

MAY

May 1, 2020 THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

Readings for today: Psalms 15, 23-25, 47

May 2, 2020 THE WORSHIP GOD DEMANDS

Readings for today: Psalms 89, 96, 100, 101, 107

May 4, 2020 LET THE LORD BUILD YOUR HOUSE

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 7, 1 Chronicles 17, Psalms 1-2, 33, 127, 132

May 5, 2020 THE KINDNESS OF GOD

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 8-9, 1 Chronicles 18

May 6, 2020 #AHMAUD ARBERY

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 10, 1 Chronicles 19, Psalms 20, 53, 60, 75

May 7, 2020 HOPE

Readings for today: Psalms 65-67, 69-70

May 8, 2020 SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 11-12, 1 Chronicles 20, Psalm 51

May 9, 2020 MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

Readings for today: Psalms 32, 86, 102, 103, 122

May 11, 2020 DYSFUNCTION

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 13-15

May 12, 2020 SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

Readings for today: Psalms 3-4, 13, 28, 55

May 13, 2020 HUMAN NATURE

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 16-18

May 14, 2020 LEARNING TO PRAY

Readings for today: Psalms 26, 40-41, 58, 61-62, 64

May 15, 2020 AS THE DEER

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 19-21, Psalms 5, 38, 42

May 18, 2020 WORD OF GOD SPEAK

Readings for today: Psalms 97-99

May 19, 2020 THE CHARACTER OF GOD

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 24, 1 Chronicles 21-22, Psalms 30

May 20, 2020 THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Readings for today: Psalms 108-109

May 21, 2020 LEGACY

Readings for today: 1 Chronicles 23-26

May 23, 2020 THE HARD WORK OF GENEROSITY

Readings for today: 1 Chronicles 27-29, Psalms 68

May 25, 2020 MEMORIAL DAY REFLECTIONS

Readings for today: Psalms 111-118

May 27, 2020 THE BLESSINGS OF OBEDIENCE

Readings for today: Psalms 119:1-88

May 28, 2020 DISCERNMENT

Readings for today: 1 Kings 3-4, 2 Chronicles 1, Psalms 72

May 29, 2020 CLINGING TO TRUTH

Readings for today: Psalm 119:89-176

May 30, 2020 SEX AND GOD

Readings for today: Song of Solomon 1:1-5:1

May 1, 2020
THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

Readings for today: [Psalms 15, 23-25, 47](#)

I am a “one” on the Enneagram. For those of you not familiar with the tool, the Enneagram helps a person grow in self-understanding. It helps you identify your basic fears, drives, and desires. It gives you a pathway to health, virtue, and holiness. It also reveals your susceptibility to particular temptations, vices, and stress. So, again, I am a “one” on the Enneagram. A perfectionist whose primal fears are corruption, deceit, imbalance, and immorality. These fears lead to stress which creates anxiety. When I am anxious, I tend to be resentful, even angry. My buttons get pushed and I literally can feel my blood begin to boil inside. In the face of these feelings, my temptation is to deny them. Play the hypocrite. Not acknowledge my anger because it is not morally good and therefore must be rejected. This results in continual self-condemnation. The critical voices in my head rise to a cacophony of shame as I fail to live up to my own high ideals. It’s frankly exhausting.

“O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart...” (Psalms 15:1-2)

“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.” (Psalms 24:3-4)

“Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you.” (Psalms 25:20-21)

This stuff is music to a “one’s” ears. It speaks my love language. Goodness. Righteousness. Moral uprightness. Holy perfection. All good things. All important things. And yet, none of these things actually lead me to health. They do not assuage my anxiety. They only serve to feed my fears. They throw me back on my own strength. My own effort. Which I already know is never enough. So what’s a “one” to do? Continue playing the hypocrite? Continuing pretending he or she has it all together? Continue presenting an image to the world that is good and upright and moral?

By no means! The “one” must instead cling to message of Psalm 23. One of my favorites, by the way. “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” (Psalms 23:1-3) Peace comes as I trust in the Lord. Serenity comes as my soul rests in Him. All my stress. All my anxieties. All my fears fade away when I let the Lord be my shepherd. He takes care of all my wants. He makes me lie down and rest in green pastures, beside still waters. These words are balm to my soul.

Every morning when I wake, I find my heart ”reset” to its default position. As soon as I open my eyes, the voices in my head start clamoring for attention. “Get up! You have so much to do! So much to accomplish! You’re already behind! You’re already letting people down! You’re already failing!” As I said above, my temptation is to argue. To fight. To try to silence those voices through my own Herculean efforts. But God charts a different path for me. The path of grace. And His Words became my words as I pray, “To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me...He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant

and his testimonies...The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant...Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you." (Psalms 25:1-2, 9-10, 14, 20) As God's voice fills my head and heart, I find the other voices retreating into the background. Yes, they are still there but it's more of a murmur than a roar and I can now go about my day filled with God's peace.

We are living through a very stressful time. A time of great fear and anxiety. And the temptation will be to let this season drive you to the darker corners of your heart. Longing to numb the pain or regain control, you may find yourself acting out in ways that are self-destructive or painful for those around you. You may find your relationships starting to strain. The key is NOT to work harder or longer or more efficiently. The key is to rest in the arms of the Good Shepherd. Let go of control. Let go of the need to succeed. Let go of the need to have it altogether. Ask for help if needed. Reach out to those who can come alongside. Make a call to a mental health professional or your pastor and ask for an appointment. Trust God has provided these means for the well-being of the sheep of His pasture.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 89, 96, 100, 101, 107

May 2, 2020
THE WORSHIP GOD DEMANDS

Readings for today: [Psalms 89, 96, 100, 101, 107](#)

Human beings are naturally selfish creatures. We are self-centered. Self-promoting. Self-protective. Self-indulgent. If you have any doubts, take a scroll through Instagram or Facebook sometime. Selfies. Humble brags. Carefully curated authenticity. Scripted messiness. Real life edited down into a series of highlight reels. Flip open Twitter and what do you see but a platform for “call-out” and/or “cancel” culture. People throwing out their often ill-informed opinions on just about every subject. Perfecting the blame game. Throwing around self-righteous accusations. Setting themselves up as a modern day Pharisees as they seek to “police” other people’s content. Of course, our media is no different. Driven by particular agendas, they report only those facts which support their pre-determined narratives. They spin inconvenient truths out with the hope that their audience won’t notice the verbal misdirection. This game is played by politicians, media moguls, titans of industry, social influencers, you name it. Why? Because we’re all human. And - back to my original premise - to be human is to be self-centered. Self-promoting. Self-protective. Self-indulgent. We just have this innate tendency to make life all about us.

The same is true in the church. We might even be the worst offenders. Why would I ever say such a thing? Well, it’s one thing to have a political hot take. It’s another to take a stand on social issue. If we’re honest, all our selfies and humble brags are pretty superficial and trivial in the grand scheme of things. But to twist the worship of the Living God and make it about us is serious business. To dare to impose our own preferences or judge based upon whether we “got something out of it” is arrogant in the extreme. To assume we know what’s best or to make the mistake of thinking worship is about us getting our needs met, our wants fulfilled, our desires granted is foolishness. Worship is not about how we feel...though we should experience a range of feelings during the experience. Worship is not about what we think...though our thinking should be challenged on any number of levels as we sit under the authority of the Word of God. Worship is not about what we get...though if we are humble we’ll receive any number of blessings for having been in God’s presence. Worship is not about us. It is about God.

One of the most challenging Biblical truths for Christians to grasp is that God’s highest priority is Himself. God’s greatest passion is for His own glory. God’s deepest love is for Himself. And if you find yourself thinking that makes God sound like a narcissist, let me humbly suggest you take a step back and think it through. In the beginning. Before time and space. Before the universe came into being. There was God. He existed eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in perfect communion. There is no lack in God. No deficiency in God. No void God needed to fill. God could have gone on existing in perfect communion with Himself for all eternity and not missed a thing. God doesn’t need us. God isn’t incomplete without us. God is all-sufficient in Himself. But God did choose to create. God created a universe and filled it with all kinds of beauty and artistry and splendor. He created the dualities that mark our existence like light and dark. Sun and moon. Earth and sky. Male and female. Finally, God made a special creature in His own image. It was an act of pure grace. He gave us agency and creativity and responsibility that mirrored His own. His plan was to live in unbroken fellowship with us forever. Inviting us to share in the perfect love He has in Himself. But we rejected His plan, of course. We went our own way. We wanted to be like God. Self-sufficient. Self-governing. Self-propagating. We wanted to be in charge of our own lives. We wanted to be the captains of our own destiny. The masters of our own fate. The rulers of our own souls. So, in a supreme act of love, God let us go. God let us go our own way, knowing it would end in self-harm and self-destruction. God let us go our own way, knowing we would turn His beautiful creation into a means to feed our own selfish desires. God let us go our

own way, knowing we would reject Him at every turn as we tried our hand at self-rule. And all God knew and feared would happen took place. It broke His heart.

