the life of your Spirit within us: for the gifts of your Spirit: we praise and worship you today; Lord Jesus

**Amen**





For I know the plans I  
have for you,  
declares the Lord,  
plans to prosper you  
and not to harm you,  
plans to give you  
hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29 v. 11

# SONG SUGGESTION



The Lord's My Shepherd



My Lighthouse



# BIBLE READING

## Jeremiah 29 v. 1 - 14

### New International Version

#### A Letter to the Exiles

This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. <sup>2</sup> (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) <sup>3</sup> He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent

to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said: <sup>4</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup> “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup> Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. <sup>7</sup> Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” <sup>8</sup> Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the

dreams you encourage them to have. <sup>9</sup> They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,” declares the LORD. <sup>10</sup> This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. <sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. <sup>12</sup> Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. <sup>13</sup> You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup> I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”



# CHURCH IN TRANSITION THOUGHTS

If you have known times when everything seemed to be going wrong for you, then you will be able to appreciate these events, that are recorded in **Jeremiah 29**.

There was sustained fighting between Israel, Egypt and Babylon (*by far the strongest nation, led by King Nebuchadnezzar*). Israel was persistently forsaking the Lord. Their capital city, Jerusalem, was under continual attack, and in 597 BC King Jehoiachin and some of the leaders of the people were taken away into exile and captivity in Babylon.

Ezekiel the prophet tells the people by words and actions that this is going to happen, but they don't believe him. God tells Ezekiel, as a '**visual aid**' for the people, to gather together, by day, the bare essentials for a long journey by day. Then he is to dig through the wall of his house and,

at night, to let the people watch him, with his bundle of belongings on his shoulder as if he were making a secret escape (**Ezekiel 12 v. 1 - 16**).

It seemed as if God had completely forsaken his people and everything was going wrong. Are there not times when we feel just like that? There are often times when we feel that maybe God has abandoned us and left us.

## **God knows and cares**

Some of the prophets who were taken away with the leaders were saying that the exile would last only a short time. Jeremiah had to tell the people the truth. He wrote this letter to them (**Jeremiah 29 v. 1 - 14**) about three years later.

Some 3000 people had gone into captivity and more would follow later. God's message to his people

was to settle down in exile and to get on with living. He urged them to cultivate the land, set up homes, have families and to live as ordinary a life as possible, seeking not only the well-being of the city and the land, but also seeking the Lord himself. But why should they? Did God really care?

Jeremiah brought the heart-warming message that God knew and cared about their situation. He was in control and had the future in hand.

Notice how Jeremiah tells us that Nebuchadnezzar had thought that he had brought Israel into exile (**Jeremiah 29 v. 1**), while God says that he had (**Jeremiah 29 v. 4**).

Even awful things don't happen without God knowing. But Jeremiah tells them that the exile would last for 70 years and God has plans for their future return and blessing. Their duty was to seek the Lord and find out his will and purposes for their lives.

### **Your move**

Any change in life is difficult — leaving home, moving house, a change of job. a tragic event. It's even worse when we feel that God is not concerned. That's just how Israel must have felt, but both



Ezekiel and Jeremiah write to remind us that God knew about their captivity, and even when things were going very wrong he knew, cared and had plans to restore them and bring them back.

This is the story of a mountain! It was the tallest point of the capital of the Promised Land. It was known as Mount Zion. It was the central focus of the religious life of the Jews, for on top of it the temple was built, and there the presence of God was felt so strongly that it was acknowledged as the dwelling place of God himself.

The Jews believed that it was inviolable. Circumstances confirmed this - on one occasion the enemy troops of Sennacherib had invaded the whole of Judaea as far as the foot of Mount Zion, which they besieged. And then they melted away, as if the very sign of the mountain of God's presence was enough to defeat them (**Psalms 48 v. 1 – 5**).

But feeling inviolable almost inevitably leads to complacency. The Jews began to believe that the protection of God was their right. Their worship became haphazard. They flirted with the idols of foreign countries. Corruption and injustice

infiltrated every level of society. The prophets warned that God would not tolerate sin indefinitely. But the people had no anxieties. God had made his home among them on Mount Zion, and Mount Zion was inviolable. And then, as we see in **Jeremiah 29 v. 1 - 14**, the unthinkable happened. . .

