

**BIBLE IN A YEAR**

**BIBLE, FOLLOWING JESUS, DISCIPLESHIP**

**2019**

**STUDY AND COMMENTARY**

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**FROM “THE INTERSECTION”©**

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May 1, 2019  
DESIRE

Readings for today: Judges 13-14, John 1:29-51, Psalms 102, Proverbs 14:15-16

Samson is a cautionary tale. He is a man ruled by his appetites. Driven by his desires. An addict enslaved to the basest of emotions. His life is a study in contrasts. Miraculously conceived. Set apart from birth as a Nazarite. (No wine, cutting of the hair, or touching of dead bodies) He single-handedly delivers Israel from their enemies. At the same time, he despises his birthright. He intermarries with Philistines and sleeps with prostitutes. He eats honey from the carcass of a lion he's killed. He tells Delilah (yet another Philistine) the supposed secret of his strength and she cuts his hair. He is imprisoned and tortured by exacts vengeance on his enemies in one final act of martyrdom.

I have met Samson. Many times. I cannot tell you the number of people I have counseled over the years in my office who seemingly cannot control their desires. Sexual appetites. Drug and alcohol addiction. Co-dependence. Suicidal ideation. It's heartbreaking. These are gifted people who have been blessed in every measure by God. They have families. They have friends. They have careers. They make good money and experience professional success. But their inner lives are a mess. Their souls are in turmoil. They feel trapped and enslaved and ruled by their passions. They buy into the lie that they were "made" this way and therefore have no choice. And it cripples them.

I have met Samson. Every time I look in the mirror I am reminded I too was once driven by sinful desire. Enslaved to the flesh as the Apostle Paul might put it. Sexual desire drove me to pornography. My drinking habits bordered on alcohol addiction. I've struggled with depression and despair in my life. It's been hard. At the same time, I'm blessed with an amazing family. A godly wife and four kids I love with all my heart. I've got great friends. A career I absolutely love. But my inner life has been a mess. I've too often believed the lie that I am at the mercy of what I feel. That I have no choice. Thankfully, I've received great counsel and a lot of therapy over the years. Mentors, counselors, friends who acted as a spiritual and emotional guides to help bring peace to my soul.

Here's the truth of the gospel...you have been set free! For freedom Christ has set you free so do not submit again to a yoke of slavery! Do not turn back to your former ways! Do not believe the lie that you are at the mercy of what you feel. You are not defined by your desires. You are not a slave to your emotions. Love the Lord with all your heart! Submit your desires to Him! Allow His Spirit to sanctify your emotions and your feelings. Keep in step with the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. In fact, you will find yourself beginning to desire what God desires. Holiness. Purity. Grace. Mercy. Compassion. These things flow from a heart surrendered to God.

Readings for tomorrow: Judges 15-16, John 2, Psalms 103, Proverbs 14:17-19

May 2, 2019  
**MEDITATING ON TRUTH**

Readings for today: Judges 15-16, John 2, Psalms 103, Proverbs 14:17-19

My wife and I were sitting down for dinner last week when one of our daughters came downstairs. She was in the middle of her homework. There were still dishes to do. A floor to sweep and mop. A lunch to be made. A room to clean. And it was getting late. She was tired. Frustrated. Upset. And I could tell by the look on her face that her internal critic was in overdrive. Telling her all kinds of lies. “You can’t get it all done.” “You are so far behind.” “You will flunk your assignment.” “You’ll never finish.” As we talked, her emotions escalated. Her voice raised. Tears came to her eyes. Her body language more animated. Now I will confess I used to escalate with her. I used to get angry. I too believed lies. “She’s just being disobedient.” “She’s trying to avoid work.” “She’s just wasting time.” My voice would raise. My body language would become animated. And we’d end up in a shouting match that just wrecked her spirit.

Meditating on Psalms like the one we read today have been so helpful. “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s...The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children...” (Psalms 103:2-5, 8-17) You see, if God is merciful and gracious. If He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. If He does not deal with me according to my sin. If He removes my sin as far as the east is from the west or as high as the heavens are above the earth. How can I do the same for the people in my life? I know their frames. I know they are dust just like me. I know they are fragile and anxious and afraid. So how can I encourage and bless? How can I crown them with steadfast love and mercy? How can I satisfy them with good so their strength is renewed?

So rather than yell, I simply held out my arms to my daughter. She resisted at first. I actually had to chase her around the kitchen for a full five minutes or so before she relented. She was so upset the last thing she wanted was a hug. But eventually she gave in. As I held her, her tears dried up. Her heart rate slowed down. You could feel her body relax. We started talking through everything she had to do. We identified the lies she was telling herself and I reminded her of the truth. “You have plenty of time.” “You are more than capable.” “Your mom and I are here to help.” She wrapped everything up in no time and was able to relax before bed.

Such a beautiful moment. And if I - a sinful, broken dad - can bless my children, how much more our Heavenly Father? I don’t know about you but I too often believe the lies. How can God forgive me? How can God love me? Where is God when I hurt? He must not care about my suffering? Psalm 103 teaches us the truth. Our Father forgives all our iniquity. He heals all our diseases. He lavishes all blessings on us. He removes our sin as far as the east is from the west and His steadfast love never fails. He is merciful. Gracious. Good. Compassionate. When we are anxious and afraid and find our emotions amping up, He simply holds out His arms to us. Inviting us into His embrace so He can give us peace.

Readings for tomorrow: Judges 17-18, John 3:1-21, Psalms 104:1-23, Proverbs 14:20-21

**May 3, 2019**  
**IDENTITY**

Readings for today: Judges 17-18, John 3:1-21, Psalms 104:1-23, Proverbs 14:20-21

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

Our culture is obsessed with identity. Gay, straight, bi. Black, brown, white. Republican, Democrat. Socialist, Libertarian. Male, female, tran. Boomer, Gen X, Millennial. Abled, disabled. Rich, middle class, poor. Religious. Non-religious. Everyone wanting to be part of a tribe. Part of a group. Part of a community who understands their needs. Everyone wants to be affirmed and accepted. Everyone wants to be validated and embraced. Of course, there's nothing wrong with these desires. Human beings have an existential fear of loneliness that is hardwired into the deepest parts of our souls. We were not made to be alone. In fact, part and parcel of being made in the image of God means being made in the image of our Creator who exists eternally in community in Himself.

Enter Nicodemus. A man who belonged to the tribe of the Pharisees. A leader among the Jews. A man who identified clearly with his people and his faith. But something is missing which is why he finds himself coming to Jesus. He's nervous. He's anxious. He's afraid. He doesn't want to cross his tribe. He doesn't want to put his reputation at risk so he comes to Jesus at night. Under the cover of darkness. He wants to get in and out unseen. But Jesus – as he so often does - cuts right to the heart of his problem. It's one of identity.

"You must be born again." What a statement! You must ground your identity in Christ alone. You must take on a new name. Belong to a new family. One defined by love and devotion to God. It's not new. It's really the only way we can live out the first and second great commandments. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. The only way this happens is if we are first born again. Born to new life. Born to a new identity as a child of God.

But how can we be born again? How can we lay hold of our new identity in Christ? By faith. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." (John 3:16-18) We cannot make this happen on our own. We cannot climb back into our mother's womb. And thankfully we don't have to! All we have to do is believe. Receive the gift of God's only begotten Son. Trust He came not to condemn but to save.

Readings for tomorrow: Judges 19-20, John 3:22-4:3, Psalms 104:24-35, Proverbs 14:22-24

May 4, 2019  
**HEART OF DARKNESS**

Readings for today: Judges 19-20, John 3:22-4:3, Psalms 104:24-35, Proverbs 14:22-24

Today we encounter some of the most difficult material in all of Scripture. We see Israel at one of her lowest points. She has forgotten Yahweh. She has become like all the pagan tribes around her. She is more focused on her own gratification than she is on serving and honoring the Lord. Her world is full of idols and sexual perversion and violence. Yes, she still goes through the motions. She still makes her sacrifices. She still prays. Fasts. Appears before the Lord at the appointed times. But it's all empty at this point. Everyone is doing what seems right to them. They are all following their own ways. They are plumbing the depths of sin. They are pushing the boundaries of evil. Unspeakable atrocities are taking place in Israel such as the gang rape of a woman whose body is then dismembered resulting in a genocidal war that basically annihilates an entire tribe. It's madness.

One of my favorite books is the Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad. With penetrating insight, he describes the nature of man. Given the right conditions. Given the right set of circumstances. We will all succumb to temptation. In the book, Kurtz sets himself up as a god to be worshiped. He exploits those around him. He uses them for his own personal gratification and enjoyment. He is evil and selfish and insane. Towards the end of the story, he finds himself dying as he "returns" to civilization. His life flashes before his eyes. He reflects back on all he has done. And his final words are, "The horror! The horror!"

Horror. It's a good word to describe what we read today from the book of Judges. There simply is nothing redemptive in the story. Nothing good. Nothing godly. Man's inhumanity to man is on full display. It's dark. It's evil. It's terrifying. Horror. It's a good word to describe what's going on in our world today. One only has to scroll through a Twitter news feed to see the hate that leads to violence that leads to death and then return the next day to watch the cycle repeat itself. Horror. If we're totally honest, it's a good word to describe what goes on in all of our hearts. All of us are perpetrators. All of us are victims. We are the Levite. We are the concubine. We've sacrificed others and we've been sacrificed for the sake of self-protection and self-gratification. In the Bible's judgment, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:10-18)

So where can we find hope? Where can we find light in the midst of our darkness? Only in Jesus. On the cross, Jesus embraced our darkness. On the cross, Jesus walked into the valley of the shadow. On the cross, Jesus let evil have it's day. The murder of God is the most horrific act in human history and it is worth our reflection. Reflect on the price Jesus paid. The blood He shed. The penalty He bore. Reflect on the suffering He endured. The pain He experienced. The heartbreak of betrayal. Reflect on the depth of our sin. The depravity of our nature. The darkness of our hearts. Reflect on the cost of our salvation. On what it took to redeem us from sin and death. To deliver us from evil.

But make sure to also reflect on our salvation! God plunging Himself into the horror of our condition! Plumbing the depth of our darkness! Immersing Himself in the breadth of our madness! And embracing us as His own! Today we declare there is hope for the Levite and his concubine! Today we declare there is hope for the Kurtz's of our world! Today we declare there is hope even for us! And that hope is found in Jesus!