But God wouldn't let go. To do so would be to act against His own divine character. So God rends the heavens and comes to earth. God - in some sense - rends the Trinity to come to earth. Sending His beloved Son to become one of us. Sending His beloved Son to suffer and die for us. Sending His beloved Son to deliver us out of the mirrored prisons in which we live - where all we can see is Self - and set us free to love and serve Him again as He planned from the beginning. And yes, God did this for us but more importantly, He did it for Himself. He did it to remain true to who He is. To do anything else would be to deny His very nature and character. Even in our salvation, God's highest commitment remains Himself. God's highest priority remains His own glory. And this is why we worship. We worship God not for how He makes us feel. Not for what He's done for us. Not for the eschatological "goodies" that await us in the life to come. We worship God simply because He is God. He alone is worthy. He alone is deserving. This is what we were created for in the first place.

So listen again to the words of Psalm 96. Lift your voice again in praise. God is God! Let's give Him the worship He deserves and the worship He demands! "Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength! Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity." Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness." (Psalm 96:1-13)

May 4, 2020
LET THE LORD BUILD YOUR HOUSE

Readings for today: [2 Samuel 7, 1 Chronicles 17, Psalms 1-2, 33, 127, 132](#)

“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. I know I’m not alone. I see these values reflected across all sectors of society.

A few years ago now, 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.

Recently, I've been learning more about the meaning of those three, God-given words in my life...

Obscurity - Over the years, I've been asked to consider many different ministry positions. Some at much larger churches. Some involve greater denominational influence. But 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. And God has confirmed my current call over and over again.

Anonymity - One of the best things about serving at PEPC is I get to simply be "one of the pastors." We have a great team, each with different gifts. This releases me from the pressure to perform. To succeed. To self-promote. No one needs to know 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. And I can't wait to finish my career as part of the volunteer cleaning crew!

Insignificance - My work around the globe is humbling. It makes me 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.

Friends, unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord builds your house and my house, our labors are in vain. Unless the Lord builds our nation's house, our collective labor will be in vain. As we continue to struggle through this season of social distancing and stay at home orders, the pressure builds inside all of us to get to work "building our own house." Protecting our own future. Securing our own lives. Don't fall prey to that temptation! Take a step back and let God do the work. Engage in some self-examination to find those areas of your life where you need to hand over the tools, stop working so hard, and let God take over. Make sure you are working from His blueprint in your life rather than your own.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 8-9, 1 Chronicles 18

May 5, 2020
THE KINDNESS OF GOD

Readings for today: [2 Samuel 8-9, 1 Chronicles 18](#)

“And King David said, “Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?” (2 Samuel 9:3) It’s hard for us to imagine how radical this action would have been. David lived in a brutal world. A world full of violence and suffering and pain. A world where one’s family. One’s tribe. One’s nation was everything. It was a world where honor was paramount. Shame to be avoided at all costs. There were strict cultural expectations regarding how one acted when one was treated dishonorably.

Saul shamed David before Israel. He unjustly accused him. He sought to kill him. He pursued him in the wilderness. He tried to discredit him. He did all he could to destroy him and his family. Now the tables are turned. And the expectations are clear. Everyone in ancient Israel knew what was coming. David would destroy Saul’s family to the last person. He would eradicate Saul’s name from the earth. He would leave no stone unturned. No one behind lest that person become a seed of discontent and rebellion in the future.

But once again, David defies his culture’s expectations. Instead of seeking to destroy the house of Saul, he seeks to forgive. To bless. To honor. So he asks his servants if there is anyone left of Saul’s family. There is. A grandson. A crippled man named Mephibosheth. Even better, he is a son of David’s beloved friend, Jonathan. David has him brought in. Honors him by restoring all Saul’s lands and property to him. Gives him a place at the king’s own table. It’s a stunning act of kindness, mercy, and generosity. And it communicates to the entire nation that David is no ordinary, ancient near east king.

What motivated David? The kindness of God. David was humble at this point in his life. He knew his life was a testimony to grace. David was a shepherd. He fully expected to live his life as a shepherd. But God - through His great mercy - had raised him up to be king. And having been on the receiving end of God’s kindness, David now extends it out even to his enemies.

What about us? The greatest poverty in our world today is the poverty of grace. The poverty of kindness. The poverty of mercy. We are so quick to judge. So quick to become enraged. So quick to attack others. In my experience, very few people engage in any sort of honest self-reflection. Very few people actually acknowledge their biases and privilege and short-comings much less confess their sin. Very few people make themselves vulnerable to the point of revealing their own weaknesses. Sure, people talk about how they’ve been hurt. Wounded. Abused. Those terms - sadly - have almost become cliche. But they almost never talk about how their choices contributed to their own pain. And because they perceive themselves to be the victim, they do not forgive very easily.

But what if we saw ourselves as God sees us? What if we honestly acknowledged the fact that we are as sinful as anyone else. Just as capable of hurting others as we are of being hurt. Just as capable of wounding others as we are of being wounded. Just as capable of inflicting pain as we are of experiencing it. What if we looked in the mirror and saw both perpetrator and victim? And what if - in that moment - we turned to God rather than self-condemnation? What if we experienced the grace and mercy and kindness of God even for sinners such as ourselves? Perhaps then we would be able to extend that same grace and mercy and kindness out to others. Even those who have hurt us. Even to our enemies.

Sadly, I find such faith in short supply these days. And I believe it exposes a fundamental flaw in our relationship with God. We cannot give to others what we have not received ourselves. And too many of us believe the lie that God will bless us because we are “good.” Too many of us believe the lie that God affirms us without reservation. Too many of us believe the lie that we deserve God’s love. In short, we do not believe in grace. We do not believe we’ve done anything to merit God’s mercy. We believe God has to be kind to us or else. And so we live largely graceless, merciless, intolerant lives especially towards those who are not like us. Those who have hurt us. Those we consider to be our enemies. Sure, we are gracious and merciful and kind to those we love and like but woe to them if they should ever betray our trust or speak ill of us or refuse to affirm us. Jesus says, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the sinners do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the unbelievers do the same?” (Matthew 5:44, 46-47) Grace. Mercy. Kindness. These are not intellectual ideas but eternal realities. They flow from a deep, intimate relationship with Jesus. They are only made possible through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. May you seek these things from God today.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 10, 1 Chronicles 19, Psalms 20, 53, 60, 75

May 6, 2020
#AHMAUD ARBERY

Readings for today: [2 Samuel 10, 1 Chronicles 19, Psalms 20, 53, 60, 75](#)

“May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob protect you! May he send you help from the sanctuary and give you support from Zion! May he remember all your offerings and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices! May he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans! May we shout for joy over your salvation, and in the name of our God set up our banners! May the Lord fulfill all your petitions! Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright. O Lord, save the king! May he answer us when we call.” (Psalm 20:1-9)

These words have deeper meaning for me today. Especially as the news breaks about the young African-American man who was lynched in broad daylight in Georgia. Ahmaud Arbery was out running in a neighborhood when two armed white men in a pickup truck pursued him and shot him in cold blood. Assuming he had been part of a robbery that had taken place earlier, they believed it was their right to chase him down and execute him. Tragically, this is just the latest example of how we continue to be haunted by our racist past here in America. And it comes in the midst of a pandemic that is killing African-Americans at much higher rates. The US Census Bureau reports that African-Americans represent 13.4% of the general population but counties with higher concentrations of blacks account for more than half of all COVID cases and almost 60% of deaths. Furthermore, we've known for a long time that African-Americans are disproportionately targeted by our justice system. 37% of the general prison population is African-American men. 22% African-American women. Clearly, we still have a race problem in our country.

One of the things I love most about reading the Bible in a year chronologically is how it reminds us to combine our prayers with action. In our readings for today, David sends emissaries to the Ammonites to offer condolences for the death of their king. His desire is to build a friendship with the heir to the throne. His plan is thwarted, however, by the princes of the Ammonites who would rather sow suspicion and create a pretext for war with Israel. Tribal conflict, you see, is nothing new in human history. So they publicly shame David's messengers, gather an army, and set out to destroy Israel. At first, it appears their efforts will be successful. They actually are able to surround the army of Israel. But Joab and his mighty men fight free and end up routing the enemy. In the wake of this great victory, David pens the words to Psalm 20.

