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April 1, 2022
The Horror

Readings for today: [Judges 19-21](#)

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

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

Horror. It's a good word to describe what we read today from the book of Judges. There simply is nothing redemptive in the story. Nothing good. Nothing godly. Man's inhumanity to man is on full display. It's dark. It's evil. It's terrifying.

Horror. It's a good word to describe what's going on in our world today. One only has to scroll through a Twitter newsfeed or watch cable news to see the hate that leads to violence that leads to death and then return the next day to watch the cycle repeat itself.

Horror. If we're totally honest, it's a good word to describe what goes on in all of our hearts. All of us are perpetrators. All of us are victims. We are the Levite. We are the concubine. We've sacrificed others and we've been sacrificed for the sake of self-protection and self-gratification. In the Bible's judgment, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:10-18)

Perhaps it's providential that we read this section of Judges as we head towards Holy Week. A season we dedicate to reflection on the horror of the Cross and the death of God. We reflect on the price Jesus paid. The blood He shed. The penalty He bore. We reflect on the suffering He endured. The pain He experienced. The heartbreak of betrayal. We reflect on the depth of our sin. The depravity of our nature. The darkness of our hearts. We reflect on the cost of our salvation. On what it took to redeem us from sin and death. To deliver us from evil.

Of course, we also reflect on our salvation! God plunging Himself into the horror of our condition! Plunging into the depths of our darkness! Immersing Himself in the breadth of our madness! Embracing us as His own! In Christ, there is hope for the Levite and his concubine! In Christ, there is hope for the Kurtz's of our world! In Christ, there is hope even for us! And that hope is found in Jesus!

Readings for tomorrow: Ruth 1-4

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April 2, 2022
Great Redeemer

Readings for today: [Ruth 1-4](#)

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

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

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

After all the bloodshed and violence and suffering and pain, it is nice to read that not all was lost in Israel. Even in the time of the judges, there were still faithful men and women who followed the Lord. It is a great reminder to us in our own time that the night is always darkest right before the dawn. Next Saturday is Holy Saturday. A day where Christians reflect on the death of their Lord. His body lying on a cold slab. Wrapped in a burial shroud. Death seemingly having the victory. Sin and Evil seemingly having their way. The Son of God seemingly defeated. We wait on that day in silence. With baited breath for we know what the next day brings! Victory! Jesus rising from the grave! Jesus throwing open the door of the tomb! Death could not hold him! Hell could not defeat Him! Sin and Evil had no power over Him! Jesus is our Great Redeemer! Jesus is our Great Savior!

Readings for tomorrow: None

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April 4, 2022
A Mother's Devotion

Readings for today: [1 Samuel 1-3](#)

Monica was born in 331 AD to a moderately wealthy family. Though raised as a Christian, she was given in marriage to a non-Christian man named Patricius. Together they had three children who survived infancy. One of them was named Augustine. Monica did not have an easy life. Her husband had a violent temper. Her mother-in-law was a challenge to live with. Her son, though incredibly brilliant, was a happy pagan. All of this could have made Monica bitter and angry but instead she chose to direct her energies to prayer. One by one, her family gave their lives to Christ. Her mother-in-law was won over by her grace and charity. Her husband gave his life to Christ a year before he died. She continued to pray for her son, following him to the city of Milan where he came under the influence of a bishop named Ambrose. As Monica poured her heart out for Augustine to Bishop Ambrose, he is said to have remarked, "I cannot believe a child of such tears shall ever perish." Augustine soon came to faith and was baptized on Easter in 387AD, becoming one of the most influential Christians in history. After his baptism, his mother told him, "Son, nothing in this world now affords me delight. I do not know what there is now left for me to do or why I am still here, all my hopes in this world being now fulfilled." She died soon after.