Readings for tomorrow: Judges 21-Ruth 1, John 4:4-42, Psalms 105:1-15, Proverbs 14:25

**May 5, 2019**  
**RUTH**

Readings for today: Judges 21-Ruth 1, John 4:4-42, Psalms 105:1-15, Proverbs 14:25

I love the book of Ruth. It upends so many expectations and helps us understand the heart of God. Ruth is a Moabite. A foreigner. A sojourner. She married an Israelite named Chilion and became part of his extended family. This was forbidden by the Law of God but it took place during the time of the judges when everyone was doing right in their own eyes. Tragedy strikes. Her father-in-law, Elimelech, dies. Ten years later both her husband and his brother die as well. This puts the whole family in dire straights. There are no men to work. No men to protect them. So Naomi makes the decision to return home. She encourages her Moabite daughters-in-law to do the same. Start over. See if they have better luck with a new family because hers has brought them only grief. Ruth refuses. She makes this extraordinary declaration, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God." (Ruth 1:16) So powerful is her statement that we often hear it read at weddings thousands of years later!

Ruth not only returns with Naomi to Bethlehem, she cares faithfully for her mother-in-law. She puts her life at risk by going out to the fields to glean what was left after the reapers had made their way through. It was backbreaking, painstaking work. Women who did this were often molested, harassed, and abused. They were the poorest of the poor in the land. Completely without hope. In the providence of God, the field she chose belonged to a man named Boaz. A righteous man. A man who left the gleanings for the poor as the Law of God demands. (Lev. 19:9-10) A man who protected her from the men who worked for him. A man who included her among his own young women so she wouldn't be alone. Even invited her to sit and eat at his table. Boaz is a man who clearly honors the Lord. I love what he says to Ruth when she asks him why she has found favor in his eyes. "The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" (Ruth 2:12)

Naomi cannot believe their good fortune! Ruth has been led by God to the very fields of the man who can redeem them! (Lev. 25) A man who is a close enough relative to bring them into his family and continue the family line! Thus unfolds this beautiful courtship in chapter three where Ruth goes and lies at Boaz's feet to ask him to take them in. Boaz is humbled by the request and makes the necessary arrangements to become their kinsman-redeemer. They get married. Conceive a son. The family line continues which is important since her great-grandson is King David! Furthermore, many generations hence, her descendant Joseph will marry a young pregnant woman named Mary and they will have a son named Jesus. The Great Redeemer who will save His people from their sins!

After all the bloodshed and violence and suffering and pain, it is nice to read that not all was lost in Israel. Even in the time of the judges, there were still faithful men and women who followed the Lord. It is a great reminder to us in our own time that the night is always darkest right before the dawn. God using ordinary people to accomplish His extraordinary plans in a culture seemingly hell-bent on ruin. God is faithful and He has promised to the moral arc of this universe towards His Kingdom. Thanks be to God!

Readings for tomorrow: Ruth 2-4, John 4:43-54, Psalms 105:16-36, Proverbs 14:26-27



May 6, 2019  
**READINGS FOR THE DAY**

Readings for TODAY: Ruth 2-4, John 4:43-54, Psalms 105:16-36, Proverbs 14:26-27

Readings for Tomorrow: 1 Samuel 1:1-2:21, John 5:1-23, Psalms 105:37-45, Proverbs 14:28-29

May 7, 2019  
**SPIRITUAL RENEWAL**

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 1:1-2:21, John 5:1-23, Psalms 105:37-45, Proverbs 14:28-29

Today's reading represents a transition point in salvation history. As we've already seen, things are really bad in Israel. The people do not honor God. They do not have leaders who honor God. They are simply going through the motions of worship. Saying all the right things. Making all the right sacrifices. But in their hearts, they reject God. The rebel against His Law. Their priests are a disaster, engaging in sexual immorality. Making a mockery of the sacrificial system. Abusing their spiritual authority. Eli and his sons are the last in the line of the judges. A corrupt time in Israel's history that heartens back to the days of the Great Flood, the Tower of Babel, and slavery in Egypt. At each of these points, God raised up a new leader. A godly leader. Someone who sought Him with all their heart and was "blameless" (not perfect) in their generation.

Noah. Abraham. Moses. Now it's Samuel's turn to take up the mantle of leadership and lead Israel back to Yahweh. Samuel is really a bridge from the time of the Judges to the time of the Kings. He will oversee a major transition in the life of Israel as they go from a bunch of tribes, each with their own identity, to one nation under a strong, centralized monarchy. It's also striking to note Samuel's age when he receives this call. Noah, Abraham, and Moses were all old men. Well beyond their prime. Samuel is a young boy. Not yet come into his own. The message here? God can use anyone at anytime to accomplish His purposes.

Admittedly, we are bleeding into tomorrow's reading a bit but it's worth getting the whole narrative in front of us. "Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was." (1 Samuel 3:1-3)

Several things stand out in this passage. The Word of the Lord was rare. There was no vision. Eli, the current judge and spiritual leader of Israel, was going blind. All of these are connected. Israel was so mired in sin that God had gone almost silent. Throughout the Bible we see this dynamic in play.

"For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him." (2 Chronicles 16:9)

"For My eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from Me, nor is their iniquity concealed from My eyes." (Jeremiah 16:17)

"And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:13)

God will not be mocked. When God's people continue to turn to sin instead of turning to Him in faithfulness, He will withdraw His presence. He will withhold His Word. He will give "them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity...give them up to dishonorable passions...give them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done." (Romans 1:24, 26, 28) And that is exactly what had taken place in Israel and in Eli's own family. Eli failed to discipline and restrain his sons. Hophni and Phineas are the very definition of corrupt religious leaders who manipulate the faith for their own benefit. And though things look okay on the outside - i.e. sacrifices are being made, prayers are being said, worship is taking place - the people of God are spiritually dying. (By the way, we see these same things happening in our world today. Think of the health and wealth preachers who speak to thousands every week. Or the Christian self-help gurus who masquerade as preachers. Or the many preachers who have fallen into sin, reject any kind of accountability or spiritual authority or process of repentance, and then get back into the pulpit. As incredible as it seems, faithlessness is often very popular and faithfulness unpopular.)

Thankfully, all hope is not lost! The lamp of God had not yet gone out! A young boy lies down in the temple of the Lord ready to receive His Word anew! Note the differences between Eli and Samuel. Eli is old. Infirm. Going blind. Samuel is young. Strong. His eyesight is clear. Eli is alone. Lying down in his own place. Samuel is also

alone but makes his bed in the temple to be near the ark of God. Eli is associated in this passage with the rarity of God's Word and a lack of vision. Samuel is associated with hope because light still flickered in the lamp of God.

"The world has yet to see what God can do with a man (or woman) fully consecrated to him." (Attributed to Dwight L. Moody) Spiritual revival always begins with one person fully devoting themselves to God. Samuel was set apart from conception to be such a man. His mother gave him to the Lord to be raised in the temple. He was open to hear God's call when it came. As a result, revival did come to Israel. "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord." (1 Samuel 3:19-21)

Where do you find yourself in this story? Are you like Eli, Hophi, and Phineas? Enslaved to your sinful desires? Pursuing a life apart from God? Is the Word of the Lord rare in your life? Let me strongly encourage you to go before the Lord in honest, even ruthless, self-examination. Ask God to show you the areas of your life that need to be surrendered. Are you like Samuel? Do you have a heart for God? Let me encourage you to dig deep into His Word. Dedicate daily time in prayer. Listen for God's voice as it comes to you through His Word or through other believers or through your own personal prayer time. And when He speaks, may you answer with Samuel, "Speak Lord! Your servant is listening."

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 2:22-4:22, John 5:24-47, Psalms 106:1-12, Proverbs 14:30-31

May 8, 2019  
**SCHOOL SHOOTINGS**

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 2:22-4:22, John 5:24-47, Psalms 106:1-12, Proverbs 14:30-31

It's been a very long day. Filled with lots of conversations, text messages, and emails regarding the latest school shooting in our area. Parents. Teenagers. Families. All reaching out. All needing comfort. All needing hope. And I have to admit, I don't have much to offer. I am tired. Tired of the shootings. Tired of domestic terrorism. Tired of the senselessness of it all. Our culture has made a pact with death and we are reaping the whirlwind. Our obsession with violence too often ending in self-destruction. When will the cycle end?

We have to come to grips with reality. The violence we are experiencing is a symptom of a deeper disease. One that has taken root in every human heart. We are sinful. We are selfish. We are narcissistic. Driven by our basest desires, we no longer seem able to moderate our reactions. Instead we give them full rein. We vent. We emote. We perpetuate hate. Social media throws gasoline on this dumpster fire exacerbating our worst tendencies. Disconnected from authentic relationships. Lonely and isolated. We feel we have no outlet other than unbridled rage. "If we're going down, we're going to take as many with us as possible." Some of us do it with words. Others with guns. Either way, the root of the problem remains the same. A heart tormented by pain and suffering. Wracked by shame and guilt. Numb to the humanity of others.

What happens when we use the very freedoms that make our nation great to indulge the very worst parts of our sinful nature? Freedom of speech used to defend the spread of hate, misinformation, and fake news. Freedom of expression used to defend the graphic depiction of violence in video games, television, and movies. Freedom of assembly used to defend the lunatic fringe. All the while, media outlets make millions fanning the flames of our national discontent. Can we really be surprised when angry, abused, bullied, and neglected adolescents/adults become emotionally unhinged, get their hands on easily obtainable firearms, and shoot up a school? I know, I know. "Guns don't kill people...people kill people." However, this seems dangerously naive sentiment in a culture where mental health issues continue to rise at an extraordinary rate and we consistently demonstrate an inability to mature or show any kind of capacity for emotional restraint.

It's time for a reality check. A national conversation around not just human rights but human responsibilities. A national commitment to the ethics of Jesus which involves self-denial for the sake of others, sacrifice for the greater good, and a dedication to the golden rule. Though all may not accept Christ's divinity or believe in His name unto salvation; surely we can all agree practicing the way of Jesus would lead to a more just and gracious society? And we don't need a theocracy to achieve it. Simply a willingness to be held to a higher standard personally, professionally, and politically.