I think it's critical to note that David cried out to God. He cried out to God in the midst of his trouble. He cried out to God in the midst of his fear. He cried out to God for salvation. David knew the battle belonged to the Lord. David knew the fight would be fierce but with God he would prevail. David acknowledges his own strength is not enough. He is humble. He is heartfelt. He is sincere. At the same time, David prepares his army for battle. He arrays his forces as best he can. He devises strategies and implements his plan. The result is a great victory for God's people.

Now apply those same principles to our situation today. Yes, our thoughts and prayers are with the Arbery family. Yes, our thoughts and prayers are with the African-American community as they continue to suffer from the scourge of white supremacy. Yes, we join our voices together to call on the Lord to answer them in these days of trouble. Protect them from evil. Send them help from His sanctuary. Fulfill their desire for salvation. Yes, we humbly acknowledge that only Christ can purge the

evil of white supremacy from our midst. Only Christ can deliver us from the sin of racism. Only Christ can transform hatred into love. Yes, we cannot place our trust in “chariots and horses” or in “legislative powers” or “social reforms.” But that doesn’t mean we ignore them completely. They are simply tools in God’s hand to accomplish His will on earth. Just as David deployed chariots and horses to defeat the Ammonites so we must deploy laws and reforms to defeat white supremacy. We must tear down systems and structures that continue to create uneven playing fields and deny access to people of color. We must hold our political leaders accountable for how they use racism as a tool to retain power and influence and wealth and privilege. We must hold ourselves accountable for the things we say and the ways we think and the ways we act that unwittingly foster hostile attitudes towards those of a different color. We must be proactive in building friendships across racial lines. Actively listening to one another’s experiences and suffering with those who have suffered rather than pre-judging them. We must work towards a more just, more gracious society where no one has to be afraid to go on a jog through a neighborhood.

So I am praying Psalm 20 differently today. Not for myself. Not for my tribe. Not for my community. I am praying for God to fulfill the desire of my heart and deliver us from the sin of racism. I am praying for the day when we can celebrate and rejoice in the diversity God has created rather than perceive one another as a threat. I am praying for the day when God will deliver us from the worst of our fears and prejudices and lust for power. And I am working towards those ends as well. Listening. Serving. Voting. Advocating. Trusting the Lord to use my meager efforts for His just purposes in this world.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 65-67, 69-70

May 7, 2020
HOPE

Readings for today: [Psalms 65-67, 69-70](#)

Yesterday, despair got to me. I woke up to a horrific video of a young African-American man being hunted and gunned down in broad daylight. I scrolled endlessly through the feeds of my friends of color lamenting, raging, demanding justice. As I prayed, I lifted up my own lament to God. Along with my rage and anger. Shaking my fists at the heavens. How long, O Lord? I don't understand how such things can happen in 21st century America. I don't understand why the two men who committed the crime aren't in jail tonight. I don't understand why - as Dr. Bryan Loritts and Dr. Eric Mason pointed out yesterday - why black men are murdered while eating Skittles in Florida. Sitting in a church in South Carolina. Sitting in a car with a girlfriend and young daughter in Minnesota. Eating ice cream at home in Dallas. Playing video games with a nephew in Fort Worth. Jogging in a neighborhood in Georgia. I don't understand why there isn't justice. I then broadened my appeal to God. I don't understand why synagogues are attacked. I don't understand why mosques are vandalized and burned. I don't understand why LGBTQ nightclubs are targeted. I don't understand. I don't understand the greed that feeds off the backs of the poor. I don't understand why power tends to corrupt. I don't understand why we human beings always seem to have to find an enemy to fight. A group to organize against. I don't understand why so many of our ideologies include hate. I was soon overwhelmed. It led me to the point of despair and my soul bore that weight throughout the day. I crashed into bed exhausted and could barely get up this morning.

Then I read the Psalms. I was reminded that David too felt overwhelmed at times. David too knew hardship and injustice and suffering. David too struggled to make sense of it all. And yet he praised God. He praised God for hearing our prayers. Praised God for creating the heavens and the earth. Praised God for each sunrise and sunset. He praised God for the goodness of the earth. The fruit of the vine. The abundance of blessings. He praised God for His mighty acts of deliverance. Cutting a path through the Red Sea. He praised God for His steadfast love and faithfulness. For His grace and tender mercies. He praised God for His righteousness and holiness and justice. He praised God for His forgiveness, reconciliation, and redemption. David was not sticking his head in the sand. He was not given to sentimentalism or naive piety. David faced the horrors of this world with eyes wide open. And still he believed. Still he trusted. Still he found hope in God.

I don't know where life finds you today. People read this blog from all over the state. All over the nation. All over the world. They come from different backgrounds and cultural traditions. Different races and socio-economic classes. Each of you has a story to share. Each of you has seen your share of suffering and pain. Each of you is wrestling in your own way with the crisis we are facing. And maybe, just maybe, you've found yourself like me feeling overwhelmed. Exhausted. Fearful. Anxious. Afraid. Weighed down by the weight of it all. Friends, each new sunrise is a gift. A reminder that God's mercies are new every morning. He is steadfast. He is faithful. He is true. He is at work. He is coming. He will set all things right. He will make all things new. Let Him restore your hope today!

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 11-12, 1 Chronicles 20, Psalm 51

May 8, 2020
SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

Readings for today: [2 Samuel 11-12, 1 Chronicles 20, Psalm 51](#)

”Nathan said to David, “You are the man!” 2 Samuel 12:7

Imagine you are Nathan. You are David’s closest advisor and friend. You’ve risen to power alongside him. You are the most trusted member of his court. You’ve watched him pile up victory after victory. You’ve seen his heart for the Lord firsthand. He’s confided in you. He counts on you. He trusts you with his most intimate thoughts and desires like when he came to you to ask advice on building God a house. Such a project would have been sealed his fame forever. It would have established his reputation as a mighty king. It was something every significant ancient near east monarch did at some point during their reign. And you sought the Lord for David. And you gave David the Lord’s answer which had to be disappointing on some level to him. So you are the man David relies upon to have the courage to speak the truth he doesn’t want to hear.

Now you watch as David falls. You grow anxious as David stays home during the season when kings normally head off to war. David is not meant for a life of ease. He is a man of action. And he’s missing the fight. He’s missing the challenge of leading his men into battle. Perhaps he even feels guilty or ashamed for not being on the frontlines. He prowls around the palace. He can’t sit still. His mood growing darker with each passing hour. One day he finds himself on the roof. Surveying all he has made. He’s vulnerable. He’s weak. He’s become blind to his own lusts and desires. Then he sees Bathsheba bathing. He sends for her. He rapes her. She gets pregnant. Ashamed, he takes matters into his own hands. Seeks to cover up his terrible sin. He calls Uriah home from the front. One of his mighty men. A man who has fought by his side through thick and thin. But Uriah refuses to sleep in his home. Refuses to enjoy the company of his wife while his fellow soldiers are sleeping in the fields. David’s shame only grows. He knows he should be following Uriah’s example. So he sends him back to the front. Premeditates his murder. All so he can steal his wife and escape judgment for his adultery. It’s a brutal, horrifying episode in David’s life.

You’ve watched all this come to pass and now you know what you have to do. You must confront David on his sin. You must call David to account. You must remind David that even kings are not above God’s law. This will mean taking your life into your hands. After all, David’s already killed one man who stood in his way. So you approach the throne. You approach the man you once considered a great king and even greater friend. You come before him in fear but also with courage. You know what needs to be said. You know it’s for the greater good. The greater good of David. The greater good of the nation of Israel. The greater good of all involved. The truth must come to light. Righteousness must have its day. David must be given the opportunity to repent. You know David well. You know the shame he must be feeling. And you know he will most likely over-compensate for his sin. So you tell him a story. About a rich man who unjustly robs a poor man. David in his righteous indignation calls the man to judgment. Nathan replies, “You are the man.”

I try to imagine the silence that must have settled over the court in that moment. You must have been able to hear a pin drop. David half off his throne in anger. Nathan standing calmly before him with his finger outstretched. The rest of the court holding their breath to see what will happen. David’s speechless so Nathan continues. Delivering the Word of the Lord with clarity, conviction, and power. With each word, you can almost see David shrink back into his seat. What he thought to keep secret has

now been shouted from the mountaintop. Everyone now knows. The word is out. There's no going back. David repents. Nathan delivers the final blow. Their child will die. And then goes home.

Would that we had a Nathan today! A godly man or woman willing to speak truth to power! Willing to speak God's Word to presidents and governors. Congressmen and women. State legislators and local community officials. Where is the Nathan who refuses to play partisan games? Where is the Nathan who refuses to promote their own political agenda? Where is the Nathan who refuses to represent any party but God? Sadly far too many pastors, priests, and other religious leaders have been captured by the lure of political influence. They've sacrificed their integrity before God for a seat at the table. They go on cable news and justify their party's social policy positions by cherry-picking Scripture. Rather than serving as court prophets, they become court jesters in their twisted attempts to prop up their particular candidate. It happens on both sides of the aisle.