### **CARRIED INTO EXILE (Jeremiah 29 v. 1)**

Nowadays a visit to Mount Zion is just one more tourist excursion, but for the Jews, dragged as captives to Babylon, being unable to ascend the hill to the temple was a calamity. They believed that God had been left behind. **Psalms 137 v. 1 - 9** describes their agony.

The Christian path sometimes takes us to places we would rather not go and puts us among people we would rather not be with.

### **ILLUSTRATION**

*Exile is being where we don't want to be with people we don't want to be with. It forces a decision: will I focus my attention on what is wrong with the world and feel sorry for myself? Or will I focus my energies on how I can live at my best in the place I find myself ...*





*We can say ... 'God is here with me. What I am experiencing now is on ground that was created by him, and with people whom he loves. It is just as possible to live out the will of God here as any place else.'*

**Eugene Peterson**

It is a kind of exile. But we can know with certainty something that the Jews had yet to discover. God is not tied physically to any one place. Not only does he go with us wherever exile may take us; he was already there!



## **SEEK THE WELL - BEING OF THE CITY (Jeremiah 29 v. 7)**

The letter is from Jeremiah, who had been left behind in Jerusalem, to those who had been less fortunate. The prophets had delivered scores of warnings that, unless they changed, this very catastrophe would occur (**Ezekiel 12 v. 7 - 11**, for example). But Jeremiah's tone is not a whining, '**Told you so!**' Nor is it a furious condemnation of the Babylonians.

The attitude one would expect is found in **Psalms 137 v. 8, 9**. Instead he says, '**Pray for Babylon. Put down roots there. Make peace and seek the good of the people among whom you live. Be happy.**' Six hundred years before

Jesus, he is saying, **‘Love your enemies.’**

When the world seems to us an evil place, it is tempting to withdraw to the safety of the Christian community. **Jeremiah 29 v. 7** speaks to us, not telling us to accept uncritically all that takes place, but asking us to engage with a society that needs to be brought into contact with God through his people. (**2 Corinthians 10 v. 2, 3 & 1 Peter 2 v. 11, 12**).

### **A FUTURE AND A HOPE (Jeremiah 29 v. 11)**

It's very easy when thinking about God's plan for our lives to have the attitude: **“it's all about me.”**

Yes, it's true that God cares about every intricate detail in our lives. In fact, Jesus said that even the hairs on our heads are numbered. We can also mistakenly think that God's plan is always going to be a **‘feel good’** plan with the intent to make us happy.

Jeremiah's message in these verses is actually radically different.

He's writing to a group of people who are being held captive, and are in exile from their

homeland. He's writing to let them know that although they're not where they would have expected to have been, nor where they would have asked God to place them, that God has not forgotten them and He still has a plan for their lives. Even in the midst of a difficult situation, God wants them to know His plans.

In the preceding verses we see that a big part of God's plan is for them to **‘seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile’** (**Jeremiah 29 v. 7**). In other words, God wants them to know that His plans are not just to benefit them personally.

God's also telling them that He's not removing them from the situation immediately. He does promise to eventually restore them, but it's not coming quickly (**70 years out when many of them will be dead**).

God's letting them know they can move forward, because in the eternal picture, God's justice will prevail and everything will even out. They belong together, but they are granted only to those who take the search for God seriously (**Jeremiah 29 v. 13**).

Uncertainty about the future is a great shadow over the western

world. Industrial progress has taught us how to put a hole in the ozone layer, but not how to plug it again. The word '**hope**' is not found much in secular literature. Today, in the midst of difficult situations, God wants us to know He has a plan. He also wants us to know that as we submit to His plan that He desires to use us to bless the world around us.

The key still remains during both good and difficult times: ***You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your***

***heart.***

*Maybe, as we enter into 2021 we need to be asking ourselves these questions: How does God want you to trust His plan in the midst of life's daily difficulties? How does God want to use you to be a blessing to others?*

In that setting the prospect of the return of Christ should bloom like a rose in a wasteland. It has taken much longer than seventy years (**Jeremiah 29 v. 10**).