Sadly, our situation is not new. It is as old as Cain and Abel. There is a violent streak that runs through the heart of every human society which is why God sent His one and only Son. He sent Jesus to give us hope. He sent Jesus to give us peace. He sent Jesus to bring heaven to earth. Even in the midst of the violence and corruption of Eli's time, we read these prophetic words about the coming of the Messiah, "And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever." (1 Samuel 2:35) Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 5-7, John 6:1-21, Psalms 106:13-31, Proverbs 14:32-33

May 9, 2019  
**THE DANGER OF FALSE GODS**

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 5-7, John 6:1-21, Psalms 106:13-31, Proverbs 14:32-33

Imagine you are living in ancient Israel during the time of the judges. You have no Bible. You have no synagogue. You have no centralized system of government. Every now and again, a charismatic leader rises up and for a time you have peace. For a time you seek after God. But pretty soon you lapse back into your old ways. You live in a very tribal culture. Every tribe around you has its own gods and goddesses and its own way of worship that seems to have been working for them. As you build your house and plant your crops and grow your family, you grow complacent. The incredible miracles God worked on your behalf recede further and further. You are preoccupied with the present. What you will eat. What you will wear. Will your wife get pregnant this year? How many lambs will be born this spring? What will the harvest yield? Sure, you go up each year to Shiloh to make your sacrifices but then it's back to normal. And "normal" doesn't really include God. It's actually not hard to imagine, is it? This is familiar territory for all of us. How many of us own a Bible but rarely open it? How many of us belong to a church but rarely go to worship? We too live in a "tribal" culture whether it's our family, social group, political party, etc. Everyone of those tribes has its own "gods" and "goddesses" and different ways of worship. And if we aren't careful, we can get sucked in. We buy our homes. We grow our families. We work hard. We play hard. And we too can get complacent. The miracles and blessings of God can become commonplace in our lives as well. We too are preoccupied with the present. What we will eat. What we will wear. What kind of home we will live in. Will I get a raise this year? A promotion? Will my child make the team? Will I get into my dream college? Will I get my dream job? Will I meet the man or woman of my dreams? Sure, we go to worship on Christmas and Easter just in case but then it's quickly back to normal. And "normal" doesn't really include God.

Enter Samuel. A man sent by God to bring Israel back. To remind her of her covenant commitments. To have no other gods before God. To worship no idols. To honor God's name and keep the Sabbath. "Samuel said to all the house of Israel, 'If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.'" (1 Samuel 7:3) Samuel led Israel during a very difficult period in her history. She had suffered a heartbreaking defeat at the hands of the Philistines. The ark of God had been captured. Her priests had been killed. All hope seemed lost. And then along came Samuel to remind her of God. To challenge her to return to God with her whole heart. To put aside all the other gods and goddesses. To cleanse herself of all the false worship she had engaged in. To come back to God and watch Him work yet another miracle on her behalf. This is exactly what happened. God brought them a great victory over their enemies. The Philistines were subdued. Territory was reclaimed. Hope was restored.

Enter the church of Jesus Christ. Sent by God to bring our world back. To remind humanity of her most sacred calling. To have no other gods before God. To worship no idols. To honor God's name and keep the Sabbath holy. To love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. The church of Jesus Christ in the 21st century is called to lead during a very challenging time. Persecution is on the rise across the globe while here in America the church is in steep decline as it struggles against the increasing secularism of our culture. Pastors are failing morally. Sexual abuse and financial infidelity seem rampant. Heresies like prosperity preaching bring shame to the name of Jesus. It does feel like we are facing a steep, uphill battle. Perhaps you even feel like all hope is lost. But God isn't finished! The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe! Of all who place their trust in Christ! And the church is being sent out as lambs amidst the wolves to call people back to God. To stand up against the principalities and powers and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. We are being sent to challenge the people of our world to put aside all the false gods and goddesses that only deal in suffering and death. To cleanse themselves of false worship and re-commit their lives to Christ. As we do this, we can be confident. For we know we worship the only true and living God. All the false gods will bow before Him just as Dagon did that day in the temple. There is no weapon that's formed against us that can stand for greater is He that is in us than is in the world!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 8-9, John 6:22-42, Psalms 106:32-48, Proverbs 14:34-35

**May 10, 2019**  
**NATIONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 8-9, John 6:22-42, Psalms 106:32-48, Proverbs 14:34-35

“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” (Proverbs 14:34)

Yesterday I had the privilege of attending the Colorado Prayer Luncheon and hearing from Governor Polis, Mayor Hancock, and others discuss the state of politics at national, regional, and local levels. It was a particularly insightful and poignant conversation especially in the wake of tragic shooting at the STEM school in Highlands Ranch. Everyone seems to be asking the same question. How in the world can this be happening in our country? How is this the new “normal” for our children? And how should we, as leaders, respond? Of course there will be the standard calls from both the right and the left to either arm or disarm. If only our teachers carried in schools then our children would be safe. If only we banned automatic weapons then our children would be safe. Each side will entrench and do their level best to legislate their agenda but neither side will be successful. Why? Because we keep focusing on the symptoms rather than the disease. We struggle to have any kind of honest, respectful national debate on the issue of gun control and instead allow the extremes on either side to devolve the debate.

It’s not just gun control. The same is true on issues of race, wealth, criminal justice, etc. Because each political party employs a scorched earth approach hell-bent on the denial of any victories to their political rivals, we cannot come together. When was the last time a political leader on either side actually acknowledged their political rival had a good point? A good idea? A good policy initiative? When was the last time our political leaders tried to authentically share the credit rather than hoard it for themselves? It simply doesn’t happen as both sides do all they can to defend the indefensible in their own tribe while ruthlessly seeking to drag down their enemies. This naked pursuit of political power at all costs is slowly eroding the social fabric of our nation. And things are picking up steam. I have had people leave my church over politics. I have seen friendships end over politics. Businesses suffer because of our “call-out” culture that makes party loyalty/tribal identity a litmus test for every relationship in life. It’s getting harder and harder to imagine a shared future.

Does the Bible offer any guidance? Yes. The wisdom of Solomon. We must return to righteousness. We must re-establish a strong moral foundation. We must engage in a respectful conversation around national values and we must – we absolutely must - demand more from our leaders. Righteousness exalts a nation. Righteousness forms the bedrock on which strong nations are built. A shared sense of righteousness helps us discern right from wrong, evil from good.

What would happen if our national charter proclaimed, “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of righteousness” rather than the pursuit of personal happiness? What might change if we chose righteousness over selfishness? Righteousness over bitterness? Righteousness over outrage and anger? Righteousness over sin? Righteousness demands we look over our history as a nation and acknowledge our sins. The massacre of First Nation people. The systematic enslavement of an entire race of people. The subjugation of women and abuse of children. The rapacious greed that drives economic inequality. Righteousness also demands we acknowledge our virtues. The establishment of a government by the people for the people. The establishment of equal rights – even if harder won for certain groups - is a miraculous anomaly in human history. Wealth creation that has lifted billions around the world out of life-threatening poverty. And, of course, the incredible sacrifice of a generation as they fought to free the world from tyranny.

Righteousness demands we acknowledge every human being is made in the image of God. Righteousness demands we refuse the temptation to demonize and dehumanize those with whom we disagree. Righteousness demands we think the best of one another rather than the worst. Righteousness demands we actively and empathetically listen to one another and honor our different life experiences. Righteousness demands those who are blessed seek to bless others. Those who have seek to lift up those who have not. Those who have “made it”

turn around and offer their hands to those still slugging it out. Righteousness means we refuse to take up the tools of oppression or seek vengeance or try to tear others down. Righteousness exalts a nation.

I truly believe we occupy more common ground than we imagine. I truly believe there is more that holds us together than drives us apart. I truly believe we hold some truths to be self-evident and we are working hard to make those truths even more self-evident. I truly believe the road to righteousness is messy and long and hard. But I also believe it is worth every effort. And I believe pursuing righteousness is essential for the follower of Jesus.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 10-11, John 6:43-71, Psalms 107, Proverbs 15:1-3

**May 11, 2019**  
**THE BREAD OF LIFE**

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 10-11, John 6:43-71, Psalms 107, Proverbs 15:1-3

John 6 challenges us. Challenges us to think about why we seek Jesus. Is it for the signs and wonders? The miracles He can perform? Is it because of His blessings? The eschatological rewards we will one day receive? Is Jesus just a means for us to accomplish our own ends? Fulfill our own desires? The people had experienced a great miracle. Five thousand of them had been fed by a few loaves and a few fish. They had eaten their fill which was no small thing in a 1st century agrarian economy. And they're probably thinking to themselves, "If we follow this man, we will never grow hungry again."

But is that why we seek Jesus? To satisfy our physical needs? "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." (John 6:27) Yes, Jesus! That's what we want! Help us understand! What does it mean to do the works of God that He might be pleased with us and give us the food that never perishes? "Believe in Me." Jesus responds. "What sign will you perform that we may see and believe?" You can almost see Jesus shake His head. Really? Did I not just multiply loaves and fishes and feed five thousand? Was that not enough? Of course, it's never enough for us. We always want more. Always need more. Always seek yet another sign. Another confirmation that God is who He says He is and will do what He says He will do.

Jesus says, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (John 6:35, 47-51)

In other words, "You aren't getting it. You're missing the point. This isn't about the manna you ate in the wilderness during the Exodus journey. That manna may have sustained but it could not save. This is about the true bread the Father is offering you from heaven. The bread that not only sustains but saves you eternally. I am the living bread. Believe in Me! Feast on Me! Trust Me and you will live forever." Essentially what Jesus is telling them is He is the sign. He is the wonder. He is the miracle of God come down from heaven so that all who believe might have eternal life.

We get so caught up trying to meet our own needs. We focus so much on our own desires. We work so hard for selfish gain. But we all know we can't take this stuff with us. We all know there are no storage units in heaven to store our stuff. No moving van to pack us up for glory. Naked we came into this world and naked we shall depart. As much as we achieve in this world, it will be forgotten. As much as we accumulate in this world, it will fall to dust. The only thing that endures is our faith in Christ. The only thing that is eternal is our belief in Him. The only thing that matters is that we trust Him and surrender to Him and let Him meet our needs according to His will and perfect plan.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 12-13, John 7:1-30, Psalms 108, Proverbs 15:4



**May 12, 2019**  
**READINGS FOR THE DAY**

Readings for TODAY: 1 Samuel 12-13, John 7:1-30, Psalms 108, Proverbs 15:4

Readings for Tomorrow: 1 Samuel 14, John 7:31-53, Psalms 109, Proverbs 15:5-7

**May 13, 2019**  
**DISCERNMENT**

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 14, John 7:31-53, Psalms 109, Proverbs 15:5-7

One of the most important gifts we can exercise is an ability to discern between right and wrong. Good and evil. God's will and our own will. Saul is now king over Israel. He is the man God is going to use to deliver His people. He is a strong man. A valiant man. Sadly, he is not a wise man. He makes rash decisions. He takes vows in the name of the Lord that come back to haunt him. He is often his own worst enemy.

In today's reading, Jonathan wins a great victory for Israel. He and his armor bearer undertake a dangerous, potentially even suicidal, mission. They invade the camp of the Philistines. They kill twenty men and the result is chaos. The Philistine army starts panicking and racing in every direction. Saul sees the confusion and takes advantage of it. He marshals the rest of his army and sends them after the Philistines. God gives them a great victory. However, in his zeal, Saul issues an edict that no Israelite shall eat until their defeat of the Philistines is complete. The battle is hard. The fighting is fierce. God's people grow faint. In the midst of it all, Jonathan – who didn't know about his father's command - eats a some honey and it strengthens him. He openly questions his father's wisdom. The people follow his example, slaughtering animals for a feast. The news gets back to Saul. He interprets their actions as sin. He attempts to talk to the Lord who remains silent through the whole episode. In response to God's silence, Saul casts lots to determine who has broken his command. It's Jonathan. In his foolishness, he decides to kill him but the people of God stand in his way.