I think the closest we've come to a Nathan is Billy Graham. He consulted with presidents over several decades with no fanfare. No photo ops. Just came and went and made himself available for counsel. No one will ever know the content of those conversations but I imagine most would agree that Billy spoke for the Lord in each and every situation. He pushed our presidents to become better leaders and even better people. He challenged them to seek the Lord's wisdom and to follow the Lord's ways. He cared for them just as Nathan cared for David. And we can do the same by praying fervently for all our leaders regardless of political affiliation. We can love them by seeking to serve them and care for them in whatever ways we can. We can send them messages of encouragement. We can resist the temptation to tear them down publicly. We can celebrate and support them when they make godly decisions. And if God does give us influence, we can make sure we do all we can to represent Christ in the halls of power where we've been called.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 32, 86, 102, 103, 122

May 9, 2020
MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

Readings for today: [Psalms 32, 86, 102, 103, 122](#)

The more I spend time with people, the more I am convinced that eminent Jewish psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl, was right. So much of our pain and heartache and struggle is because we do not truly understand who we are. We have a distorted self-image. We look in the mirror and we are blind to the true nature of the person looking back at us. I love what he wrote at the end of his classic work, Man's Search for Meaning, "We have come to know man as he really is. After all, man is that being who invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord's Prayer or the Shema Yisrael on his lips." In other words, all of us are capable of great good or great evil. This is why reading and re-reading and re-reading Scripture is so important. Within the pages of this precious book, God teaches us the deepest truths about ourselves and how we can find salvation. The narrative runs something like this...

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27) You and I were designed to live in a world of perfection. A paradise called Eden. We were made in the image of God so that we might show forth the glory of God. We were given dominion and authority and power to rule over all God has made as a kind of vice-regent or undershepherd.

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalms 51:5) We abandoned our vocation. We rebelled against God. We aspired to be gods ourselves. In so doing, the image of God was marred. Corrupted. Poisoned. Every single human being since Adam and Eve's fall has been born in brokenness. Born in sin. Conceived in iniquity. From the moment the sperm fertilizes the egg, we are lost.

"Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3) We are lost but we are not hopeless! Out of love, the Father sent His only Son into the world that whosoever would believe in Him would not perish in their sin. All who believe in Christ are born again. Born a second time. This time of the Spirit.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17) Being born of the Spirit literally changes our DNA. Changes the fundamental reality of our existence. Gives us a new nature. A new heart. A heart of flesh sensitive to the leading of God to replace the heart of stone that was so rebellious and resistant. The image of God is now restored. Our vocation renewed. The commission re-issued. Go. Make disciples of all nations. Baptize. Teach. Fill the earth. Subdue. Have dominion. Share my glory with all of creation.

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:52) The final promise. Jesus will come again. On the last day, a trumpet shall sound. The heavens will open. The dead will rise. And we shall be changed from one degree of glory to another. The imperfect shall be made perfect. The perishable shall be made imperishable. Sin and death will be destroyed. Eternity sets in. We are home.

This is the fundamental worldview of the Psalmist. It's the fundamental narrative they are singing about though the revelation of Jesus as Messiah still lies far off in the future. They trust in the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Father to bring about His will on the earth. They also understand this side of

heaven that we are broken, sinful, corrupt creatures in desperate need of God's grace. And grace only comes as we confess. As we repent. It's more than feeling bad. More than feeling guilty. More than feeling ashamed. It's about turning from our sin. Turning towards God. Making the necessary changes in our lives in response to all God has done for us. "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered...I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." (Psalms 32:1, 5)

What do you need to confess today? Where have you fallen short? Where do you feel enslaved? Afflicted? Ashamed? Guilty? In what areas of your life has the Spirit brought conviction? Is it your thoughts? Attitudes? Actions? Feelings? The life of a believer in Jesus is one of constant confession as we come before the Lord acknowledging our sin, receiving His grace, and learn to follow in His ways. Does this mean we should live our lives in constant guilt? Live our lives in constant shame? Absolutely not! God's love is everlasting! And His promise is sure! "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." (Psalms 103:11-12) Cling to the love of God, sinner! Let His love be the cornerstone of your life! Let His grace set you free! Trust in His faithfulness to save you from depths of your sin!

May 11, 2020
DYSFUNCTION

Readings for today: [2 Samuel 13-15](#)

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.

One of the things I love most about the Bible is its raw honesty. It doesn't attempt to whitewash the sins of God's people. 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 its 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've spent considerable time in counseling as we try to break patterns of sin that have not only been passed down but reinforced by our own sinful choices. I have had to learn to deal with my anger issues. Wrestle with my own fears and failures and disappointments. I've had to face the fact that I have caused my children pain through the choices I've made in how I've responded to the different circumstances we've had to face as a family. I've 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've had 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've 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: Psalms 3-4, 13, 28, 55

May 12, 2020
SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

Readings for today: [Psalms 3-4, 13, 28, 55](#)

“But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.” (Psalm 3:3)

“In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” (Psalm 4:8)

“But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.” (Psalm 13:5)

“The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. The Lord is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed.” (Psalm 28:7-8)

“Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.” (Psalm 55:22)

I needed all these words this morning. Last night was a sleepless night. I tossed and turned for much of it. My heart burdened for those I love. Those I serve. I think of my friend who lost his mother yesterday. I think of another friend with advanced MS who is fighting for his life against COVID-19. Still another friend who lost their job and despairs of any prospects. And other friends who have had to take dramatic pay cuts or lay off most of their employees. I think of the family of a well-known pastor who took his own life last week. I think of the mother whose son was murdered in cold blood. I think of my own children. Their hopes and dreams. Their struggles and frustrations. How I wish I could save them from all the pain! How I wish I could protect them from the hardships and suffering of this world!

I love the Psalms. They give voice to my deepest feelings. The Psalmist invites me to share openly and honestly and transparently before the Lord. The Psalmist reminds me I do not need to be afraid before God. He will not shame me. He will not dismiss me. He will not ignore me. He is faithful and true. Steadfast and loyal in His love. He will never leave me or forsake me. He is with me in the valley of the shadow when sleep is scarce. In the dark hours of the night as I lay my burdens before the Lord, He listens. He hears my prayers. He receives them and lifts them from my shoulders.

As I process my pain. My fear. My anxiety. My worry. My stress. The Psalmist eventually turns my heart to the Lord. To the source of my life. To the source of my strength. To the source of my salvation. He reminds me that though I cannot shield those I love from the brokenness of this world, the Lord can. Though I cannot keep those I love safe from the trials and tribulations of this world, the Lord can. Though I cannot save those I love from the pain and suffering and heartbreak, the Lord can. Though my strength often fails, the Lord’s never does. Though I am weary and heavy-laden, the Lord will give me rest. These promises renew my hope. Even in the midst of this crisis. Even in the midst of all we are going through right now. God is present. He is our help. He is our refuge. He is our sanctuary. May we rest in His everlasting arms.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 16-18

May 13, 2020
HUMAN NATURE

Readings for today: [2 Samuel 16-18](#)

In my devotional reading this morning, I came across these words, “Deep in every human life there is somehow that which defiles it.” Written in 1943 in the midst of World War 2 by a prominent pastor in New York City. He saw firsthand the impact “crisis” made on people. He came of age during World War 1. He began his ministry in the Roaring Twenties. He served through the Great Depression until the end of World War 2. He was a national voice. He helped our nation process their pain. And the one thing he kept coming back to over and over again was how all these different crises revealed the “deformation” of humanity’s soul. We just couldn’t get out of our own way. We kept striving in our own strength. We kept turning to our own wisdom. But it was clear to Rev. Scherer that the world’s resources were now played out. The highest ideals of secularism had descended into the horrors of the Holocaust. Science produced fearful and terrifying weapons of mass destruction. Set free from the shackles of religion, humanity pursued it’s own end with tragic consequences. All that was left was what Nietzsche called, “the will to power.” Millions died as a result. Millions experienced systematic abuse and oppression. Millions suffered the consequences of our collective anger and hate.

I was struck by how little has changed in our reading today. Humanity just hits the “repeat” button with every generation. The people of Israel abandon David. The once-great hero is now on the run for his life. All the power dynamics of this particular ancient near east society are thrown up in the air. Allegiances change overnight. Everyone casting their lot with the person they believe will eventually prevail. Ziba makes a play for his master’s wealth. Shimei takes the opportunity to take out all his frustrations. Abishai reverts to type, thinking he can solve every problem with violence. Ahithophel is so ashamed when his advice isn’t taken, he goes home and takes his own life. Joab seizes the opportunity to kill Absalom against the specific orders from his king. David weeps over the death of his son. Israel will return to David but nothing will ever again be the same. Violence and suffering and warfare will mark the rest of David’s reign. There is just something dark and deep in our nature that continues to defile us.