I thought of Monica as I read about the devotion of Hannah this morning. Hannah did not have an easy life. Her barrenness would have been perceived as God's curse. Her treatment at the hands of her rival, Peninnah, would have been difficult to endure. Most of her community would look on her with pity. It would be easy for Hannah to give into grief and despair. But Hannah turns her energies into prayer. She seeks the Lord with all her heart. She promises to devote her firstborn son to His service if He will simply hear and answer her prayers. God remembers Hannah. He hears her prayers and grants her heart's desire. Hannah proves faithful. She weans the child and then brings him to Eli so he can be brought up at the Tabernacle which was then located in a city called Shiloh. She never ceases to pray for him. Never ceases to care for him. She even brings him a little robe when she and her husband came up for the annual sacrifice. The impact of her faithful devotion is incredible. Samuel comes to faith at a young age and becomes one of Israel's greatest judges and prophets.

I imagine all of us can relate even if we don't have children of our own. All of us know what it's like to watch a loved one struggle. Perhaps life deals them a bad hand. Perhaps they are struck down with a terrible disease. Perhaps they struggle with their faith. Whatever it may be, it is always tempting to let ourselves become bitter and frustrated and angry with God if He delays in answering our prayers. It's easy to become impatient or throw in the towel or give up. But faithful people like Hannah and Monica remind us of the power of persistent, devoted prayer.

I have experienced this in my own life. I have prayed over family members for years. I have shed so many tears for them. I have sought God on their behalf. I've spent many a sleepless night pacing the floor crying out to God. Sometimes I get frustrated with God. Sometimes I get angry with Him. Sometimes I throw my hands up in despair. But saints like Hannah and Monica and Don and Berk and Daisy and Sam and James and Sarah and Lisa and a host of others have inspired me to keep coming back to the Lord. They have encouraged me to hold fast to God's promises. To believe God when He says He will never stop pursuing those He loves and He will bring to completion the good work He's begun.

Readings for tomorrow: [1 Samuel 4-8](#)

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April 5, 2022
Talisman

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 4-8

I remember the first time I watched Raiders of the Lost Ark. Such a great movie. Action. Adventure. Suspense. Mystery. It remains a favorite to this day. The heart of the movie is the search for a lost talisman. A sacred treasure. The Nazis want to capture the ark and use it to conquer the world. Indiana Jones wants to capture the ark and put it on display in a museum. Both sides miss the point. The ark of the covenant has no power of its own. Looking into the ark isn't going to cause your face to melt off. There are no ghosts lurking inside. No insidious force waiting to pounce on the unsuspecting. It simply is a box built to carry the most treasured memories of God's chosen people. The budding rod of Aaron. A jar of manna from heaven. The stone tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments.

Human beings have this tendency to turn ordinary things into magic totems. We are desperate for something concrete that we can touch and hold and see and feel. We are deeply uncomfortable with the unknown and the unfamiliar. So we make idols like golden calves or bronze snakes. We build beautiful spaces like the Tabernacle and adorn it with golden furniture like the ark but promptly forget the point of it all which is to connect to God.

In our passage today, Israel treats the ark like a magic charm. A good luck token. They mistakenly assumed the ark itself contained power when in fact it was useless. It was just a golden box. The Philistines made a similar mistake. They assumed the ark represented a god and they trembled in fear. Both sides missed the point. In the ensuing battle, the Philistines easily overwhelm Israel. They slaughter thirty thousand on the battlefield. They capture the ark. They kill the priests. They return to their cities having won a great victory not only over Israel but seemingly over Israel's god. So they take the ark and put it in one of their temples as tribute to their own god, Dagon. When they get up the next morning - probably hung over from the celebration the night before - they can't believe their eyes. Dagon had fallen on his face before the ark. So they set his statue back up again but the following day they find him fallen yet again to the ground this time with his head and hands cut off. A plague sweeps the city. People start getting sick and dying. They take the ark to another city but the same thing happens. They send it to a third city but the people of that city won't let it in. So they send the ark back to Israel with an offering. Golden tumor and golden mice to represent the plague they had suffered. It's important to note the lesson they learned. What they did with the ark was of little importance compared with what they did to honor the God of Israel.