The whole story is a mess. It's a confusing jumble and hard to follow. And it points to what happens when human beings take matters into their own hands. When we fail to discern the difference between God's will and our own. How often do we make this mistake? How many times over the course of my life have I pursued something out of pride or selfish desire, foolishly assuming it to be God's will? How often have I grown impatient and rushed into a decision I later regretted? If I am completely honest, there have even been times in my life where I chased something I knew to be sin but did it anyway, hypocritically asking God for forgiveness in advance.

How do we discern the will of God? First, we have to know God's Word. We have to know God's law. We have to commit ourselves to obedience to His commands. It is NEVER God's will that you disobey Him. It is NEVER God's will that you live out of alignment with Jesus. Second, we have to ask God for wisdom. The wisdom to follow Jesus. He promises in James 1:5 to give this wisdom generously to all who ask. So we pray in faith, trusting God to keep His promises. Finally, we learn through constant, daily practice to discern the difference between good and evil. Right and wrong. God's will and our will. There is a process of trial and error here as we get better at listening to God's voice above our own or the voices in our world.

I love what Hebrews 5:12-14 says, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil." Discernment rests on our ability to become "skilled in righteousness" or skilled in God's ways. If we walk in His love. If we obey His commands. If we submit our lives to Him, we can know the will of God for our lives.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 15-16, John 8:1-20, Psalms 110, Proverbs 15:8-10

May 14, 2019  
**SIN OF PRESUMPTION**

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 15-16, John 8:1-20, Psalms 110, Proverbs 15:8-10

“For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king.” (1 Samuel 15:23)

“I cannot believe in a God like that.” “Surely God wants me to have fun?” “God can’t be that picky, can He?” “Man, it sure seems like God has an ego.” I cannot tell you the number of times I’ve heard fellow Christians say these things and others like them. Typically, these comments come when Christians run smack up against a command of God they do not want to follow. They feel like God is out to get them. Out to steal their joy. Out to squash all their fun. So they presume upon His grace. They presume upon His merciful character. They go their own way. Do their own thing. And when the consequences come, they get angry or confused or blame God.

Sadly, too many people who call themselves Christians are biblically illiterate. They don’t even know God’s commands much less follow them. They find worship boring and pointless. Reading the Bible a chore. Prayer a waste of time. They live their lives any way they wish. They seek the fulfillment of their own desires. Spend their money primarily on themselves and their families. Use their time selfishly rather than seek to serve those around them. All the while believing they are loved by God. Forgiven by God. Blessed by God.

Saul presumed upon God’s grace as well. He followed God’s command and attacked the Amalekites. He defeated them and won a great victory for the Lord. However, he didn’t follow God’s commands. He spared the life of the king and kept the best of the spoil for a sacrifice. Now I can already hear the protests. Wasn’t his heart in the right place? Wasn’t his intent - if misguided - still pretty good? It’s not like he was trying to enrich himself? The answer to these questions is an unequivocal “no!” What God wants is our complete and full obedience. He wants us to follow His ways not create our own. He wants us to love Him with all our hearts. Show Him our full devotion. And Saul, by choosing to do things his way rather than God’s, lost his kingdom. He presumed. And in his presumption was destroyed.

This is a sobering story for us all. How often do we presume on God’s grace? How often do we take God for granted? The first commandment is to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. To love Him with all that we are. To put Him first. What does this look like in our everyday lives? It means spending time with Him in prayer and study of His Word. It means worshiping Him on the Lord’s Day with our fellow believers. It means serving Him and giving generously to support His work in the world. These things are non-negotiable. It also means loving and learning God’s commands. Actively aligning our lives to the life of Jesus. Taking His words seriously and seeking to apply them to our daily lives. Will we do that perfectly? Of course not. We will make mistakes along the way but there is forgiveness for those who are truly seeking the Lord. There is grace for those who stumble and fall as long as we are continually falling forward.

Let me challenge and encourage you to examine your life. Where do you need to confess the sin of presumption? Where have you taken God for granted? Do you truly love His commands and seek to follow them? Or do you go your own way. Do your own thing. And assume God will give you a pass?

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 17:1-18:4, John 8:21-30, Psalms 111, Proverbs 15:11

**May 15, 2019**  
**TRUSTWORTHY GOD**

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 17:1-18:4, John 8:21-30, Psalms 111, Proverbs 15:11

The best things about the Psalms is how they teach us to sing the character of God. To praise God for who He is and what He has done. To reflect on God's nature and being. Over and over again, they declare His righteousness. His faithfulness. His steadfast love. Over and over again, they declare His justice. His holiness. His splendor and majesty. Over and over again, they declare His mercy. His grace. His compassion and forgiveness. If were lost on some deserted island somewhere and I had to pick one book of the Bible to bring with me, it would be the Psalms.

Praying the Psalms is a wonderful exercise. I don't know about you but sometimes I struggle to pray. I struggle to find the right words to express my emotions. Struggle to give myself permission to be honest and real and authentic before the Lord. I struggle to pray in faith, trusting God's character. This is where the Psalms come in. I can pray these words rather than my own. I let the Psalmist guide me deeper into the heart of prayer. I find myself praising. Lamenting. Expressing every emotion imaginable. I find myself thanking God. Remembering all His mighty works and miracles. Praying these words restores my soul. Helps me find my way back to faith again.

Romans 4:21 defines faith as "being fully convinced God is able to what He has promised." Praying with such confidence is rich and powerful. And one can only do that if one is fully convinced God is who He says He is. The Psalms keep God fully in view. They fix our eyes on Him. The focus our hearts on His character and nature and being. They remind us of all His glorious attributes and this, in turn, leads us to pray with greater faith.

Why do we praise God? Why do we give thanks to Him with our whole hearts? Because He is great. "Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them." Splendid and majestic. "Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever." Gracious and merciful. "He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and merciful." He is our faithful provider. "He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever." He is trustworthy and true. "He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the inheritance of the nations. The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy; they are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness." Holy and awesome. "He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name!" (Psalms 111:1-9)

Because God is all these things and so much more, we fear Him. We reverence Him. We worship Him. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!" (Psalms 111:10) Let everything you do today – in word or deed - be an act of worship to the Living God!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 18:5-19:24, John 8:31-59, Psalms 112, Proverbs 15:12-14

May 16, 2019

ENVY

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 18:5-19:24, John 8:31-59, Psalms 112, Proverbs 15:12-14

"Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands." (1 Samuel 18:7)

It doesn't take much to ruin a relationship. A friendship. A partnership. Saul and David's relationship began with such great potential. David was Saul's champion against Goliath. David was humble and aspired to nothing more than service to his king. David didn't pose any kind of threat to Saul. In fact, quite the opposite. Everywhere David went, the armies of Saul had success. Every battle David fought, the armies of Saul won. David was Saul's greatest general. His greatest asset. Their partnership could have re-shaped the geopolitics of the entire region. Sadly, Saul fell prey to envy. He simply could not and would not share any glory with another. So when they returned in victory over the Philistines and the women ascribed greater glory to David, Saul became angry. The more David experienced success, the more Saul's jealousy grew. Finally, things came to a breaking point when Saul tried to take David's life. Such is the power of envy in a person's life.

Ultimately, the sin of envy is rooted in discontent. We believe we deserve more than what we have. We aspire for greater position. Greater power. Greater wealth. Greater influence. We believe we've been wronged. Passed over. Dismissed. When we see others around us seemingly getting ahead. Collecting awards. Achieving success. We perceive it as a diminishment. We fall for the lie that their success somehow highlights our failure. Their victories somehow bring to light our defeats. We measure ourselves against them and are found wanting. As soon as envy sets in, it is tough to root out. It warps our thinking. It clouds our vision. It changes our perceptions of reality.

I think of how envious I have been in my life. I remember as a young pastor just starting out how envious I was of my colleagues who led larger congregations, held greater influence in our city, and seemingly got all the press. I remember going through difficult times in my marriage or with my children and envying those around me whose marriages and families seemed to be so strong. To this day, I struggle with the sin of envy. Always comparing myself to those who have achieved more than I ever will in my life.

What's the antidote to envy? Godly contentment. Resting in the truth that it is God who directs my life. God who commands my destiny. God who holds my future in His hands. My life is not my own. My achievements and success are not mine to claim. This life is not about me and my glory. It is about God and God alone. Jesus understood this, of course, when He says in John 8:54, "My glory is nothing." The Son of God didn't come to glorify Himself but to bring glory to His Heavenly Father. He didn't come to accomplish His own will but to fulfill the Father's plan. He didn't come seeking His own success but sought first His Father's Kingdom and righteousness. Because Jesus was faithful to His Father, He was exalted. He was lifted high. He was given the name above every name. Imagine if Saul rested in God? Imagine if Saul truly understood that the glory of Israel had nothing to do with him and everything to do with God? Imagine if Saul saw his role in God's Kingdom clearly? David would never have been a threat no matter how many ten thousands he killed. Imagine what would happen if you and I rested in God? If we truly understood the glory of our lives was not our own but the Lord's? Imagine if we saw our role in God's Kingdom clearly and we embraced it with joy? Would that not put an end to envy in our lives?

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 20-21, John 9, Psalms 113-114, Proverbs 15:15-17

May 17, 2019

## **LIVING RIGHT-SIDE UP IN AN UPSIDE DOWN WORLD**

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 20-21, John 9, Psalms 113-114, Proverbs 15:15-17

"For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." (John 9:39)

Jesus came to turn an upside down world right-side up again. In the Kingdom of Jesus, the last shall be first and the first shall be last. The poor shall be rich and the rich shall be poor. The privileged will be the first to serve those who are underprivileged. The blessed will share generously with those who have not. Hate will be met with kindness. Hurt with forgiveness. Brokenness with healing. Creation will be cared for rather than exploited. Selflessness shall replace selfishness. We will exchange all our "identities" for the only one that truly matters...our identity in Christ.

In our passage today, Jesus heals a man who was born blind. In those days, being born with a disability meant someone had sinned. Perhaps it was your parents who did something wrong or perhaps you had committed some error in the womb. Whatever it was, blindness was seen as God's righteous punishment on the wicked rather than an expression of the brokenness of our world. Jesus corrects this misunderstanding. He heals the man. He takes the opportunity the man's blindness affords to show forth the glory of God. To remind His disciples that this world is not as it should be. It is not as God intended it to be. And this is why Jesus was sent in the first place.