Now consider our own situation. A pandemic rages across the world. It seems highly infectious. It is dangerous as well especially to those who are vulnerable in terms of age or health conditions. The pandemic exacerbates the highly charged political divisions that already exist. Polarization deepens. The chasm between people widens. Distrust flourishes, fed by corporate and social media platforms who are more committed to their own agendas rather than truth. The flames of fear and anxiety are fanned higher and higher. We are facing the very real consequences of our decisions both personally and politically. More people are getting sick. More people are dying from COVID-19. More people are losing jobs. More businesses are shutting down. The mental health crisis only grows. Domestic violence is on the rise. Substance abuse increases. There is no win here. There is only the hope of mitigating as much loss as possible. But still we look for someone to blame. Still we look for someone to attack. Still we look for a scapegoat. There is something dark and deep in our nature that continues to defile us.

Where can we find hope? Only in Christ. Christ gives us compassion to walk in another person’s shoes. Christ gives us grace to allow people to make mistakes. Christ gives us love for those we disagree with or those whom we call our enemies. Christ gives us joy even in the midst of our trials. Christ gives us strength to persevere through our suffering. Christ gives us humility to ask for help. Christ gives us wisdom to make as good a decision as we possibly can with the limited information we have available

to us. Christ gives us peace in the midst of the storm. Friends, we have reached the horizon of our lives. We have reached the end of our resources. No amount of government intervention can possibly save any of us from the effects of this pandemic. Only Christ can deliver us. May we turn to Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 26, 40-41, 58, 61-62, 64

May 14, 2020
LEARNING TO PRAY

Readings for today: [Psalms 26, 40-41, 58, 61-62, 64](#)

What is prayer? Communion with God. On our knees. Folded hands. Eyes closed. Forming thoughts in our minds and sending them upwards like sparks from a fire? Is it a conversation or more of a monologue? A task we have to complete each day if we want to stay on God's good side? Something we do before meals or before bed? Is it the recitation of memorized words learned as a child and carried through to adulthood? "Now I lay me down to sleep..." "Bless us, O Lord, and these, Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen." "God is great. God is good. Let us thank Him for this food." "Our Father, who art in heaven..." What is prayer?

The Psalms are the prayerbook of the Bible. 150 different prayers written by different people on different occasions as they wrestled with life. Readers of the Psalms are always struck by their raw honesty and transparency. The beautiful way they express the deepest emotions of the human heart. The vivid descriptions of God and His great faithfulness. They are marvelous and great teachers when it comes to prayer.

One of the biggest things I've learned in the years I've spent meditating on the Psalms is that prayer comes more from the heart than the head. Prayer is less about me forming thoughts or saying words or reciting texts and more about laying before God the deepest emotions of my heart. Deep prayer doesn't require much in the way of words. Just letting the feelings flow and trusting God is hearing what's behind them. This is what makes David such a great Psalmist. He doesn't seem to stop to think about the "appropriateness" of his feelings. He doesn't seem to "judge" his emotions. He just lets them fly up to God and trusts God is big enough and great enough to make sense out of the chaos.

It's why he can express contradictory emotions all in the same prayer. "I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked...O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells." (Psalms 26:5, 8) He feels no need to try to make sense of it all. He trusts God can sort it out.

He can express his anger and desire for vengeance against those who hurt him. "O God, break the teeth in their mouths; tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord! Let them vanish like water that runs away; when he aims his arrows, let them be blunted. Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime, like the stillborn child who never sees the sun...The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked. Mankind will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth." (Psalms 58:6-8, 10-11) And almost in the same breath, be so tender. "Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us." (Psalms 62:8)

Ultimately, the Psalms give us permission to be real and authentic before God. To truly be ourselves. To put aside all pretense and performance and let drop the masks we so often wear.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 19-21, Psalms 5, 38, 42

May 15, 2020
AS THE DEER

Readings for today: [2 Samuel 19-21, Psalms 5, 38, 42](#)

Human beings just seem hardwired to divide. Perhaps I'm just jaded from what I see happening in our community and country and around the world today. People arguing over whether or not to wear masks. People arguing over the proper response to viral outbreak. Politicians taking advantage of the moment to push their own agendas. The ubiquity of fake news and false reporting that spreads like wildfire of social media. Our ideologies seem impenetrable. Our tendency towards confirmation bias unchangeable. Our partisan commitments unshakeable.

The same is true for Israel. The civil war is over. Absalom is dead. David is grieving. The nation is mourning. They face an uncertain future together. What will David do? How will the king respond to the betrayal? How will Israel deal with its national shame? It's not clean or neat or easy. There is more violence. More rebellion. More division. More suffering. More pain. Political enemies are assassinated. Tribal tensions exploited. Israel's enemies sense weakness and attack. David is almost killed. It's a reminder of how brutal and unforgiving this life can be. Small mistakes can lead to devastating consequences especially when you are a person of power and influence. Furthermore, today's reading reminds us that even people who have a heart for God are fallen. Broken. Sinful human beings who often make mistakes.

So where can we find hope? Where do we find our unity amidst all the divisions? Is there a force powerful enough to bring us together? Yes. It is God. "Let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exalt in you." (Psalm 5:11) "But for you, O Lord, do I wait; it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer...Do not forsake me, O Lord! O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!" (Psalm 38: 15, 21-22) David looks to God in the midst of his crisis. David looks to God for strength to face his enemies both within and without. David looks to God for hope as he seeks to reunite Israel and lead the nation back on a path to peace and prosperity. David recognizes his desperation for God. "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." (Psalm 42:1-2)

I don't know your unique circumstances. I know some of you are struggling with your health right now. Some of you are struggling with the loss of a job. Some of you are struggling in your marriage. Your relationship with your children is coming apart. Some of you just got news you will have to move to stay employed. Some of you may be in danger of losing your homes. Some of you will have to put off retirement. For others of you, the stay at home orders have put your life at risk either because of abuse or starvation or something just as dangerous. And perhaps the hardest part of all this is we don't know when it will end. We don't know when a vaccine will be developed. We don't know when the virus will mutate and run its course. We don't know how long herd immunity will take and the very real human costs involved. There are so many unknowns still out there and that causes fear and anxiety in our hearts. We too are becoming desperate for God. Like a deer pants for water. Thankfully, when we come to the end of ourselves, we find God. "Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and waves have gone over me. By day, the Lord commands His steadfast love, and at night He sings over me...Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God." (Psalm 42:7-8, 11) May you find your hope renewed in Christ today and may it bring you closer to those you love and live among!

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 22-23, Psalms 57

May 18, 2020
WORD OF GOD SPEAK

Readings for today: [Psalms 97-99](#)

Sometimes no commentary is needed...

“The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around. His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory. All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods! Zion hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of your judgments, O Lord. For you, O Lord, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. O you who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!”

“Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord! Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.”

“The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! The Lord is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples. Let them praise your great and awesome name! Holy is he! The King in his might loves justice. You have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the Lord our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he! Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called upon his name. They called to the Lord, and he answered them. In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them; they kept his testimonies and the statute that he gave them. O Lord our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the Lord our God is holy!”

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 24, 1 Chronicles 21-22, Psalms 30

May 19, 2020
THE CHARACTER OF GOD

Readings for today: [2 Samuel 24, 1 Chronicles 21-22, Psalms 30](#)

Today's reading presents us with several challenges. Did God or Satan incite David to perform a census? Why was census-taking so bad? What sin had kindled the wrath of God? Why was the punishment so severe? What does this passage reveal about the character and nature of God? Of course, the nature of the punishment hits very close to home as we too are watching tens of thousands die all around the world as a result of a virulent plague.

First and foremost, today's reading forces us to read not just for content but for comprehension. 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles are written by two different authors. These two authors are describing the same incident but from different perspectives. The author of 2 Samuel wants to highlight the sovereignty of God over all human affairs. Including our sin. This doesn't make God the author of sin but it does acknowledge that He will bend even our sin towards divine justice. The author of 1 Chronicles wants to highlight the author of sin who is Satan. The accuser. An evil spirit allowed by God torment God's people. (Remember the example of Job?) However, the author also reminds us that even Satan lives under God's sovereign power and God will not give him free reign to wreak havoc forever.