How long, O Lord? ***Maranatha.***  
Come, Lord Jesus!





# QUESTIONS TO PONDER

A black and white photograph of a person kneeling on a long, straight road that stretches into the distance towards mountains. The person is seen from behind, wearing a light-colored t-shirt and dark pants. The road has a dashed white line down the center and solid white lines on the sides. The background shows a vast, open landscape with mountains in the distance under a clear sky.

Have there ever been times in your life when you have felt that God was not there for you? If so, what can you do in order to 'come closer' to God again?

If God blesses us, what can you do in order to be a blessing to those around you?

# SONG SUGGESTION

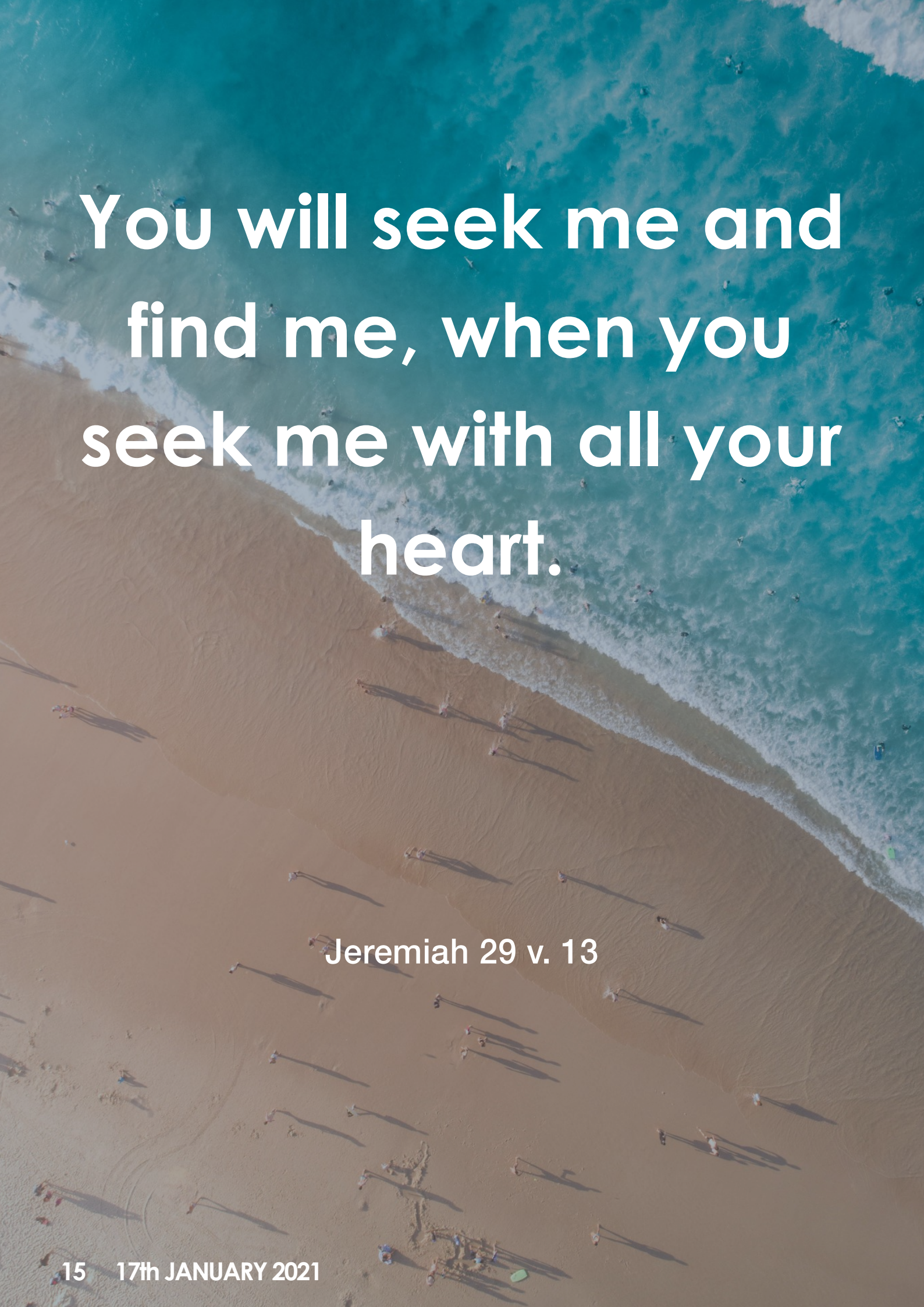


I Stand Amazed In The  
Prescence



As The Deer Pants For  
The Water



An aerial photograph of a beach with people walking and swimming in the ocean. The text is overlaid on the image.

You will seek me and  
find me, when you  
seek me with all your  
heart.

Jeremiah 29 v. 13



# PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

I invite you to join in a kind of reflective praying as you think about your journey with Jesus.

First think back to when you first started walking with Jesus. For some of us, it was too early to fully remember, as we prayed trusting goodnight prayers in our cribs. For some it will have been a decisive moment when, as an adult, we chose to journey with him. And for many there is not one moment, but a gradual realisation that Jesus walks beside you. Whichever camp you find yourself in, choose a moment at least in the early stages of your Christian life.

Imagine that you stand at that moment, looking forward through time to today. Take a moment to see the joyful times in your life journey: When have you felt extra close to God? When have you experienced answered prayers or a strong sense of calling? Notice these moments in the years, months and weeks leading up to today, and offer your thanks to God.

Now, from your perspective of the early stages of your journey with Jesus, look towards today and notice the times of disappointment. When have there been difficult times? Times of unanswered prayer or unmet expectations? Notice these times, and bring them before God. Be honest when you express how you feel about these times, God can take it.

Now, change your perspective to today. Look back at your disappointments from this perspective and open your heart to allow God to speak. Did God have a plan with this time of your life? Was there anything you

learned from that part of your journey? Sometimes, this side of the new creation, we see nothing good coming out of suffering, but be open to the possibility that God might whisper in your heart something he has grown in you through your difficulties. Let's listen in silence.