What does it mean to "do the works of God" like Jesus? It means living right-side up in an upside down world. I happen to believe the one Christian doctrine that is empirically proven is total depravity. Human beings are naturally inclined towards selfishness. They naturally put their own needs, wants, and desires first. They naturally prioritize the accumulation of wealth and possessions and power in order to ensure their own personal safety and security. When human beings possess political power, they codify their selfish desires into law thus creating systems of oppression and injustice and privilege that help them maintain control. One sees this played out on the world's stage over and over again and throughout human history. Those who throw off the chains of oppression tend to take up the tools of the oppressor and become oppressors themselves.

Where can we find hope? Only in the way of Jesus. Only in the Kingdom of Jesus. Only by surrendering our lives to Jesus and allowing His Spirit to reshape our hearts and reorder our desires. Jesus came to give sight to the blind but His ways also result in bringing blindness to those who think they have sight. If we persist in thinking/believing our ways are better than the Way, we remain blind and in our blindness, we perpetuate the very problems we are trying to solve. Need an example? Consider sex education. Despite rising rates of sexual addiction, the proliferation of pornography that objectifies women, sexual harassment and abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, broken relationships, etc., we still believe the answer is teaching kids to practice "safe sex." Rather than recognize the sacredness of the sexual act and the deep intimacy of giving oneself physically to another person, we treat sex as a commodity to be used for our personal enjoyment. Need another example? Consider gender dysphoria. Somehow we believe it is right and true to teach children who are psychologically incapable of abstract thought that they should disassociate from their biological gender. We are teaching them that gender is a social construct, denying the scientific, biological reality of their chromosomes. We are celebrating their choices despite the overwhelming evidence that it leads to higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation. Need yet another example? Consider the recent rise in identity politics. Human beings attacking other human beings simply because of the color of their skin, sexual orientation, economic wealth, educational privilege, etc. The rise in tribalism in our nation is tearing apart the social fabric of our country. The blindness is real, friends.

Jesus comes to make us see. See things from God's perspective. See one another as human beings made in God's own image. See the world as God's beloved creation. He comes to teach us the ways of God's Kingdom. Selflessness. Service. Forgiveness. Reconciliation. Grace. Peace. Love. Jesus embodied these values while He was on earth and He calls His followers to do the same. To work for justice. To love mercy. And to walk humbly with our God. This is the way of Jesus. This is the way of the gospel. And it is the only hope our upside down world has of ever becoming right-side up again.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 22-23, John 10:1-21, Psalms 115, Proverbs 15:18-19

**May 18, 2019**  
**HEARING THE VOICE OF JESUS**

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 22-23, John 10:1-21, Psalms 115, Proverbs 15:18-19

“The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” (John 10:3-4)

Noise. There’s a lot of it in our lives. From the moment our alarm clocks go off until we finally put down the phone or turn off the television at the end of the night, our lives are full of noise. So many voices. Telling us all kinds of things. Much of it not good for us. The bully at school who tells us we’re worthless. The co-worker who’s so negative all the time. The spouse who badgers or berates us. The child who screams when they don’t get their way. The commercials that tempt us to think life is all about us. The subliminal messages coming through on social media that constantly invite comparison. The news outlets spinning world events to bolster a particular worldview. The proliferation of fake news, gossip, and a rumor mill run wild. And, in the middle of it all, the still small voice of God whispering continually to our hearts.

Can you hear Him? Can you hear His voice? Amidst all the noise and distractions? When was the last time you sat in silence? I mean true silence. No one around. No devices present to distract. No radio. No television. Just you and God sitting in silence together. “My sheep hear my voice...” Perhaps one of the main reasons we struggle so much with our faith is we do not take the time to listen for God’s voice. We expect Him to compete with all the other voices in our lives. Shout them down. Yell over the top of them. We expect Him to make Himself known to us but we refuse to create space in our lives for that to happen. Instead, we expect Him to push His way in. Elbow His way to the front of the line. Then and only then will we turn and acknowledge Him.

Jesus doesn’t work that way. There’s a great story from the Old Testament about a man named Elijah. He went out to meet with God. A great storm whipped up. God wasn’t in the storm. A great fire raged. God wasn’t in the fire. A great earthquake shook the very ground. God wasn’t in the earthquake. Then a still small voice. Elijah covered his head. He knew he was hearing the voice of God. “My sheep hear my voice...” Do you want to hear the voice of God? Make time for solitude and silence in your life.

For me, this often comes at the end of the day. My children are in bed. My wife as well. I sit in my favorite chair in the living room. Nothing is on. I read God’s Word. I meditate. I pray. I think back over the events of my day. The people I met. The conversations I had. The work I was able to accomplish. I pay close attention to how I experienced each moment. And I lay those feelings before the Lord. I ponder what’s to come the following day. What am I excited about? Nervous about? Who will I be meeting with and how can I serve them? What challenges will I be facing and how do they make me feel? All of these things I simply lay before Lord and ask Him to speak into them. Sometimes He does. Sometimes He simply reaches out and takes my hand. Let’s me know He’ll be with me no matter what.

My sheep hear my voice. I know them. They follow me. There’s nothing more comforting than walking through life with the Good Shepherd at your side.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 24-25, John 10:22-42, Psalms 116, Proverbs 15:20-21



May 19, 2019

## SURRENDERING TO GOD'S WILL

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 24-25, John 10:22-42, Psalms 116, Proverbs 15:20-21

Imagine having everything you ever wanted within your grasp? Position. Power. Peace. You have the opportunity with a single stroke to bring it about. Imagine spending your life defending yourself against injustice. On the run for crimes you did not commit. Falsely accused by your enemy. And now you have the chance to end it. All you have to do is take matters into your own hands. A sudden strike in the darkness and you could lay hold of all God had promised.

The temptation to bring about the will of God in our own way and own time is very real. David faced it in the cave when Saul came in to relieve himself. Jesus faced it in the wilderness when the enemy offered him all the kingdoms of the world without the cross. You and I face it everyday as well in big and small ways. Yes, we know the will of God for our lives. We know His Word. We know His Truth. We know His Law. We know what He desires for us. But we get impatient. We get frustrated. We get anxious. We get afraid. And in our fear, we take matters into our own hands.

I remember vividly sitting down at a coffee shop one morning in Sun Prairie, WI. Kristi and I had been seeking God's will for many months. God had led us to resign from a difficult and painful ministry position. He had led us to a great church family who welcomed us in to help us heal. He had provided a sixty day severance package that we lived on while we waited for Him to reveal what was next. Through a mutual friend, God had connected us to a church in Parker, CO that was just beginning their search for a new senior pastor. But these things take time and I was growing anxious. I was afraid. The church in Parker was literally my only job prospect. I had no other options. How would I feed my family if it fell through? How would I pay the rent? Was my career in ministry over? Was it time to go do something else? All these thoughts ran through my head as the weeks passed and the wheels of the search process slowly turned. I was getting about two to three hours of sleep a night. I would pace the hours away praying and crying out to God.

One Saturday evening, I made up my mind. Enough was enough. I needed to expand my search. I needed to look at other ministry positions. I needed more options. So I told Kristi I would start looking the next morning. She and I went to bed. She tossed and turned all night, suffering from the sudden onset of a migraine. I did my normal pacing routine. We were both deeply unsettled. Eventually, morning dawned. I showered. Got dressed. Headed over to the coffee shop, laptop in hand to begin my day. I ordered my regular cup of black coffee. Sat down at my favorite table. Opened up the browser on my computer. Just as I went to type, I heard the word "NO" in my mind. It was clear. It was loud. It was startling. I looked around. Shook my head. Went to type. Again came the word..."NO!" This time I jumped a little. I looked around again. No one else was in the shop. Just me and the barista who was in the back. So I tried a third time to type. "NO!" I sat back. I looked out the window. I knew it was the Lord. Calling me to trust. Calling me to be patient. Calling me to wait on Him to reveal His will rather than make my own plans. I called Kristi. Told her what had happened. Told her God wasn't allowing me to apply to any other positions and that we just needed to wait for Him to reveal what would happen with the church in Parker. Immediately she felt the pain from her migraine lift and relief flood her body. It remains one of the most incredible moments in our lives.

God's ways are not our ways. All of us would have counseled David to take Saul's life in the cave that day. Put an end to the running. Put an end to the civil war. Kill your enemy and take your rightful place on the throne of Israel. All of us would have counseled Jesus to avoid the cross. To accept the deal the devil was offering. Accomplish all the Father has sent You to do without the suffering and pain. We all compromise. We all rationalize. We all have our excuses for why we don't follow the will of God. Why we don't walk in His ways. Why we don't wait on His timing. The reality is we are always looking out for number one. We are always looking out for our own interests first before we look to the interests of others. Even God. But David was a man after God's own heart. He refused to take matters into his own hands. He refused to lift his hand against the Lord's anointed even though Saul was an evil and corrupt king. He trusted all God had promised would be fulfilled in God's time and in God's way. Just like Jesus did in the wilderness. Just like Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Friends, take a step back. Take your hands off the wheel. Relinquish control. Let go. Trust God to fulfill His promises in His perfect timing and according to His perfect will.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 26-28, John 11:1-54, Psalms 117, Proverbs 15:22-23



**May 20, 2019**  
**RESURRECTION THREAT**

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 26-28, John 11:1-54, Psalms 117, Proverbs 15:22-23

Death is something all human beings fear. Death is something we all work hard to avoid. We resist aging because it reminds of death. We hate funerals because they remind us of our own mortality. Governments use the death penalty as a tool to deter crime. Nations threaten one another with death in order to achieve their own ambitions. Death is the ultimate weapon of the principalities and powers of this world.

But what happens when death is defeated? What do you do when a man can stand at the mouth of a tomb and call a dead man back to life? Surely this cannot be tolerated! Surely this kind of thing must be eliminated lest people start to believe there is a world beyond this world. A life beyond this life. If people started to believe such things then death would lose its power. Hell would lose its sting. The principalities and powers would have no way to keep people in line. So what do they do when they hear the news that Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead? Rejoice? Celebrate? Praise God? No. They hatch a plot to kill Jesus.

Why would they do such a thing? Because they are afraid of death. Scared of what the Romans might do if word got out that dead people were coming back to life. The delicate political compromise they had struck with Rome would come crashing down like a house of cards. "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." (John 11:48) This was a very real fear. They had seen firsthand the brutality of the Roman legions. They knew the fate that awaited those provinces that rebelled. Their nation would drown in violence, blood, fire, and death.

So one of them, Caiaphas the high priest, came up with a solution. "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." (John 11:49-50) If we can just kill Jesus, we can put an end to this movement before it starts. If we can just get to Jesus, then the rest of the people will fall in line. If we can just eliminate Jesus, then the nation will be safe. Little did he know he was prophesying the manner in which Jesus would die. Jesus would indeed become the atoning sacrifice...just not in the way Caiaphas had planned.