Second, why was God angry with Israel? This is where the Bible's chapter and verse divisions can trip us up if we aren't careful. In the original language, there is no break between what has come before and what happens in our reading today. They are all part of the same story. So Israel has just come out of a civil war. Israel's leaders are engaging in power struggles and even outright, cold-blooded murder. (Joab) This is obviously not the way God wants His people to live. They are failing in their calling to be a light to the nations. So God rightfully judges them for their sin.

Why the census? What was so bad about it? Well, again, consider the situation. You are David. You just survived a coup. You want to know who's with you and who's against you. You send your mightiest warriors out to take a census. To remind everyone who's boss. It's a show of force meant to intimidate as much as anything else. It's also an act of self-preservation. David is placing his trust in his own strength. His own ability to project power. His own authority as king. This is not God's will for David. God wants David to rely on Him. To trust in Him. To place his faith and his life in God's hands.

Finally, the plague. This one - as I said above - hits close to home. Are plagues a sign of God's judgment? Maybe. Is COVID-19 a sign of God's judgment on our world? Perhaps. The reality is we will never know. What we do know for sure is that God is still sovereign. The plague will come to an end when He decides it will. He will end it just as surely as He ended the plague in David's time. That end may come through a vaccine. It may come through natural means. God uses any and all measures to accomplish His will for our lives. In the meantime, plagues such as these should cause us to repent. To fall on our knees before the Lord. To humble ourselves and cast our cares on Him. God is good. God is righteous. God is holy. God is compassionate. God is gracious. God is with us even in the midst of this plague and He will hold us fast as we persevere through these difficult times.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 108-109

May 20, 2020
THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Readings for today: [Psalms 108-109](#)

“Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth! That your beloved ones may be delivered, give salvation by your right hand and answer me! God has promised in his holiness: “With exultation I will divide up Shechem and portion out the Valley of Succoth. Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my scepter. Moab is my washbasin; upon Edom I cast my shoe; over Philistia I shout in triumph.” (Psalm 108:5-9)

Today’s reading reminds us of God’s sovereignty. God reigns over all the earth. Over all human affairs. Over all the nations. Over all the princes and kings and presidents and prime ministers. God reigns over all of nature. His throne sits high above the heavens. The earth remains his footstool. God exalts Himself over creation and there is nothing that escapes His notice. Nothing operates outside His sovereign will. Nothing catches Him by surprise. Nothing lies outside His power and authority.

Yes, that includes viral pandemics. Wars and regional conflict. Just and unjust governments alike. Corrupt politicians and those who hold fast to their integrity. Rich and poor. Educated and uneducated. Every tribe. Every tongue. Every nation. All exist under His sovereign hand. If this is true, it creates the ultimate conundrum. If God is sovereign, how can He be good? There is just too much evil in the world. Too much suffering. Too much pain. Too much death. If God truly is sovereign, He must not care. He must not be good. He must be arbitrary and capricious. Cold and distant. Disengaged and uninvolved. Or...perhaps He is good but just not sovereign? Perhaps He’s all-loving and all-gracious and all-compassionate but simply not powerful enough to confront the forces of darkness that afflict our world? Perhaps this is why plagues run amok. Wars never seem to cease. The most corrupt and power-hungry politicians seem to win. The gap between rich and poor gets wider. The social divisions only become more pronounced. These truths are difficult to hold together in our finite, human minds. How God be both sovereign and good when we look at the state of the world He supposedly rules?

It’s a thoroughly modern problem. David, obviously, didn’t have such issues. He had no problems holding in tension in his own heart and mind the sovereignty and goodness of God and the brokenness of his world. He fundamentally believed in the Biblical story. The good and sovereign God had created a good and perfect world. Into that good and perfect world, God put a good and perfect creature made in His own divine image. The charge to that creature was to care for and nurture and act as God’s agent in that good and perfect world to help it become fruitful and beautiful and lovely as God originally planned. However, the good and perfect creature grew proud. It disobeyed. It stretched out its hand in an effort to be like God. And the good and perfect world fell into ruin. Sin and death now reigned. But the good and sovereign God’s plan remained the same. He would work in and through the creature made in His image to restore the world to its pre-Fall condition. Thus, Adam’s call came to Noah. Noah’s call came to Abraham. Abraham’s call came to Moses. Moses’ call came to David. David’s call would eventually come to a man named Jesus. God Himself re-imaging Himself into the broken world He still loves. The good and sovereign God refusing to let go of all He had made. Through Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension, the power of sin and death was broken. The forces of evil defeated. And what we are experiencing today is simply the aftershocks of that great victory that will one day find completion when the good and sovereign God returns to make all things new.

Until that day comes, we walk by faith. We hold fast to our belief that God is good. He is holy. He is pure. He is righteous. And we hold fast to our belief that God is sovereign. All-powerful. Almighty.

Ruler of the heavens and the earth. And we trust He knows what He's doing. We trust He sees things we cannot see. We trust He knows things we cannot know. And He is at work. The good and sovereign God has not abandoned His world to its fate. He is with us. He is near us. He is for us. And His promise is that He will bring to completion the good work He began.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 23-26

May 21, 2020
LEGACY

Readings for today: [1 Chronicles 23-26](#)

“When David was old and full of days, he made Solomon his son king over Israel.” (1 Chronicles 23:1)

Legacy. It's something all of us will leave. To our children. To our grandchildren. To those we work with. To those we serve. For several years, I served my denomination as the chair of our Ministerial Committee. In that position, I had the privilege of walking alongside several pastors as they made the transition into retirement. It wasn't always easy. Some of those transitions were smooth. Some were rocky. Some were planned. Some were unplanned. Some felt affirmed on their way out. Others felt pushed out by the people they loved. My biggest takeaway? We either plan for the day when we will no longer be around or someone else will plan it for us.

David made plans. He understood with all his wisdom and experience that he could set his successor, Solomon, up for success. So he organizes the Levites. Helps them transition from service to the Tabernacle to service in the Temple. Gives them new roles and responsibilities that fit the new situation they will find themselves in. He organizes the priests. Casts lots so they can be established in their terms of service. He sets up the musicians in their service. And then the gatekeepers, treasurers, and other officials. It is a massive undertaking. A complete reorganization from top to bottom of the entire leadership structure of a nation. Imagine what might have happened had David left this to Solomon to figure out? Imagine the infighting. The jockeying for position. The currying for favor. Imagine the chaos that might have resulted as the sons of Eleazar fought with the sons of Ithamar for the power of the priesthood. Imagine the sons of Levi, set free from their obligations to carry and care for the Tabernacle, refusing to care for the sacred elements of the Lord. Imagine the gatekeepers and musicians each deciding to do their own thing. Solomon would have had a mess on his hands for sure!

But David was faithful. He knew a significant part of his role was to finish well. To pass on a strong legacy to his son. Not just for Solomon's sake but for the sake of Israel as a nation. Because of my experience walking alongside so many pastors, my wife and I talk a lot about our legacy. Though I am still young, the years pass by so quickly. How am I preparing to pass on what has been entrusted to me? Should the Lord tarry and give me a rich and full life on this earth, I might have twenty-five good years of pastoring left. What will those years look like? How will I spend them? When will I know it is time to raise up my successor? How can I set them up for success? My children are beginning to leave home and head off to college. What kind of spiritual legacy have I given them? How have I prepared them to take on the roles and responsibilities of an adult? My parents are getting older and will begin to face the challenges that come along with aging. Am I prepared to care for them? Assist them? Make sure they continue to live a rich and full and vital life alongside their grandkids? These are important questions to ask and ponder and pray over no matter what season of life you find yourself in.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 131, 138, 139, 143-145

May 23, 2020
THE HARD WORK OF GENEROSITY

Readings for today: [1 Chronicles 27-29, Psalms 68](#)

The global economy has lost trillions due to the pandemic. Throw in a super-cyclone in southern Bangladesh and a locust infestation in the Horn of Africa and some of the poorest people in the world are now in danger of a famine of biblical proportions according to the latest news from the WHO and UN. They are setting up “hunger hospitals” in the most vulnerable countries in order to help provide food security during this time when global supply chains are disrupted and local markets shut down due to the virus. It’s heartbreaking. Some ask where is God in the midst of all of this? I believe God turns that question back to us. Where are you? Where are my people? Why do you not take what I have given you and use it to bless others in my name? You see, the reality is God has given us all we need to take care of every single human need in the world today. According to the New York Times, it would take 10 billion dollars a year to provide clean drinking water to the world. Sounds like a lot, doesn’t it? It’s 1/10 of what Europe spends on alcohol each year and about half of what the US spends on dog food. According to the UN, it would take about 30 billion a year to solve the world’s food crisis. According to the WHO, it would cost \$58/person to provide everyone with access to basic healthcare. About 371 billion by 2030. The impact? 97 million premature deaths could be averted, including more than 50 million children who never live to see their 5th birthday. 20 million deaths from non-communicable diseases like diabetes, cancer, and heart disease would be prevented. Life expectancy would jump anywhere between 3-9 years. Incredible!

