

Youth Sunday 2/24/08

by Matt Custer

Jeremiah 29: 11-12 “I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring you the future you hope for. Then you will call to me. You will come and pray to me, and I will answer you.”

It's really hard to see the hope in today's world. Horrible things happen to good people, such as flooding, car crashes, divorces, college shootings, the list goes on. But as Emily just mentioned, hope can be found even in the midst of chaos. Even though we can find hope in horrible situations, it is difficult to remain optimistic about the future. Threats of terrorism, questions about climate, and concerns of the economy have made our future a bit disconcerting.

If you haven't found out why we chose the theme of hope for Youth Sunday, you will now know. Hope is in our midst was the theme for this year's Triennium. I had the privilege to attend this week long experience at Purdue University in Indiana with Presbyterian youth from all around the

world. It is a humbling, yet amazing experience to worship with almost 5,000 other people who are trying to find hope in their own lives.

Everywhere you looked, you would see people on street corners with signs saying “Free Hugs.” It’s really amazing that in an event with such an eclectic group of people, that complete strangers actually hug back. You wouldn’t see that in Towson. It really helped spread happiness and even more- hope that strangers can get along.

One of the preachers told a story, one which profoundly expresses hope for the future. The preacher’s name was Mark Montgomery from Connecticut. He had just finished seminary and was employed as a pastor at a Presbyterian church in South Carolina. One of the church members there was also one of his best friends. One day, Mark gets a call from him saying that his father had died and that he would like Mark to preside over the funeral. While Mark was honored to have been asked by his best friend to conduct the funeral, he also felt compassion for him, as the father-son relationship had been very close. The funeral day comes and his friend is very distraught. He believed that his life would not continue with his father gone. Mark was trying to search for something, a sign, that would indicate that everything would be ok. All of a sudden, a butterfly lands on the

father's casket. Mark approaches his friend and comforts him. "Look," he says, "that butterfly was sent from God to let you know that everything would be ok." It wasn't enough. His friend was still more distraught than ever. The ceremony ends and Mark comforts his friend one more time as they depart.

A few hours go by, and Mark gets a call on his cell phone. It's his friend. He says, "Mark, you have to come over here." He was calling from his father's house. But he seemed fine, almost as if he hadn't just attended his father's funeral. Mark drops everything to make the trip across town to see why he was invited to his friend's parent's house. Mark arrives and is ushered inside. He is shown toward his father's bedroom. He walks in and lone behold: the entire wall was covered in real butterflies. This was the sign that Mark's friend needed: the sign that everything was going to be ok.

We all wonder whether our children will grow up in a good world. We all fear that the slowing economy will affect us, that hurricanes will eventually flood our house, and that we will get accepted into the right college. God provides this great thing. It's called hope. Whenever we feel

like the future is questionable, we should stay comfortable in the fact that God has our futures in his hands, and that he would never harm us.

We have to remember that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins. We would not be here today if Jesus did not sacrifice himself. This alone is hope for the future. The hope that we will have the opportunity to eventually go to heaven.