What about us? How often do we turn ordinary things in our own lives into sacred talismans. We place our trust in a particular place or particular style of worship or a particular personality in the pulpit. We treat prayer like some magic formula. The Word of God like some magic book. Friends, none of these things contain any power or authority of their own. Sacred space is important not because of the space itself but because of what happens there. The worship of the Living God. Worship style is important not because of the words or melodies or instrumentation but because of how it points us to God. Prayer is important not because we are good at it or know just the right words to say but because it is the primary way we talk to God. The Bible is important not because of the words on the page but because of how the Holy Spirit uses those words to transform us into the image of God. God is gracious to us. He reveals Himself to us through ordinary means of grace. Make sure you don't ascribe to those "ordinary means" any more credit than they deserve. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 9-12

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April 6, 2022
Visions and Dreams

Readings for today: [1 Samuel 9-12](#)

Several years ago, I was in Ethiopia helping lead a training conference for church planters. About midway through the conference, a striking young man walked up to a group I was talking to. He was dressed head to toe like a traditional Muslim warrior. Flowing robes. Head covering. Curved sword on his hip. We found someone who spoke his dialect and asked him what he needed. He share the most amazing story with us. He grew up in a Muslim village and had never met a Christian. He didn't even know the name of Jesus. But the Lord revealed Himself to him in a dream one night and he surrendered his life to Him. He woke up the next morning and began preaching about this man who had come to him in his dream. The entire village converted. Now he was left with a dilemma? What to do next? He had no Bible. There was no church in the area. So he prayed to the Lord and the Lord told him to show up in a particular village on a particular day at a particular time and he would be given the resources he needed. The village was Gojo. The day and time coincided with our training conference. It was an absolute miracle.

It's always hard to read stories like the one we encounter today. Depending on our faith background, we aren't necessarily used to the idea that God would speak to us in dreams and visions. Today, Saul appears before Samuel. This came as no surprise to Samuel because God had already told him the day before what was going to take place. A man from the tribe of Benjamin would appear out of nowhere. Samuel was to anoint this man king over all Israel. Saul's task was to reign over God's people and deliver them from the hands of their enemies. It's a miraculous story. Especially when one considers all the details that had to take place in order to make it happen. Lost donkeys. A servant's suggestion to see the "seer." The fact that Samuel just happened to be in town on that particular day. Three men going up to Bethel with goats, bread, and wine. The confirmation of Saul's kingship through prophesy. It's amazing.

Why don't these things happen more often today? Why do we not see the miracles of God like they did in the Bible or like they do in other parts of the world? If we're honest, it's because we don't need God. Not really. Not in the same way. Most of us live lives of plenty. We have plenty of money. Plenty of time. Plenty of resources at our disposal. This is why Jesus said it's harder for a rich person to get into heaven than a camel through the eye of a needle. We tend to rely on ourselves. On our own strength and ability and wisdom and for the most part...it works! Or so we think. Contrast that with the people of Israel in Samuel's day. They were oppressed. Constantly under threat. They were a subsistence agricultural society. The same is true in places like Ethiopia where the local population fights everyday to survive. This is why their faith is so strong. They depend on the miracles of God and He delivers. Friends, the challenge for us is to learn how to depend on God in the same way. To open our hands and hearts to Him and surrender all control. To spend time in silence and solitude before Him. To worship Him in spirit and in truth. As we do these things, God promises to meet with us. He promises to speak to us. He promises to provide for us. He promises to deliver us.