Throughout this story, Jesus reminds us all things are happening for the glory of God. All these events are taking place so that we might believe. They are signs given by God Himself to His people to lead us to faith. In fact, the entire gospel of John is one sign after another culminating in the ultimate sign of Jesus' death and resurrection. These things are written, John says, so that we might believe. "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31) So do you have life in Jesus' name? Have you accepted Christ as the Son of God? The One who made full atonement for your sins? This is the offer Jesus makes to Mary and Martha when He says He alone is the resurrection and the life. He is offering a life that transcends death. A life that is eternal and indestructible. A life that never ends.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 29-31, John 11:55-12:19, Psalms 118:1-18, Proverbs 15:24-26

**May 21, 2019**  
**AN EGOTISTICAL GOD**

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 29-31, John 11:55-12:19, Psalms 118:1-18, Proverbs 15:24-26

Recently I had dinner with someone who asked me why the Christian God had an ego. I asked him what he meant. He talked about how the God of the Bible seems overly concerned about His own glory. His own honor. His own fame. He demands too much from us. All our gold. All our wealth. All our time and attention. He wondered if God was co-dependent or insecure and said he could never worship a God like that. I asked him what would make God more worthy of worship in his mind? He answered with a laundry list of human needs – poverty, violence, drought, famine, etc. - that God could take care of and if He did, He would be more worthy of worship.

It's tempting to use God as a means to accomplish our own ends. Judas looked with disdain on the extravagant offering Mary gave to Jesus. The ointment she "wasted" on Jesus' feet could have been sold and given to the poor. Surely Jesus didn't need such extravagance? Surely Jesus didn't need such devotion? Surely Jesus would side with Judas and rebuke Mary for her sin? He must have been shocked when Jesus instead turns and rebukes him. "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me." (John 12:7-8) Jesus knew the future. He knew what was coming. He knew Mary – however unwittingly - was anointing him for his burial. Her act of devotion was preparing Him for His death. All Judas could see was the immediate needs before him and even those were an excuse for him to line his own pockets. He was not focused on Jesus. Jesus was a means to another end for Judas and the same was true for all the disciples. They believed Jesus would restore the kingdom of Israel and they would be granted places of honor. None of them truly understood what was happening except for women like Mary. Women who were fully devoted to Jesus. Women who loved Him for who He was not just for what He could do for them.

God is worthy of our worship. He is worthy of all our honor and devotion. He is worthy of the best we have to offer. Our gifts. Our time. Our talent. And yet how many of us see God as a means to another end? Perhaps we see Him as the means of blessing in our own lives and so we give and serve with the expectation that we will get something in return. Perhaps we see God as the means of solving the world's problems and so we serve with the expectation that God will relieve human suffering and pain. Perhaps we see God as the means of eternal salvation so we raise our hand. Pray our prayer. Check the boxes and then go about life as usual assuming we've got our "get out of hell" free card. Friends, God will not allow Himself to be used. He will not be reduced to some genie in a bottle. He does not exist to serve us. We exist to serve Him. We exist to love Him. We exist to worship Him. This is why we were created and it is why Jesus affirms Mary. She saw Him clearly whereas Judas did not.

God doesn't have an ego. He doesn't need us. He lives in perfect communion with Himself – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The great news is that He wants us to share in His life. He invites us into relationship with Him. He loves us and reaches out for us and longs to draw us close. There will always be problems in this world. The poor. The hurting. The suffering. God never intended this world to be this way and in fact, He is preparing a world for us where all tears will be wiped away and sin and death will be no more. He sees more and knows more than we do so perhaps a little humility is in order? Perhaps God is God and we are not? Perhaps He knows what's best for us and it transcends the needs of this present world?

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 1:1-2:11, John 12:20-50, Psalms 118:19-29, Proverbs 15:27-28

May 22, 2019  
**WHOSE GLORY DO YOU SEEK?**

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 1:1-2:11, John 12:20-50, Psalms 118:19-29, Proverbs 15:27-28

“Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.” (John 12:42-43)

We love the glory of man. We love the honor, success, and accolades of this world. We love the power and privilege and position we achieve. We love the wealth and possessions we accumulate. We love to compare ourselves to others. To keep up with the Jones'. To compete for the trophies of this world. It may be in business where we seek to climb the corporate ladder. It may be in the home where we push our children to achieve all they can. It may be at school where we collect honors and awards for our academic success. It may be at the end of careers where we look back and recount the mountains we summited along the way. Yes, we love the glory of man.

And for the glory of man, we too often sacrifice the glory of God. Living out our faith is costly. It requires sacrifice. Humility. Putting others before ourselves. It requires the greatest to become the least. The rich to become poor. The powerful to let go of their control. Living out our faith means taking all that we are and all that we have and putting it to use for God's Kingdom. It means claiming the name of Jesus even though it may cost us a promotion. A friendship. Our reputation among our neighbors. Advancement at school. Living out our faith in some parts of the world costs a Christian their family and community. They are cast out and shunned much like the people John references here in his gospel. The pressure to conform is incredible. And the temptation to seek the glory of man over the glory of God very real.

We face this temptation on a daily basis. When a co-worker comes to you to gossip about another colleague. When a group of students tries to rope you in on their bullying. When your neighbors throw their parties with all kinds of booze and drugs. It's hard to take a stand for Christ. It's hard to have the courage to stick out from the crowd. To seek the glory of God over the glory of man. When your boss tells you professional advancement depends on you toning down your faith. When teachers at school make fun of Christians, calling them ignorant, intolerant, and bigoted. When neighbors no longer include you or talk to you because you are raising your children so differently. These are all very real situations faced by real Christians on a regular basis. We can get angry at the injustice of it all. We can shake our fists and let our frustrations get the best of us. We can play the victim and develop a “persecution complex.” Or we can simply recognize seeking the glory of God over the glory of men requires sacrifice. Requires us to give up honors and accolades and recognition in this world in order to obtain those things in the world to come.

I have some dear friends who live in Muslim-dominated eastern Ethiopia. When they came to Christ, they were thrown out on the street by their family. Ostracized by their community. They lost friendships. Jobs. Homes. Even marriages and children. They were beaten. Thrown in jail. The temptation to backslide was real. The pressure to relinquish their faith to go home almost irresistible. But they persevered. Like the Apostle Paul, they considered the present sufferings of this world not worth comparing to the glory that will one day be revealed in Christ. (Romans 8:18) They have given everything to follow Christ. To seek His glory above the glory of man.

What about you? What have you given up? What is God challenging you to give up right now? Where will you have opportunities today to seek the glory of Christ above your own glory or the glory of man?

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 2:12-3:39, John 13:1-30, Psalms 119:1-16, Proverbs 15:29-30

**May 23, 2019**  
**SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 2:12-3:39, John 13:1-30, Psalms 119:1-16, Proverbs 15:29-30

The greatest among you will be a servant. These are the words of Jesus and they run directly against our culture today. In order to serve, one has to be selfless. One has to be willing to put another's needs above their own. Be it their spouse. Their children. Their co-workers. Their classmates. The poor. The sick. The hurting. One has to be willing to put aside one's own needs, wants, and desires. Position, power, and privilege. One has to be willing to listen. Learn. Love without strings.

This is the model Jesus gives us when he wraps a towel around His waist and washes His disciples' feet. He took the position of the slave. The servant. The lowest of the low in order to serve those He loved. He washed their feet in humility. The Lord of the Universe not holding onto pride or privilege and instead relinquishing it all for the sake of both His friends and His enemies. We too often forget that Judas Iscariot was present throughout the Last Supper. His feet were washed. He too was served the bread and the cup. Jesus loved him to the end as much as He loved the rest of the disciples.

We live in a self-centered world. We talk about self-protection. Self-care. Self-esteem. Self-help is a billion dollar industry. Self-proclaimed gurus use all kinds of media to promote their latest, greatest "secret" to a fulfilled life. But the fruit is rotten. Our society is more fractured than ever. People are more depressed than ever. People are more lonely than ever. Life is more unfulfilled than ever. It doesn't seem to matter how many toys we buy. How much money we make. How many awards and accolades we receive. How many people we sleep with. It doesn't seem to matter how many laws we pass or people we elect or organizations we launch. We cannot seem to grasp the simple truth that the more we focus on "Self", the more we will despair. We will never measure up. Never satisfy all our desires. Never arrive at self-fulfillment.

So what do we do? We follow the way of Jesus. The way of surrender. The way of service. The way of selflessness. Whoever loses their life will find it. Whoever gives up the world will gain it. Whoever denies "self" will find true acceptance. Jesus gave Himself away. He laid down His life so the whole world might be saved. He forgave freely. He embraced sinners. He loved even His enemies. If you want to know what a life of surrender looks like...look to Jesus. If you want to know what a life of service looks like...look to Jesus. If you want to know what a life of self-denial looks like...look to Jesus. He is literally the most joy-filled man who ever lived. He is the most peace-filled man who ever lived. On this everyone -from Buddhists to Hindus to New Age to Agnostics to Christians -seem to agree. Jesus found the secret to a truly fulfilled life. Maybe we should trust Him when He says His is the Way, the Truth, and the Life?

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 4-6, John 13:31-14:14, Psalms 119:17-32, Proverbs 15:31-32

**May 24, 2019**  
**GREATER THINGS**

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 4-6, John 13:31-14:14, Psalms 119:17-32, Proverbs 15:31-32

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” (John 14:12-14)

This passage has always thrown me for a loop. Greater works than Jesus? Greater works than the Son of God? Greater works than the 2nd Member of the Trinity? Surely you jest, Jesus! Jesus healed. Jesus raised the dead. Jesus cast out demons. Jesus turned water into wine. Jesus calmed the storm. Jesus died for the sins of the world. How in God’s name can I be expected to do greater things than Jesus?

My problem is twofold. First, I tend to read this passage “selfishly.” What I mean by that is I tend to assume Jesus is asking me to perform miracles in my own strength. According to my own wisdom. I look at my own resources. My own lack of faith. My own struggles and doubts and fears. And I naturally assume there is no way Jesus is serious so I dismiss what He has to say out of hand. Surely, I cannot do greater works than Christ! Jesus is asking the impossible!

Secondly, I tend to read this passage individualistically. I assume Jesus is talk to me as an individual. I am supposed to do greater works? I am supposed to perform miracles? Anything I ask for in Jesus’ name will be fulfilled? I forget I am part of a larger community. Something the Bible calls the “Body of Christ.” I forget that the people Jesus is addressing understood themselves “communally” not individually.

What’s my point? When we read the Bible “selfishly” and “individualistically”, we run the very real risk of missing so much of the what Jesus is talking about. Jesus is not lobbing the ball back into our court as He heads to His Father. He promises to be with us always even to the end of the age. He promises the gift of the Holy Spirit. The indwelling presence of the 3rd Member of the Trinity. He promises we will be clothed with power from on high when the Spirit descends. This is not a power that arises from our own strength or the depth of our own faith. It comes to us as a gift from God. And as we exercise this faith. Praying in Jesus’ name. Praying in alignment with His purposes for our lives. Praying for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. His promise is sure. He will do it. He will accomplish it. He will work miracles and signs and wonders in and through us.

