

"Settle Down"

**Scripture: Jeremiah 29:4-7a, 11; Mark 4:35-39; Theme Song: "Home" by Phillip Phillips
By Rev. Dr. Don Ludwig**

Dreams that Die Hard

Looking back to 19 years ago when Kathy and I visited this church for the first time, we sat in the back row just behind Walley and Gale Carey. We had one goal which was to stay in the background, not tell people what we do and just enjoy this progressive community without getting involved. Well, you can see how well that turned out for us. Six months later I was a member of the staff.

Beloved friends and family of this church, my home for the past 18 and a half years. As I stand before you today for the last time in this role, I feel a mix of emotions: gratitude, nostalgia, and a touch of anxiety as I wonder what some of you have planned for my roasting after the worship service. But seriously, today is about reflection, hope, and yes, a bit of saying goodbye. In the midst of this transition—both mine and ours—I want to talk about settling down, not as resignation, but as faith-filled rooting in God's promises, even when the world feels chaotic and the future uncertain.

Frederick Buechner once said, "Dreams of fame and fortune die hard if they ever die at all." And he's right. Who among us hasn't held onto some dream of glory, some vision of success that we thought would complete us? Maybe it's the dream job, the perfect relationship, or, for some of us, simply finding our keys in less than 30 minutes.

In our scripture today, Jeremiah writes to exiles—people who had lost everything: their homeland, their temple, their dreams. They were strangers in a strange land, clinging to the hope that God would swoop in and fix it all, return them to the life they once knew. But God's message through Jeremiah wasn't, "Pack your bags, rescue is coming tomorrow." It was, "Settle down." Plant gardens. Build houses. Seek the welfare of the city where you are. God's message wasn't about immediate escape; it was about learning to live faithfully where you are, even when "where you are" is far from where you want to be.

Settle Down to Be Transformed

Sometimes, we think settling down means giving up. But what if settling down means giving in—to God's work in us? What if it's not about resignation but transformation? Jesus, in Mark's Gospel, invites the disciples to settle down in another way. He says, "Let

us go across to the other side.” It’s not a casual boat ride; it’s a call to trust, even as storms rage. The disciples panic, as we all do, because storms—literal or metaphorical—are terrifying. “Teacher, don’t don’t you realize that we are going to drown here?”

And Jesus, in the most Jesus-y way possible, stands up, rebukes the storm, and then turns to them and says, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” Friends, faith isn’t the absence of fear or questions. Faith is what we settle into when the storms rage around us. Faith is the choice to plant ourselves in the work of justice, even when the waves rise. As I prepare to leave, I think about the idea of home. Jeremiah reminds us that home isn’t always where we want to be; it’s where God calls us to be. As Philip Phillips sings:

*Hold on to me as we go,
As we roll down this unfamiliar road...*

This church has indeed been home for me, and I hope it has been home for you too. Not because of the building—though we all love the never ending chaos of who is in charge of the items that are left in the refrigerator and making sure to always check with the surroundings committee for any change to the color of the walls or carpet or what is allowed to be hung on those walls (I have gotten in trouble a few times over the years)—but we love this church because of the relationships, the ministry, and the shared commitment to justice, mercy, and equity in all things.

This home we call Southminster has seen joy and sorrow, baptisms and memorials, potlucks and protests. I will never forget the time that we had protesters surrounding our church because our Pastor who supposedly didn’t believe in the traditional God was leading us astray.. Do you remember that? And Andrew Malderelli hooking up his sound system and singing songs of peace and comfort as people came to worship. Together, we have been through a lot, we’ve laughed, cried, and dared to hope in a faith that is never done with us. And even as I leave, you remain. And while transitions can feel like storms, let me assure you: our progressive values and your amazing staff, elders, deacons and active members will keep this place steady.

In a Time of Storms

We’re living in stormy times. Political divisions, questions about the future of our nation, concerns for immigrants, education, and relationships with global allies—these are real and daunting challenges. It feels like the boat is rocking harder than ever.

We at Southminster have been here before, my friends. Just remember back a few years ago to the pandemic and to the advice given from a political authority to drink bleach as a way to fight the co-vid virus. Remember the fear we all had, the uncertainty of our future, the waves all crashing in all around us. I remember an empty church and the challenge of being an Interim Pastor trying to hold it all together. I will never forget preaching for almost 6 months to an empty space. Michel Mouzong was the cameraman who recorded me every Saturday morning to then publish it on Sunday. I got bored a bit. To spice things up, I preached from different locations in the church and had you all guess where I preached from each Sunday. Looking back, those were some fun times! We made the best of things as we always do.

But here's the thing: storms have always raged, and God has always been present. It was true for the exiles in Babylon. It was true for the disciples on the sea. It was true for us during the pandemic. And it's true for us today. Our call isn't to flee the storm and move to Canada as some have suggested, but to settle into faith, to plant gardens of justice, to build houses of hope, and to seek the welfare of the city—of our nation—even when the city feels utterly broken.

A Hope and a Future

I don't know all of the storms or blessings this church awaits. But I know this: You have a future filled with hope, love, and purpose awaiting you. My hopes for Southminster as you enter into your next chapter together is three simple things:

1. Make sure to always find time to laugh. Humor is holy. If Jesus could rebuke storms, I'm pretty sure he could also appreciate a good "Pastor Scott or Georgia Walp" joke every once in a while. In the storms of life, don't forget to laugh.
2. Continue to Love. Love fiercely. Love this community. Love the world. Love the people you agree with, and especially the ones you don't. Love because love is what makes this place a home.
3. Continue to keep Children and Youth and Mission a priority. When I look around at dying churches in Oregon and in our nation, there is one thing in common. They all but gave up on youth and children. In all that you do Southminster, never forsake to nurture the young plants in the garden and always make mission to the world a top priority. Whatever else you is gravy.

Goodbye, But Not Farewell

As I say goodbye but not farewell, I want to acknowledge someone who you have all grown to love. Someone who is my rock and my fortress. Someone who has believed in

me even when I did not. Someone who is so humble that you might never know all the things she does behind the scenes. The best pastor's wife on the planet, my better half, my wife, Dr. Kathy Ludwig. In so many ways, I wouldn't be here after 18 and a half years, if it was not for Kathy. We are partners through and through.

As I say goodbye but not farewell, I also want to thank you for the privilege of working with some of the most gifted and talented clergy and staff members in our denomination. From Pastor Peg who brought us the church ladies from Vernonia (remember them?), to Pastor Paul who darn near lost his faith because of us, to Pastor John who opened our eyes to new meanings of the word progressive, to Pastor Scott who has led us out of the pandemic with grace and humility, competence and good humor.

As I say goodbye but not farewell, know that Kathy and my prayers go with you. Know that this place will always be home for me—for us—because of you. And know that the God, who calms the storms, who gives hope to exiles, and who has plans for your good future, will continue to guide and hold you.

And when you feel overwhelmed, remember these words:

Settle down, it'll all be clear.

Don't pay no mind to the demons, they fill you with fear.

The trouble—it might drag you down,

If you get lost, you can always be found.

Settle down, beloved. God goes with us wherever we go.

Amen.