How do we get from here to there? How do we become a more generous people? The kind of givers God loves? King David shows us the way. First and foremost, we must love God supremely. We must love God more than our wealth. More than our lifestyles. More than our safety. More than our comfort. We must love God with our whole hearts. Listen to what David tells his son Solomon. “And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever.” (1 Chronicles 28:9) Essentially, the key to Solomon’s success. The key to his kingship will be his love for God.

Second, we must recognize God is the giver of all good gifts. “Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name.” (1 Chronicles 29:10-13) We don’t own a single thing. Everything we have comes from God’s own hands. He chose the place of our birth. He endowed us with gifts and talents and abilities. He sovereignly orchestrated the opportunities we’ve been given. All these things were outside our control and yet they are the secret to our success. Of course we work hard. Of course we do our best. We are not passive in this process. But the foundation of whatever success we’ve achieved in this life was not laid by our own hands but by God Himself.

Third, we must acknowledge we are unworthy of such divine attention. “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding.” (1 Chronicles 29:14-15) The world is constantly telling us we “deserve” all we have. We’ve “earned” all we’ve received. We are “good” and “righteous”

and “worth” every penny of our wealth. The Bible calls this a lie. We are unworthy sinners. Unworthy of God’s attention. Unworthy to come into His presence. We are sinners in desperate, desperate, desperate need of grace. Our days are like a shadow. There is no abiding. In a generation or two, all we have accomplished will be dust and no one will even remember our names. But God loves us. And has dealt bountifully with us. And has secured for us an eternal home in the heavens if we will receive His greatest gift. Jesus.

Fourth, once we’ve set our hearts on Christ. Once we’ve acknowledged God as the “sole proprietor” of this world and all that is in it. Once we’ve humbled ourselves in our unworthiness before Him. Our hearts and hands quite naturally open. Our fists unclench. Our fears and doubts fade. And we give. Give generously. Freely. Cheerfully. “I know, my God, that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you. O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you.” (1 Chronicles 29:17-18)

When it comes to your money...is your heart directed towards God? When it comes to your wealth...do you see it as a tool in God’s hand? In these uncertain times, do you find yourself holding tighter onto what you have? Hunkering down? Doing all you can to preserve your lifestyle? Or are you becoming even more generous? Even more sacrificial as you see the needs around you grow? We face these same questions as a church. We’ve been blessed. Through careful stewardship, we’re debt free and stable financially. To whom much is given, much is expected. It’s why we’ve sent money through the Petros Network to help ward off starvation in Ethiopia. It’s why we’ve given funds to Bishop John Rucyahana in Rwanda as he seeks to serve the poorest of the poor. It’s why we’ve sent money to help Pastor Martin rebuild in South Sudan. And we’re seeking to do even more. Not just around the world but in our own community as well. As America goes back to work, I fully expect our economy to rebound. It will not be nearly as easy for most of the rest of the world. Will we lead the way in generosity? Are we willing to be “strong and courageous”, sacrificing our own needs, wants, and desires so the world can have clean water, nutritious food, and basic healthcare? Especially in light of this pandemic? In the wake of WWII, America established the Marshall Plan to help rebuild Europe. It set us up for a century of greatness. Imagine what could happen if we did the same for the world?

May 25, 2020
MEMORIAL DAY REFLECTIONS

Readings for today: [Psalms 111-118](#)

“O Israel, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield. You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield. The Lord has remembered us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron; he will bless those who fear the Lord, both the small and the great. May the Lord give you increase, you and your children! May you be blessed by the Lord, who made heaven and earth!” (Psalm 115:9-15)

Today is a special day in our country. A day when we remember those who gave their lives to protect our freedoms. Those who sacrificed so much and, in some cases, paid the ultimate price to defend our country. I think of my own family. My wife has two grandfathers buried at Fort Logan Cemetery in Denver, CO. Her father did three tours with the Navy in Vietnam. My father served as well during that era. It's humbling to reflect on their dedication. So each year we set aside a day to remember. A day to celebrate. Proclamations will be read. Speeches will be given. And all of them will end asking for some kind of divine blessing on our nation.

Israel was no different. She too sought God's divine blessing. Today's reading is filled with all kinds of nationalistic language. Israel praising God for His steadfast commitment to His covenant with them. Israel praising God for His mighty works on their behalf. Israel praising God for lifting them up above the other nations around them. At the same time, it's important to note Israel's focus. It's on God and not on themselves. They extol God for His character. His nature. His glory. They praise Him for His righteousness. His justice. His mercy and grace. They recognize their own blessing is wrapped up in their obedience to His commands. They will not receive what the Lord has stored up for them unless they walk in His ways.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!” (Psalm 111:10)

“Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments!... Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous. It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries. He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor.” (Psalm 112:1, 4-9)

“Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!” (Psalm 115:1)

The Psalmist understood a profound truth. If we seek to lift up ourselves. If we seek to put ourselves first. If we seek to protect ourselves. Promote ourselves. Indulge ourselves. God will bring down judgment. Selfishness is the very definition of what the Bible calls “wickedness.” But the nation that serves others. The nation that gives generously. The nation that sacrifices for the sake of those who are poor and needy and less-fortunate. That nation reflects the very heart of God and will be blessed in order to be a blessing.

I love America. I am thankful for the freedoms we enjoy. I am grateful for the material blessings we've worked so hard to earn. I'm especially humbled by the example of those who have gone before us who have made all this possible. I've also seen the alternative. In my line of work, I've traveled the world. I've seen oppression firsthand. I've stood at the mass graves. I've spoken to the victims of abuse and terror. I've seen the fear in their eyes. I've had to be careful at times because I knew there was a good possibility I was being monitored. Thankfully, those are things we do not have to worry about here at home. At the same time, I am concerned. I fear we are losing our grip on what's made America great. I am grieved over our inability to come to grips with our racist past. I am continually shocked at our lack of concern for life. I am heartbroken over the political divisions that threaten to tear us apart at the seams. I am deeply concerned by the growing sense of entitlement, selfishness, and greed, My fear is we will lose whatever blessing we've enjoyed unless we repent and turn back to God.

The founders of our country wrote these words in the historic Preamble to the US Constitution... “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” I pray for the day when we reclaim the original vision on which this country was founded. I pray for the day when we truly make it our aim to form a “more perfect union” rather than exacerbate the social, racial, economic, and political divisions that exist. I pray for the day when we will establish justice for the oppressed. Tranquility for the fearful and anxious among us. Defend the weak and vulnerable. Promote the welfare of all who come to our shores seeking asylum. And secure the future not just for ourselves but for those who will follow in our footsteps. On that day, I believe we will truly be able to proclaim with the Psalmist, “Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 117:1-2)

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 119:1-88

May 27, 2020
THE BLESSINGS OF OBEDIENCE

Readings for today: [Psalms 119:1-88](#)

Jesus says, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)

There is a strange dichotomy growing in the American church today. It’s the idea that we can accept Jesus as Savior but reject Him as Lord. Sure, no one will put it quite that bluntly but it comes with the territory when you meet someone who claims to be a Christian while at the same time rejecting the commands of Scripture. I think of the number of Christians over the years who have told me God was calling them to get divorced. Not for adultery. Not for abuse. Not for abandonment. They simply had fallen out of love with their spouse. The relationship had gotten too hard. They felt trapped. So they justify in their minds and hearts an act of disobedience under the premise that God will simply forgive and forget. I think of the number of Christians I know who lie. They lie to their spouses. Lie to their children. Lie to those they work with or live among. Ultimately, they lie to themselves and they justify it for all kinds of reasons. Political. Social. Economic. Personal. You name it. And they assume God doesn’t care. I think of the number of Christians I know who plead ignorance when it comes to God’s commands. They honestly do not know what God expects from their lives and frankly - if they are totally honest - they don’t really care. They simply want to live their lives the way they want and they hope God gives them a pass.

Contrast that line of thinking with the words of Psalm 119 today...

“With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” (Psalm 119:10-11)

“I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.” (Psalm 119:16)

“My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times.” (Psalm 119:20)

“Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors.” (Psalm 119:24)

Over and over again, the Psalmist proclaims his love for the laws of God. His love is deep. Visceral. Powerful. Emotional. This is a man enraptured not with the rules of his faith but his relationship with God. He understands all relationships have boundaries. All relationships have expectations. All relationships demand something from each party. He is also humble. He knows he is dust and to dust he shall return. He knows he has no business being in a relationship with Almighty God. He understands it is only by grace that he stands. And out of the immense gratitude of his heart, he expresses his devotion to God. He longs to keep God’s commands. His greatest desire is to serve God and love God and honor God with a whole heart.

