Good morning. I’m here today to talk to you about . . . well, about the future. The future has been a recurring topic in my thoughts of late, and when I decided to give a senior sermon, it didn’t take me long to decide that I wanted to talk about the future. More specifically, I wanted to talk about fear of the future. The future, according to a favorite movie of mine, is an undiscovered country. Or, if you prefer, an unexplored frontier. Now, that idea can be exciting, but it can also be downright frightening, and there doesn’t seem to be a middle ground between these two extremes. In my experience there are few other things which provoke such strong and polarized responses in the human psyche. Over the last several months, whenever the future has come up as a topic of conversation in my circle of friends, I’ve heard a wide range of responses, ranging from excitement to uncertainty about what the future holds. Most of my friends have plans for their lives after graduation. I know people who are hoping to become pastors, software engineers, doctors, teachers, lawyers, pharmacists, artists, stockbrokers, nurses, and scientists. And while I devoutly hope that my friends’ dreams will all come true, I’m also cognizant of the fact that they—that all of us—may not end up where we expect to end up. And that’s the other thing I want to talk about today: the fluidity of the future. If I may be allowed to indulge my inner Star Wars fan for a moment: “Always in motion, the future is.” Wisdom from the backward-speaking voice of Frank Oz. The future is a nebulous thing; we may think we have hold of it, or that we know what’s going to happen, but it appears to be the way of things that our expectations of the future are stymied just as often as they are fulfilled. Oddly enough, it seems
as if this is a fundamental aspect of God’s Word, Old and New Testaments alike.