Readings for tomorrow: [1 Samuel 13-16](#)

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April 7, 2022
First Love

Readings for today: [1 Samuel 13-16](#)

What does it mean to love God with a “whole” heart? To be fully devoted to Him? To make Him our first love? Does it mean outward perfection? King Saul literally stood head and shoulders above his countrymen. (1 Sam. 10:23) Eliab, David’s older brother, clearly was an impressive physical specimen. (1 Sam. 16:6) Does it mean achievement or success? I am sure God could easily have lined up a hundred other men who had accomplished a heck of a lot more than David. Is it based on wealth or privilege? Or perhaps great moral character? What kind of heart does God treasure in a man or woman? The key is found in 1 Sam. 15:22-23..."Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry." Humility. Submission. Obedience. These are the qualities on which God places supreme value. Are we willing to listen? Willing to surrender our plans in favor of God’s plan for our lives? Are we willing to trust God even when our circumstances seem bleak? Are we willing to obey even when it’s hard?

King Saul was a half-hearted man. Though he was chosen by God and instructed by Samuel in the “rights and duties” of godly kingship, his heart was divided. At times, Saul was faithful and found great success. At other times, he was unfaithful and found only heartbreak. In times of conflict, Saul seemed to trust in God and therefore win victory after victory. In times of preparation or peace, Saul seemed to forget God and trust in his own understanding. The unlawful sacrifice at Gilgal. A rash vow during the heat of battle. A refusal to devote the Amalekites to destruction. These events illustrate the half-hearted devotion Saul paid to Yahweh and it eventually cost him everything. The kingdom was literally ripped from his hands. The Spirit of the Lord departed from him. And he ended up paranoid and tormented.

King David was a whole-hearted man. As we will see, David was a man after God’s own heart. This doesn’t make him perfect. His failures are massive and significant and costly. But through it all, David keeps seeking after God. David keeps humbling himself before God. David keeps returning to God in repentance. And God loves David. Honors David. Promises to give the throne to his descendants for generations.

So time to take stock. Time to step back and honestly examine your own heart. Are you half-hearted or whole-hearted in your devotion to God? Half-hearted or whole-hearted in your love for Jesus? How do you know? We’ve already seen that it doesn’t necessarily depend on our outward appearance or achievement or actions. We can’t count on the image we project to the world to save us. We have to be strong and courageous enough to take the inward journey into the heart. What do we find there? A love for God? A desire to serve Him? Please Him? Be with Him? Do we find in our hearts a hunger and thirst for righteousness? A deep awareness of the poverty of our own spiritual condition? Do we grieve over our sin? These are important questions that serve as a “diagnostic” to help us discern the spiritual condition of our hearts.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 17-20, Psalm 59

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April 8, 2022
Trusting God

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 17-20, Psalm 59

What does it mean to trust God? As Christians, we talk about it all the time. But what does that actually look like in real life? David was a strong young man. A man entrusted with protecting the wealth of his family. A man who spent his days and nights out in the fields. Through all kinds of weather. Suffering all kinds of hardship. Fighting off lions and bears and other wild animals. David is no novice to conflict. No fearful young boy. His confidence has been forged in the fires of hardship and struggle.

Now he stands next to his brother as Goliath taunts the armies of Israel. David has as much right to be there as anyone. He may be a little younger but he's just as qualified. There were no standing professional armies in those days so most of the warriors who had gathered to fight for Saul were much like him. Farmers. Sheep herders. Men of the fields. Men of the forge. Men who spent most of their lives in other professions. Goliath was an exception. He truly was a professional warrior. Someone who had trained for battle since his youth. A man of imposing size who the Philistines used to strike fear in their enemies. He challenges Israel. More importantly, he challenges God Himself.

David trusts God. David attributes his past success to the Lord. "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." (1 Samuel 17:37) David has faced incredible odds before. Fighting off lions and bears is no joke! It required courage to track those animals down and save his sheep. And it will require courage to go out and face this Philistine. David doesn't blink. He grabs his sling and a few stones and off he goes.