That last word is key...us. This isn’t about me. It’s never about me. It’s always about us. Always about the community. The Body of Christ. The family of faith. God clothes us with power. God indwells us when two or three are gathered in His name. God equips us for His work in the world. God gives us gifts so that we can encourage and equip and empower one another along the way. God works through His church to bring His blessing to the world. Surely when one considers the impact of the church on the world over the last two thousand years, one can see the fulfillment of what Jesus tells Philip. We have indeed done greater works than Jesus! Not because we are greater but because we who have surrendered to His will have allowed His Spirit to work through us to bring blessing all over the earth. What Jesus began with 12 men has now impacted billions. And all this happened after Jesus ascended to His Father.

You were created for more than you realize, friends! You are part of something larger than yourselves! God has a much greater plan for your life than your personal success! God wants to use you...and those you live in relationship with who love Jesus...to change the world! To declare the glories of the gospel to the ends of the earth! Imagine if all of us pooled all our resources. All our time. All our talent. All our treasure and put in service to proclamation of the gospel? Imagine the impact we could make! Here’s the good news! You don’t have to imagine it. You can see it already happening all around us as Christians gather together to fight injustice, serve the poor, visit the sick, love the incarcerated, and help those in need. Are you part of it? Good. Push yourself to take another step. Are you not yet engaged? What are you waiting for? Jump in and experience the joy of serving Christ alongside those who love Him! You were meant for greater things than you know! Trust the promise of God!

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 7-8, John 14:15-31, Psalms 119:33-48, Proverbs 15:33

**May 25, 2019**  
**BUILDING FOR SUCCESS**

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 7-8, John 14:15-31, Psalms 119:33-48, Proverbs 15:33

“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.” (Psalms 127:1)

One of the things I struggle with the most is my desire to be successful. To make my life count. To do something significant. To strive to be the best. These are values ingrained in me from an early age. They are not necessarily bad in and of themselves. The problem is I too often let these good things become ultimate things in my life. I start to pursue success at the expense of my relationship with God or those I love. I focus on the future rather than finding contentment in the present. I covet what I don’t have rather than be thankful for what I do have.

About a year or so ago, the Lord spoke to me during a time of prayer. It wasn’t an audible voice or a lightning bolt from heaven or anything like that. It was simply an impression in my heart. A feeling in my gut. A few random thoughts in my head that suddenly coalesced into a message I needed to hear. It was a short message. Three simple words. Obscurity. Anonymity. Insignificance. I was journaling and these three words started ringing over and over again in my head. Obscurity. Anonymity. Insignificance. Over the years I’ve learned to pay attention to these kinds of things in my prayer time so I sat back from my keyboard and asked the Lord to give me further insight into what He was saying. God said, “I want you to labor in obscurity. Embrace anonymity. Pursue insignificance.” To be honest, my first thought was, “Wait a minute! That doesn’t sound right! Frankly, it sounds unAmerican!” God’s answer? “Exactly.” :-)

“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” King David has a desire to build God a house. It’s a godly desire. A good desire. One that is affirmed by Nathan the prophet. But it is not the Lord’s will. “But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, 'Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in?...’ Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” (2 Samuel 7:4-5, 8-13) I love how God flips the tables on David here. It is not David who will build God a house but God who will build David a house! It is not David who will make His own name great but God who will make David’s name great!

Unless God builds the house. Unless God builds David’s house. Unless God builds our house. We all labor in vain. This was the message God was sending me during my devotional time. I was spending so much energy working so hard to be successful. To stand out among my peers. To be faithful to God. And yet all the while God was calling me to rest. To trust. To stand back and let Him do the “building” of my life. Let Him guide and direct my path. Let Him have the glory for the success I was seeking to achieve.

Over the last year, I’ve been learning more about the meaning of those three, God-given words in my life.

Obscurity – I love where I am. I love the people I serve. I love the team I get to serve alongside. We are not the largest or fastest growing or most “successful” church but we are a family. We serve God faithfully. We are producing gospel-fruit on a regular basis. Lives are being changed. People are being transformed. It is awesome to be part of!

Anonymity - I am released from the pressure to perform. To succeed. To self-promote. No one knows my name. This work isn't about me. I love the fact that I don't always have to be up front. Don't always have to preach. Don't always have to be in charge. I am simply one of the pastors at PEPC.

Insignificance – I am deeply aware of how truly insignificant my contributions to the Kingdom of God are in the grand scheme of things. The reality is I will be completely forgotten within a generation or so of my death. My own family won't remember who I was or what I did. All my accomplishments and achievements will quickly turn to dust. And that's okay. Because my significance is not found in what I do but in who God is and I am content simply to serve Him in whatever way He sees fit.

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Where do you need to step back and let God build in your life? In what areas do you need to hand over the tools, stop working so hard, and let God take over? Whose blueprint are you operating from? Yours or God's?

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 9-11, John 15, Psalms 119:49-64, Proverbs 16:1-3



May 26, 2019  
#ME TOO

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 9-11, John 15, Psalms 119:49-64, Proverbs 16:1-3

It is estimated by the World Health Organization that 1/3 of women worldwide are victims of sexual abuse. A 2017 poll taken by ABC News and the Washington post reports that 54% of American women have reported receiving unwanted and inappropriate sexual advances, most of which is never addressed. The #MeToo movement first got started in 2006 when Tarana Burke used the hashtag in social media to draw attention to the struggle of women of color, particularly in underprivileged communities. However, it really gained steam when the allegations of Harvey Weinstein were first made public in 2017 and it has since spread like wildfire through all sorts of different industries. Hollywood. Media. Corporations. Government. And yes, the church.

The great heroes of the Bible have their own #MeToo moments. The story of David and Bathsheba is perhaps the most famous. David, flush with his success on the battlefield and drunk on his own power and privilege, decides to stay home rather than head off to war. As he stands on the roof, proudly overlooking all he has accomplished, he catches a glimpse of the beautiful Bathsheba bathing beneath him. His heart fills with lust. He covets this beautiful woman and who's around to stop him? The army is off at war. Her husband is one of David's mighty men which suggests David knew Bathsheba already. Perhaps this was a secret desire he'd been entertaining for years. He calls for her. Commands her to come. With her life on the line, she obeys and conceives a child from their one night stand. Now comes the coverup. David sends for Uriah but Uriah refuses to cooperate. So David orchestrates his murder.

It's a horrible story. One we cannot and should not reduce to a morality tale. Bathsheba is raped. Uriah murdered. A child dies. All because of David's insatiable lust and appetite for power. Left to his own devices, David might have gotten away with it. But God was watching. God is always watching. "For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun." (2 Samuel 12:12) God sends Nathan the prophet, David's own brother you'll remember, to confront him. Nathan risks his life to stand up to David. Expose his sin. Call him out.

Frankly, we need more Nathans in our world. Courageous people who are willing to stand up to power expose sin. Women and men of conviction who refuse to tolerate any form of abuse. For far too long the church has protected men who abuse and those who protect them. High profile cases in the Roman Catholic Church are matched with similar high profile cases in the Protestant world such as the Sovereign Grace scandal or the allegations made against Bill Hybels and Willow Creek. In a social media world, there is no longer any place to hide which is a very good thing. The stories must be heard. The cries for justice must be satisfied. The truth must come out. These women are our sisters in Christ. They sit in our pews every week. They serve in so many ways. They give so much of themselves. We must listen. We must believe. We must act on their behalf.

Judgment begins at the house of the Lord. (1 Peter 4:17) We must clean up our own mess first before we dare to speak out to the culture around us. We must safeguard and protect. We must be honest and transparent. We must implement healthy systems of accountability. Real lives are at stake and we must not fail.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 12, John 16, Psalms 119:65-80, Proverbs 16:4-5



**May 27, 2019**  
**THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 12, John 16, Psalms 119:65-80, Proverbs 16:4-5

Today's reading introduces us to the Holy Spirit. What some have called the "forgotten member of the Trinity." Because of the materialistic nature of Western thought and our discomfort with anything supernatural, we often forget the Holy Spirit and the active role He plays in our sanctification and salvation. As Christians, we do not struggle to wrap our minds around the Father. The Creator of heaven and earth. We similarly do not struggle to understand the Son. The Savior of our souls. We do struggle to understand the Spirit. The One who comes to live with us and dwell with us and point us to Christ. And yet, the Spirit is so important! He is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that though He would ascend back into heaven, we would not be abandoned. Not left stranded in this world. Doomed to wander as orphans and strangers in this world.

The Holy Spirit is sent to accomplish several things. First and foremost, He is the Helper. (John 16:7). His role is to encourage and assist believers in following Christ. How does He do this? "When He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:" (John 16:8) He operates as the "conscience" in the heart of every believer. He lets us know when we wander and stray. He tells us when we fall outside of God's will. He brings us back in confession and repentance. He also leads us to righteousness. He doesn't just show up when we do something wrong, He teaches us what is right and good and holy and pure. He also reminds us all of God's final judgment. An assurance for believers and a terror for unbelievers.

The Holy Spirit also guides us into all truth. He illumines God's Word so that we may understand God's ways more fully and seek to align our lives with Him. He gives us insight to see God's activity all around us in creation. In the lives of those we love. Even in our own hearts. Sometimes He shows us what's to come. Gives us a foretaste of heaven or a premonition of the future. Finally, and most importantly, "He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is Mine; therefore I said that He will take what is Mine and declare it to you." (John 16:14-15) The main job of the Holy Spirit is not to draw attention to Himself but to point us to Christ. I think this is one of the reasons He is so often overlooked. He never self-promotes but instead fulfills the will of the Father and the Son to glorify Christ above all things.

Belief in the Holy Spirit is essential for every Christian. Learning to hear His voice. Tap into His wisdom. Follow His will is what leads us to sanctification. He is the One who makes us more into the image of Christ and surrendering to His will in our daily lives is the essence of what it means to be a disciple.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 13, John 17, Psalms 119:81-96, Proverbs 16:6-7

**May 28, 2019**  
**THAT THEY MAY BE ONE...**

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 13, John 17, Psalms 119:81-96, Proverbs 16:6-7

“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.” (John 17:22-23)

There is power in unity. There is power when God’s people abide in Him. There is power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us. This power is not our own. It is a divine power. Tearing down every stronghold and every high thing that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. Tearing down every dividing wall of hostility that stands between us and God, us and each other. It is the power of salvation for all who believe. It’s a power that regenerates hearts. Justifies our very being. Sanctifies our lives. It is a power to make those orphaned by sin into children of the Most High. This is the power of God.