What about you? Do you know the commands of God? Do you know what God expects from you and why? Do love God’s Word like the Psalmist? Does your soul long to be obedient? “Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart.” (Psalm 119:1-2) God’s blessings are reserved for those who seek to obey Him. Those who love Him enough to honor Him with their lives. Those who express their devotion to Him by seeking to align their lives with His life. They meditate on God’s Word. They memorize God’s Word. They long for their lives to be a reflection of God’s Word. When asked, they

can tell you specifically what areas of their life God is working on even now. They can tell you where they've made progress and where they fall short. They can tell you of their battles with sin and temptation. They can show you the scars from the mistakes they've made and confessed. They know the road of repentance is full of detours and though they stumble like a drunk man from one side to the other, they inexorably make their way to God.

So again, what about you? Do love Jesus? Do you follow His commands? Let me encourage you to start with the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5-7. Essentially, it is Jesus' interpretation of the Ten Commandments. It's a beautiful picture of what the obedient Christian life is all about. Begin meditating on the sermon. Memorizing the sermon. Letting the words sink deep into your heart and soul that you may discover all the blessings God has for you in this life and the next!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 3-4, 2 Chronicles 1, Psalms 72

May 28, 2020
DISCERNMENT

Readings for today: [1 Kings 3-4, 2 Chronicles 1, Psalms 72](#)

“Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?”” (1 Kings 3:9)

We suffer today from a lack of discernment. We live in a post-truth world. Right and wrong are personally defined. There is no such thing as objectivity anymore. People do what is right in their own eyes. We call good “evil” and evil “good.” We are lost as a culture. As a society. As a nation. The pandemic has revealed the fault lines. Our political leaders seem far more interested in using this crisis to further their own political ends. We don’t seem to have many adults in the room. People who will honestly and transparently and humbly lead us through what is an extremely challenging time. The results are deadly. Especially in impoverished areas and communities of color. The structural failings of our system and the fruit of a racist history continue to haunt us. The latest video of George Floyd only adds fuel to an already raging fire. Would that God would raise up a leader for us like Solomon!

Sadly, in a democratic system, you often get the leadership you deserve. If we are honest, they are an extension of us. They are the embodiment of our basest desires and primal instincts. They are ruthless, calculating, greedy, corrupt. Such is the system we’ve created. We’ve polluted the pool of potential candidates with so much dark money, bareknuckle politics, and backroom deals that it’s no wonder we end up with the leaders we have. The only ones can possibly stand above the fray are the uber-rich who can fund their own campaigns but they mostly live lives so disconnected from the normal everyday that it’s hard for them to know what’s best for the average person. How I long for the day when we would have a humble leader in the Oval Office or in the Halls of Congress! A godly leader who was willing to acknowledge their mistakes, ask for forgiveness, and simply do their best for the American people. A leader who would put “We the people” above their political party. A leader who would unite rather than divide. A leader who would speak the truth in love. A leader who was honest and transparent.

One of the things we will see as we read through the Kings is how the character of a leader shapes the nation. The fortunes of Israel rise or fall largely on the godliness of the kings who serve her. When godly kings are in power. Kings who are wise. Discerning. Those who know right from wrong and good from evil. Israel flourishes. When ungodly kings are in power. Kings who are corrupt. Foolish. Narcissistic. Those who could care less about right or wrong as long as they acquire more power. Israel falls. America is no different. Now, more than ever, we need godly leadership at the helm of our nation. Now, more than ever, the character of our leaders matters. May God raise up for us leaders like Solomon who know good from evil and can lead us with wisdom.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalm 119:89-176

May 29, 2020
CLINGING TO TRUTH

Readings for today: [Psalm 119:89-176](#)

We live in a post-truth world. Our politicians don't tell the truth. Our media doesn't tell the truth. Even our public health officials don't always tell the truth. Everyone it seems bends the truth to their own agenda. Their own needs. Their own feelings. Their own wants. Their own desires. Furthermore, we seem more committed to our personal ideologies than ever. Left or Right. Liberal or conservative. Democrat or Republican. Socialist or capitalist. You name it, we have an opinion on it. We take a side on it. And we consider those who oppose us to be dangerous enemies who must be dehumanized at every turn. If you don't believe me, scroll through Twitter these days. Listen to any of the cable news shows for five minutes. Watch the press conferences of our politicians. It's macabre theater.

The Psalmist points us in a different direction. He points us to the only sure foundation in life. God's Word. God's Word is eternal. "Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens." (Psalm 119:89) God's Word is the source of life. "I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life." (Psalm 119:93) God's Word is perfect. "I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life." (Psalm 119:93) God's Word is the source of all wisdom and knowledge and understanding. "Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts." (Psalm 119:98-100) God's Word teaches us what is good and godly. "Righteous are you, O Lord, and right are your rules. You have appointed your testimonies in righteousness and in all faithfulness." (Psalm 119:137-138) God's Word is more precious than gold or anything of value on this earth. "Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold." (Psalm 119:127)

The fundamental problem in our world - and in our church today - is we have rejected God's Word. We have turned aside from His Law. We have abandoned His commandments. Each of us have gone our own way. Each of us has turned inward towards Self. We have set up idols and we cling to our own understanding. It's why we can never seemingly make any progress when it comes to the persistent sin issues of our day like racism. We keep trying to solve it using human means. We keep trying to bring about the Kingdom but without the King. We keep trying to make heaven come to earth by our own strength and the more we try, the worse things seem to get. The more we clench our fists, the more righteousness slips through our fingers. It's a cycle that repeats itself in every generation. What we need is revival. A fresh movement of the Holy Spirit. But in order to receive such a gift, we have to be humbled. We have to be broken. We have to be forced to our knees in surrender. We have to take to the end of our strength and wisdom and resources. This is what I see taking place around me today. Our world is on fire. Ideologies are only becoming more extreme. Hatred is on the rise. Violence and suffering will only increase. We stand on the brink of war. It may not be fought with armies but it certainly is being fought on the political and social and economic battlefields of our day. Only Christ can save us. Only Christ can deliver us. Jesus Christ is the Word of God. Only as we cling to the Jesus Truth and walk in the Jesus Way will we find the Jesus Life.

Readings for tomorrow: Song of Solomon 1:1-5:1

May 30, 2020
SEX AND GOD

Readings for today: [Song of Solomon 1:1-5:1](#)

The Song of Solomon is one of the most difficult and least understood books in all of Scripture. It's one we tend to avoid in our sex-saturated culture. The language is far too intimate. The imagery too graphic. We won't let ourselves picture it much less reflect on how the Spirit might speak to us through it. We flip through the pages as fast as we can to get to the end so we can avoid any embarrassment.

But what is the book about? The love for a man and a woman? The love of God for His church? Perhaps both? Are we comfortable thinking about our relationship with God in sexual terms? Or is that a bridge too far? I firmly believe the Bible is inviting us to approach God in the most intimate of ways. The language of the Song is meant to arouse. Meant to touch the deepest places of our hearts. Meant to draw us into intimate embrace with the Father.

Our inability to embrace this book only reveals how corrupt our understanding of human sexuality has become. We see it as dirty yet pleasurable. Something to be enjoyed and yet something to be feared. Our culture boasts of sexual freedom and yet is shocked when such unfettered freedom leads to abuse and violence. If there's anything the #MeToo movement has taught us is that our sexual appetites are almost impossible to satisfy. Sexuality without restraint is actually destructive and traumatic.

And yet, sex is God's creation. Sexuality is something He instilled within each of us. We are created as sexual beings and when the Bible talks about "knowing" another person, it often uses the most sexually intimate of terms. The same is true for "knowing" God. God designed sex to be the ultimate experience of "knowing." A way for us to express our deepest affections. Our deepest emotions. Our deepest vulnerabilities. All within the safety of the covenant bonds of marriage between a man and a woman. All within the safety of the covenant bond we share with Jesus.

So is it possible to see the Song of Solomon as a prayer? As a way to express the deepest desires of our hearts to God? As a way for us to ask for deeper intimacy with Him? Or does our broken human experience of sexuality warp our thinking? Corrupt how we understand this most powerful and primal of drives? Does it poison this well and thus prevent us from fully grasping the depth of relationship God desires to have with us? There's a reason Christ calls the church His "bride." There's a reason God so often refers to Himself in the Old Testament as a "husband" and Israel as his "wife." Marriage is the place where a man and a woman become "one flesh" before the Lord and it is designed to point beyond itself to something even greater...the "oneness" God desires to have with His people for all eternity.