It's one thing to say you trust God. It's another to actually place yourself in a situation where that trust is put to the test. "Trusting God" for David meant defending his flocks against lions and bears. "Trusting God" for David meant going out to face the Philistine giant. "Trusting God" for David meant not retaliating when Saul became jealous and sought to kill him. "Trusting God" for David meant continuing to serve Saul even though he was being treated unjustly. Over and over again, David trusts God with his life. His reputation. His relationships. His future. Remember, he's already been anointed the next king! One would think he might try to grasp after what is rightfully his. Manipulate things in his favor. Use Saul's mental instability to his own advantage. Imagine him standing on the field of battle, having just cut off Goliath's head. Is there a better time to claim your throne? David does none of these things because he trusts God to work things out according to His will and His way and in His time.

So...do you trust God? Where are you trusting God in your life right now? Where is it hard to trust God? What hardships and struggles are you facing? What does trust look like for you in those specific situations? "Trusting God" is no an abstract concept but a way of life that finds concrete expression in the everyday.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 21-24, Psalm 91

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April 9, 2022
Godly Confidence

Readings for today: [1 Samuel 21-24, Psalm 91](#)

Recently, I had the opportunity to lead a retreat for the leadership team of another church in a different community than my own. They are a great bunch of folks! They love God with all their hearts and are courageously seeking Him for the next season of their life together. They know the way forward won't be easy. They know they will have to navigate a lot of conflict. There are a lot of major decisions to be made and a lot could go wrong but they have taken the first steps of faith. It is inspiring! Over the course of the time we had together, I shared many of my own stories. Stories of the challenges I've faced. The conflict I've had to manage. The major decisions we've made in the church I lead and the risks we've taken for the Kingdom of God. One of the things that struck them most was my confidence. Confidence God would show up. Confidence God would provide. Confidence God would lead and guide every step of the way.

Godly confidence is not something we are born with. It is something we earn over a lifetime. Primarily through hardship and struggle. It is forged in the fires of adversity. It is tempered in times of trial. It is refined through seasons of suffering. I've had my share. I shared openly and honestly about those moments with my new friends and what I learned about God's faithfulness. When my life was at its lowest possible point and I was in danger of losing everything and everyone I loved, God met me in a powerful way. He lifted me up out of the pit and set my feet on solid ground. I learned the truth of David's words from Psalm 91, "Because He holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him. I will protect him because he knows My name. When he calls to Me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him My salvation."

Once you hit rock bottom and find God waiting for you there, there isn't much that will shake you. My confidence does not come from the success we've had at PEPC or the fruitful initiatives I've been involved with in my denomination or the incredible work we've done through the Petros Network. It comes from watching God do His work through His people. It comes by having a front row seat to the movement of the Holy Spirit as He transforms so many lives. It comes through experiencing the sufficiency of the gospel over and over again despite my own foolishness and weaknesses. It comes as we take steps of faith, risking everything over and over again for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Readings for tomorrow: None

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April 11, 2022
Authentic Prayer

Readings for today: [Psalms 7, 27, 31, 34, 52](#)

The Psalms are the prayer book of the Bible. 150 prayers written by God's people. Written in times of celebration to commemorate great victories and triumphs. Written in times of grief to chronicle despair and exile and defeat. Written for use in worship like the Psalms of Ascent. Written for very specific occasions like when David sinned with Bathsheba. They are authentic and raw and real because they reflect real people bringing their deepest longings and questions and heartaches before God.

In today's selection, David is on the run. He is being pursued by his own people. Betrayed by his own king. Unjustly accused. He has lost his position. His home. His family. One would think such circumstances would lead to bitterness and despair. Anger and frustration. Fear and uncertainty. These are honest feelings and David doesn't shy away from acknowledging them. “”O Lord my God, in you do I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers and deliver me, lest like a lion they tear my soul apart, rending it into pieces, with none to deliver. (Ps. 7:1-2) “Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away.” (Psalms 31:9-13) One can hear in his words the anguish and heartbreak. He is afraid. He doesn't know what the future holds. There are no guarantees he will escape. So he brings these feelings authentically before the Lord. He humbles himself before his God. He knows the Lord sees his afflictions.