Jesus knew this power. Jesus drew on this power. Jesus understood this power. He lived in close, deep, intimate communion with His Father His entire life and He drew on this power constantly to heal, forgive, cast out demons, calm storms. He drew on this power when He multiplied the loaves and fishes and turned water into wine. He drew on this power when He suffered. Died. And this same power was at work when He was raised from the dead. This is the power Jesus offers to those who follow Him.

The gift Jesus offers us in Himself is beyond comprehension. He literally offers us the same power that created the universe. The same power that raised the dead. The same power that will one day bring all things together and make all things new. This same power is available to us through our relationship with Christ and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. This is why no weapon that is formed against us can stand! This is why no flaming arrows of the evil one can pierce the shield of faith! This is why we have nothing to fear! Because we abide in the Vine! We stand on the Rock! We drink from fountains of Living Water!

But what does union with Christ look like? Agreement. Submission. Surrender. It requires us to take our lives. All our thoughts. All our words. All our desires and align them with Jesus. Make His will our own. Allow His Spirit to determine what is True and Noble and Right rather than continuing to do what is right in our own eyes.

As we draw close to Jesus, we will find ourselves drawing close to one another as well. The Body of Christ will discover a collective power in its unity that will make a huge impact on the world. I firmly believe this is the secret to the revival taking place in Ethiopia, South Sudan, Uganda, and Djibouti. Over 4,600 churches have been planted. Almost 600,000 lost people have been saved. God is changing the landscape in places like Gojo, Dire Dawa, and Borena. He is changing the landscape in Torit, South Sudan and in northern Uganda. He is just getting started in Djibouti and will move into Somalia in the next few years. All because believers in these regions have put aside their differences and come together as one in Christ. Does this mean they agree on everything? Absolutely not! Unity is not the same as unanimity! No, their unity comes from a deeper source. A spiritual source. A well that never runs dry. Their common faith in Christ!

I love the words of Psalm 133. How good it is when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity! It is like precious oil that overflows! Dew that drenches the mountains, bringing new life! There God commands His blessing...life evermore! In these fractured and divided times, the church has a great opportunity to show the world the power of the gospel in our unity with Christ and each other! May we answer the call of Jesus’ prayer!

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 14:1-15:22, John 18:1-24, Psalms 119:97-112, Proverbs 16:8-9

May 29, 2019  
**LIVING WITH DYSFUNCTION**

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 14:1-15:22, John 18:1-24, Psalms 119:97-112, Proverbs 16:8-9

All families live with some level of dysfunction. Dysfunction occurs where unhealthy behavior (rage, addiction, abuse, neglect, etc.) is normalized, leading members of a family to make unhealthy accommodations rather than pursue repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Left unchecked, dysfunction leads destructive patterns of behavior that often impact generations as unhealthy coping skills are passed down from parent to child. Breaking generational cycles of sin is extremely difficult and requires incredible courage as well as sacrifice as dysfunctional family systems often violently resist change.

Consider the family of King David as the pre-eminent Biblical example of a dysfunctional family system. Of course, his situation was made much more complex by the cultural practice of polygamy which led to many children by many different wives and concubines, all seeking to ascend the line of succession. Dynastic considerations complicate what we read today but many lessons can be drawn that are helpful in our own lives. Amnon is the oldest son of David and heir apparent to the throne. As such, he has grown accustomed to power and privilege and simply taking what he wants when he wants it. His treatment of Tamar, his half-sister, is horrific in its own right but probably emblematic of how Amnon lives his life. Absalom is not much better. What begins as a noble desire to protect his sister from public shame ends in murder and a coup attempt against his own father. Who knows what prompted Absalom's move against David but it clearly was pre-meditated and even assisted by some of David's closest confidants. David doesn't help matters much. As king, he should have punished Amnon for his crime but instead appears to give him a pass. Once Absalom takes matters into his own hands, David appears both relieved and appalled. He refuses to forgive and reconcile with Absalom which only isolates him further and divides the royal household. David chooses to ignore the growing conspiracy until it's almost too late and thus has to flee into exile. His family shattered. His kingdom divided. His country on the brink of civil war.

I think of my own family system. We spent a few years in counseling together as we tried to break patterns of sin that have not only been passed down but reinforced by our own choices. I had to learn to deal with my anger issues. Wrestle with my own fears and failures and disappointments. I had to face the fact that I caused my children pain through the choices I made and in how I responded to the different circumstances we had to face as a family. I had to take a long hard look at myself through Christ's eyes and repent. Ask for forgiveness. And pursue reconciliation. It's not easy. It requires humility and sacrifice. I have to relinquish my need for control. My need to protect my kids from the consequences for the choices they make in life. My need to project "success" to the world around me. I had to come to grips with the fact that my family is as broken as any and I am a major contributor to that brokenness because of my own sin issues. Honestly, it's a painful journey. Then again, dying to self is always painful.

What about your family system? If your family's story was included in the Scriptures, what would others see? What failures? What successes? Would they see patterns of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation? Or would they see pride, neglect, abuse, addiction, and rampant conflict? Or perhaps a mixture of both? Where is Christ at work in your family right now? What areas do you need Christ to pay particular attention to in order to bring healing, wholeness, grace and peace? Are there particular family members you need to be praying specifically for? Who are they? What are the issues? How are you contributing to the pain? Ask Christ to help you chart a different path. One that leads to true transformation.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 15:23-16:23, John 18:25-19:22, Psalms 119:113-128, Proverbs 16:10-11

May 30, 2019  
**LEARNING TO LOVE THE LAW**

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 15:23-16:23, John 18:25-19:22, Psalms 119:113-128, Proverbs 16:10-11

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) Jesus’ words. Simple. Plain. True. Not if you want to earn my love, keep my commandments. Not if you want to be good enough for my love, keep my commandments. Not if you want to be worthy of my love, keep my commandments. Simply, “if you love me, keep my commandments.” The reality is we cannot love Jesus and reject His commandments. We cannot love Jesus and reject His ways. We cannot love Jesus and reject the Law of God in our lives.

The other day I took my car into the shop. It keeps dying at random times like at stoplights and intersections. Not good! So they hooked it up to a diagnostic machine to see if they could determine the problem. The Law of God operates in much the same way. It serves as a diagnostic for what’s truly going on in our hearts. When we read God’s Word, do we find ourselves naturally wanting to obey? Do we find ourselves aspiring to be more than we are? Do we experience the conviction of the Holy Spirit and a deep humbling in our hearts for how far we have fallen short? Do we repent? Do we experience regret? A godly sorrow? Or do we avoid God’s Law? Do we reject God’s Law? Do we find ourselves dismissing God’s Law as antiquated? Irrelevant? Impossible?

We don’t know for sure who penned the words of Psalm 119 but there is a tradition that tells us David wrote this Psalm in order to teach Solomon the “ABC’s” of the spiritual life. (The Psalm is arranged in stanzas according to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet.) David, as we know, was a “man after God’s own heart.” Why? Certainly, it had nothing to do with his behavior. Over and over again, David proved himself to be the chief of sinners. Just like you. Just like me. No, what set David apart was his great love for God’s Law. Despite his crimes. Despite his mistakes. Despite his failures. David never stopped loving God’s commands. Never stopped aspiring to them. Never stopped seeking to follow them all the days of his life. David’s love for the statutes, testimonies, and rules is expressed over and over again in this particular Psalm.

“Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart...”

“With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!”

“In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches...”

“I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word...”

“My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times...”

“Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors...”

“I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!”

(Psalms 119:2, 10, 14, 16, 20, 24, 32)

Many Christians today claim to love Jesus and yet reject His commandments. They claim to love God and yet reject His Truth and His Way. They believe God’s laws are culturally bound and therefore useless in today’s world. They argue that God’s laws are biased, privileged, and misogynistic. They argue God’s laws are too patriarchal and hierarchical and tyrannical. So they reject God’s Law. They reject God’s commands. They reject God’s ways. But this is pure hypocrisy. One cannot love God and NOT love His commands. Jesus doesn’t leave us that option. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

Now it’s important to remember to distinguish between the ceremonial laws governing the worship life of ancient Israel. The civil laws governing the national life of ancient Israel. And the moral law which is timeless and eternal. Laws forbidding the eating of shrimp are NOT the same as laws governing sexual immorality. Laws forbidding the mixing of two fibers in clothing are NOT the same as laws governing violence and murder. David is addressing the moral law in Psalm 119 as is Jesus in John 14:15. These laws were put in place to teach us how to follow God faithfully. To live a godly and blameless life before Him. They were put in place to convict us when we fall short and instruct us when we seek wisdom.

So do you follow David’s advice? Do you meditate on God’s law? Day and night? Do you love God’s commands? Believe they are what’s best for your life?

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 17, John 19:23-42, Psalms 119:129-152, Proverbs 16:12-13

**May 31, 2019**  
**THE COURAGE OF CHRIST**

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 17, John 19:23-42, Psalms 119:129-152, Proverbs 16:12-13

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (John 19:28-30)

Most of the time I struggle to give Jesus His due. Mainly because I know He is both God and man, I often assume the things He accomplished – all of which are way beyond me - somehow were “easy” for Him because of His divine nature. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Jesus stepped down out of heaven. He emptied Himself of His divine glory and power in order to become a human being. Everything He endured was hard. Everything He suffered was real. Judas’ betrayal hurt. Peter’s denial broke His heart. Every lash of the whip caused Him unbelievable pain. His trial and condemnation before those He came to save wounded Him deeply. I cannot fathom the pain He felt as He hung on the cross.

It took an unbelievable amount of courage for Jesus to face His death. It’s why He agonized over it in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was afraid. He was terrified of what awaited Him. He didn’t want to go through it. He begged the Father to change His fate. But in the end, He submitted. He surrendered. Someone once said, “Courage is fear that has said its prayers.” I believe Jesus embodied this truth. As He hung on the cross, He refused to numb the pain by accepting the sour wine the Romans offered. He wanted to stare death and evil in the face with a clear eye. He wanted to drink the cup of wrath to its dregs and exhaust the power of the enemy. He wanted Satan to know He never ran. Never shrank. Never stepped back from His fate. This is why we call the cross a victory. This is why we believe death was defeated. Because Jesus – full of pain and heartbreak, his body torn to shreds - took on the full measure of the world’s sin and cried out, “It is finished.”

I am in awe every time I sit and ponder what Jesus did on the cross. The death He died for me. How can it be? How can it be that God would die for me? Amazing love! Amazing grace! The courage it took for my Savior to suffer on my behalf! The bravery it took for Him to embrace His fate knowing what it would cost. The very idea that God would lay His life down for me in an act of extraordinary love! It is more than I can ever ask for or imagine. All I can do is fall on my face in worship. Fall on my knees before His throne. Give Him back all that I am and all that I have to use for His purposes in the world.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 18:1-19:10, John 20:1-31, Psalms 119:153-176, Proverbs 16:14-15