But now I imagine some of you might be wondering: What is this you’re going on about, John? What’s all this talk of fluidity and fear about? What do they have to do with each other, or with the future? Well, to answer that question, let’s take a moment and go back to the Scripture that we just heard and pick it apart. And, since I’m a history major, I’ll do that by giving you a brief history lecture. When Jeremiah wrote those words, the nation of Judah had been just been attacked and subdued by the Babylonian empire. The leaders and elites of the nation had been carried off by King Nebuchadnezzar, after his armies had laid siege to Jerusalem. The people of Judah, the Jews, had seen their homes looted, their shops burned, their friends and family members slaughtered. Their Temple, the very center of their world, had been pillaged by the Babylonians. Under the circumstances, it would have been entirely understandable for them to regard their future with trepidation. What else might the Babylonians do to them, now that they, the Jews, were utterly in their power? More importantly, where was God? Why had He allowed this to happen to them, His chosen people? Into this breach stepped Jeremiah and the letter that he dispatched to the exiles in Babylon, which later became chapter 29 of the book bearing his name. Again, the text, verse eleven: “‘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.’” Doesn’t that seem like a strange thing for a prophet to say to a people who had just been violently uprooted from their homes? To say this to a people being held in exile, a people who can see nothing but terrible, dark times ahead . . . to be frank, it sounds as if Jeremiah is holding out false hope, trying to placate the people with vague promises of a brighter tomorrow. But the real key to this message lies in the preceding verses, the verses which Pastor Paul so kindly recommended I look at for today. “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... 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.” Through Jeremiah, God was sending his exiled people this message: “Don’t worry about the future or make plans to return home; that’s my job. What you have to do right here and now is bloom where you’ve been planted. Make lives for yourselves and your families, and rebuild what you’ve lost. When the time is right, I’ll return you to where you belong. Only trust in me and wait for me to do what must be done.” God’s people were afraid of what the future held for them, and they were searching for guidance. He was telling His people that they didn’t need to be afraid. Even in this direst of times, He was still with them, and His plans were already being set in motion. Unfortunately, the people of Judah chose not to listen to God’s advice as delivered to them by Jeremiah; eight years after the first siege, they revolted against Babylon. This time, Nebuchadnezzar razed Jerusalem and the Temple to the ground and carried the rest of the Jews into captivity, leaving behind only a tiny group to keep watch over the land. The Jews remained under the control of Babylon for several decades more, until the Persian Empire defeated the Babylonians. The Persian king, Cyrus the Great, decreed that the Jews could go home and restored them to Jerusalem, where they rebuilt the Temple and flourished for hundreds of years. And that’s the interesting thing about God’s plans. As Jeremiah said, God has plans for us, “plans to give us hope and a future.” But God likes to take the scenic route, so to speak. He doesn’t always use what would, to our eyes, be the quickest or most sensible method of doing things. The Bible is replete with examples of this tendency: look at the birth of Isaac in Abraham’s one hundredth year, or the Israelites’ four-decade journey to the Promised Land, or David’s unlikely accession to the throne of Israel. In each of those cases, God’s plans were carried out in a very roundabout manner, and usually only after the humans
concerned had unsuccessfully tried to fulfill God’s plans and promises by themselves. “Always in motion, the future is.” It was true then, and it’s still true today. Now, I don’t believe that any of us here will ever be carried off into exile or spend forty years wandering in the desert. But the lessons in Jeremiah Chapter Twenty-Nine can still be applied to our lives. I said just a few moments ago that God likes to take the scenic route. It may be the case that some of us in this chapel will end up traveling on that scenic route. Indeed, it may already have happened. Case in point: Five years ago, I had no inkling that I was going to end up at Augustana College. In fact, I had all but decided that I was going to attend another school, down in Kansas City. However, as I got further into the college selection process, a series of visits and other events revealed Augustana to be the superior option, and so here I stand today. Who knows where I’ll be in another five years? This goes to show that, though you may have a clear-cut destination in mind for yourself, it isn’t necessarily where you’re going to end up. For example, my father, who is here today, went to law school with the aim of becoming a college administrator. That was his dream job. Instead, he ended up working as a lawyer specializing in Social Security disability and Worker’s Compensation cases, and in that capacity he has served as an arbiter of justice for hundreds of injured and disabled workers who were denied needed benefits by their employers, or by the Social Security Administration. Can I say for sure that God marked Ed Detlie down to be a lawyer when he was born? No. But when I look back at all the people my father has helped over the course of his career, people who might otherwise have been trapped in desperate circumstances without any help, I can certainly imagine it. God is the supreme creator of the infinite multiverse, and even if we don’t know where our lives are going, He does. We can try to second-guess Him, but, as Doctor Swanson is fond of saying, “God is God and you’re not.” Certainly, it is human nature to believe that we know best, that we have everything under
control—though I won’t quote it here, William Henley’s poem *Invictus* is a good example of this. However, this is not always so, and trying to out-think the supreme creator of the infinite multiverse is probably not the best or wisest of ideas. So, even when it’s hard, even when you feel like God has abandoned you or that you know better than he does, it’s still wisest to trust in Him and seek His guidance. I speak from experience; if I hadn’t been able to rely on God’s wisdom at some of the darkest points of my life, I don’t know that I would be standing here today. I was very much on the edge of being destroyed by my own rage and fear, and Jeremiah 29:11 was one of the things that pulled me back from that edge. There but for the grace of God, as the saying goes. And that brings me back to my first topic: fear. It’s all very well and good for me to stand up here and tell you that God has everything under control, but it’s another thing entirely to believe it, to internalize it, especially when we don’t know where our lives are going. I believe that, for some of us, Augustana College is a refuge from this uncertainty. Here at Augie, we are a community, bound together by our core values. We love, support, and respect each other, even if we don’t agree or get along all the time. Let’s be honest: the real world is not always a friendly place, especially not when compared to the congenial atmosphere that Augustana’s faculty and staff have worked so hard to cultivate. The prospect of leaving this cozy refuge and entering the world, with or without a clear plan, can be frightening. I have experienced this fear in the past. I still do, on occasion. But whenever I do, I remind myself that God has a plan for me, to give me hope and a future. And I believe that God has a plan for each one of us here today. Some of us may have already discovered that plan, or think that we have. Others may still be finding it out. For those who haven’t yet reached the end of the path: keep going. Live your life and pursue your dreams, but remain open to God’s wisdom and guidance, and don’t be afraid of what the future brings. It might not always be the easiest thing in the
world, but it will certainly be worth it. I hope that, when we meet again ten or fifteen or twenty
years from now, we will have all found the path God has laid out for us, and that we will all be
happy and at peace. Michael is going to come up here and give a benediction in a second, but
I’m going to preempt him a little and end with another favorite passage of mine. Numbers 6:24-
26: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be
gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.” Thank you
all for coming. God bless you.
Morning Worship  
Monday, January 28, 2013

Prelude  
Christian Einertson

Welcome/announcements  
Michael Seeley

Invocation

Prayer:
Direct us, Lord God, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and extend to us your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name; and finally, by your mercy, bring us to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Scripture  
Jeremiah 29: 4-14

Message  
John Detlie  
Majors: History, Philosophy

Hymn  
“What God Ordains is Good Indeed.”  
ELW #776

Prayer
Lord God, you call your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untraveled, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that your hand is leading us, and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Lord’s Prayer

Benediction & Dismissal

Postlude  
Christian Einertson

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS


FAITH FEST is an overnight retreat event at Augustana for area middle schoolers, February 23-24. Are you interested in helping with this fun-filled, faith-filled event?? Email Jenna Hyde to sign-up or for more information. jahyde11@ole.augie.edu

Are you on an Outreach Team? Do you love Bible Camp? Come to a PIZZA PARTY on Sunday night, February 17, 8-10pm in the Back Alley. We'll visit with camp directors from across the country about opportunities to work at summer camp. Outreach team members will stick around after pizza for a workshop that helps us brush-up on our ministry skills.

CHAPEL SCHEDULE
Weekday chapel will be held between the block classes at 11:45 am on Mon, Wed. and Fri. during Interim, returning to 10 am for 2nd Semester.

Wednesday, 1-30  Holy Communion, 11:45 am - Tom Meyer, Bs. Off.; KayLa Gerlach/Joslyn Bialas special music

INTERIM BREAK - 1-31 to 2-5.....no chapel services
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