At the same time, David prays in faith for his very real needs. He prays for God's protection. “In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me!” (Psalms 31:1-2)

He prays for God's guidance and wisdom. “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.” (Psalms 27:4-5)

He prays for God's comfort and provision. “When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” (Psalms 34:17-19)

Most of all, David lifts his eyes above his current circumstances to praise God for who He is! God is worthy of praise even when we find ourselves in the middle of the most difficult times of our lives. “I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!” (Psalms 34:1-3)

One of the greatest lies the enemy tries to tell us is that our needs don't matter to God. They are too small. Too insignificant to demand His attention. The enemy tries to convince us that we are a burden to our Heavenly Father and praying authentically somehow makes us unholy or unworthy. The Psalms teach us otherwise. They are raw. They are real. They are emotional. They are bold. The Psalmist - in

this case King David - enjoys such intimate fellowship with God that he can literally tell God anything. And that is what God desires from everyone of His children.

So what is your prayer life like? Is it real? Is it authentic? Or are there things you are afraid to share with your Heavenly Father? Areas of your life you try to hide? Do you fear coming into His presence? Afraid of what He might do? What He might say? What He might think? Do you trust God's gracious character? His unconditional love? Do you believe His mercies are new every morning? Do you believe God is generous towards you? Having an inexhaustible supply of time and attention? Do you know nothing is insignificant to God? Not one need. Not one desire. Do you bring your requests humbly before Him, trusting He knows best what you need? I'd encourage you to use the Psalms as a model, a guide, for your prayers. Let the Psalmist lead you to a deeper understanding of your relationship with God.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 56, 120, 140-142

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April 12, 2022
Resiliency

Readings for today: [Psalms 56, 120, 140-142](#)

One of the reasons I love reading the Bible chronologically is that it sets the Psalms in the context of the stories from which they arise. It's powerful when we connect them to the real lives of the real people who wrote them. Today's readings place us squarely in one of the darkest times of King David's life. He is on the run. He is living in the wilderness. He's gathered around him a pretty motley crew of people. He can never rest. He is never safe. He is never fully secure. Anxiety and fear are constant companions. This is not his fault. It's not something he brought on himself. He is not facing the consequences of his choices. No, it's the opposite. He is being unfairly treated. Falsely accused of crimes he did not commit. All David ever did was try and serve his king faithfully and well. He has fought for Saul. Bled for Saul. Won victory after victory for Saul. When Saul was troubled, it was David who played the harp to calm his soul. All for what? Betrayal? Being hunted like an animal?

How does David respond? Does he play the victim? No! He turns to God. "Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly. When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?...This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Psalms 56:1-4, 9-11) This is what I love about David. He honestly acknowledges his fears. He doesn't try to pretend like life is going well. He's being trampled. He's being oppressed. He's being attacked by his enemies. David could respond in kind. David could give into fear. David could play the victim. He could rail against the betrayal and injustice of it all. But David does none of those things. Instead, he places his trust in God. He praises God. He keeps his eyes fixed on God. What happens as a result? David is filled with incredible confidence. "What can man do to me? Take my life? Take my future? Take my possessions? Big deal. I trust in God. I place my faith in God. I know God is for me so who can stand against me?"

We live in a world where it is common to play the victim. We seem to be unable to handle disappointment. We avoid responsibility. We blame-shift. We feel wounded. Hurt. Betrayed. This is not to suggest abuse isn't real. It absolutely is and cannot be tolerated. But, as a society, we are in danger of trivializing trauma, abuse, PTSD, etc. because we use these words to describe all kinds of conditions. Many of them self-inflicted. And we seemingly believe any kind of hurt gives us license to end relationships. Avoid hard conversations. Escape the Biblical call for forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration. Someone lets us down? We cut them out of our lives. We get confronted at work? We find another job. Someone holds us accountable? We stop talking to them. A friend hurts our feelings? We move on. Such behaviors are rampant both in our society and in the church. Study after study has been done on the lack of "resiliency" in our culture. We seem to be unable to handle suffering. Pain. Heartbreak. Disappointment. We seem to be ill-equipped to have hard, honest conversations. We seem to be too scared to face our own internal demons so we project them onto those around us. Especially those we are closest to. So marriages fail. Families break apart. Friendships end. All we are doing is perpetuating a cycle of brokenness.