Finally, let's bring to God our present and our immediate future. Are there things you are currently praying for, hoping that God will answer quickly? Issues in your life where you don't want to endure the journey, but would like to hurry God to a good end destination? Bring these things to God now. Ask him to help you on your journey. Be aware that Jesus walks with you and if you let him, helps you carry your burdens.

Father God, We bring all these reflections to you. Thank you that you never leave us, and that, by the Holy Spirit, Jesus continues to walk with us. Give us patience to endure and to not rush ahead, give us hope that your goodness will prevail. In Jesus name.

**AMEN**





# THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father who art in Heaven  
hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it  
is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our  
trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
forever and ever

**AMEN.**



# COMMUNION AT HOME

Today is a Sunday that we would normally share communion together, if we were in the church building. This is a time when we would come together remembering the love and sacrifice that Jesus made on the Cross for our sins and forgiveness. As we still can't gather together physically as the body of Christ in order to share communion together, we are still able to gather spiritually as His church in our homes in order to share of the bread and the cup together.

We can do this by getting a small glass of red juice (*fruit juice, squash etc.*) and a small piece of bread and 'sharing these elements' at a time that is convenient to you.

*(Normally as a church we will do this during the service at about 11.30am.)*

Our normal practice would be to say these words:

For I received from the Lord what I pass on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, (*you might like to pray at this point*) he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' (*this is the time to eat the bread*). In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' (*now is the time to drink the cup*). For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11 v. 22 - 26

If you would like to do this today with us, then please do so, and may the Lord's richest blessings be with you today.



# SONG SUGGESTION

O Sacred King



# OFFERING



As we find ourselves once again in a 3rd National Lockdown due to the ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic, the decision was made not to meet in person in church. Therefore, as we come to give of our finances to the work of the Lord that goes on in the church, let us give with a cheerful and grateful heart and praise God for all that he has given to us until the time arises when we can physically meet together again.

# BLESSING

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you, wherever He may send you.

May He guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm.

May He bring you home rejoicing at the wonders He has shown you.

May He bring you home rejoicing once again into our doors.

**Amen**





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