Would that we would follow David's example! In the face of all the hardship and suffering and injustice and pain and disappointment and betrayal...David looked to God. He took refuge in God. He cried out to God. He asked God to search his own heart so that he may not sin. Most of all, he praised God for he recognized that it is often in the "wilderness" when we are "on the run" from our enemies

that God does His best work in us. Shaping. Forming. Forging our character. Making us into the people He created and called us to be.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 25-27, Psalms 17, 73

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April 13, 2022
Love your Enemies

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 25-27, Psalms 17, 73

This past week I read these challenging words again from the Sermon on the Mount. “Love your enemies!” Jesus says. “Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who persecute you.” (Luke 6:27-28) Frankly, I think it sounds crazy. Mixed up. Naive. Until I read about David. I watch him spare Saul’s life over and over again. I watch him refuse to lift his hand against the Lord’s anointed. I watch him restrain his anger. His desire for revenge. David had every right to strike Saul down when he caught him in the cave. He had every right to pin Saul to the ground with his own spear when he infiltrated the camp. But over and over again, David refused. Why is that?

I believe David understood on some level what Jesus would later teach. God’s great desire is for everyone to be saved and come to a knowledge of His truth. (1 Tim. 2:4) This includes a man like Saul. Evil. Paranoid. Drunk with power. This includes a man like Nabal. Proud. Arrogant. Hard-hearted. This includes a man like David who will succumb later in life to the temptation to use his power for his own purposes. It includes a man like Doug Resler who wrestles everyday with pride and ego and selfishness. You see, the reality that David saw is the same reality Jesus taught which is that we are all enemies and yet God in His infinite mercy loved us. We are all sinners and yet God in His infinite grace embraced us. While we were yet broken. While we were weak and wounded. While we were dead in our sin. God came to us. God loved us. God did good to us. And we should do the same for others including even those who may be seeking our harm.

Some ask if such an approach runs the risk of further traumatizing victims of abuse. It’s a very important question. My response is that love is not passive. It doesn’t make one a doormat. I do not believe Jesus is teaching women to stay with men who beat them. I do not believe Jesus is teaching us to seek out situations where we would suffer. I do not believe Jesus is teaching us to simply bow our heads before injustice. David didn’t stay in Saul’s palace! David left. He escaped. He found his way to safety. And then he resisted. Fiercely. Faithfully. With the hope that his persecutor would eventually see the light. I love how Martin Luther King Jr. once put it, “Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.” King pursued a path of non-violent resistance always with the hope that white racists would become his brothers. This was his dream. And I believe deep down it was David’s dream for Saul as well.

How do you respond when attacked? How do you respond when people curse you? Do you respond in kind? Do you lash out in anger? Do you try to get even? What about those who’ve suffered abuse or trauma or been victims of injustice? These are very real experiences that cannot be diminished or dismissed. They impact so many in our culture today especially those in minority groups. Over the last few years, many of these groups have taken to the streets to plead their cause. They have created movements through social media to press their case. While we may agree or disagree with their political aims, is it not heartbreaking to see so many in our culture victimized by fear? Suffering at the hands of the principalities and powers in our society? Rather than condemn, can we not courageously enter into those dark places alongside them and meet them with the love of Christ?

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 35, 54, 63, 18

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April 14, 2022
God is our Helper

Readings for today: [Psalms 35, 54, 63, 18](#)

One of the more disappointing moments in my seminary career came during a preaching class. We were practicing delivering children's sermons and during the course of my presentation I made the statement that I believed God protects His children. The professor stopped the class. She asked me if I truly believed what I had just said. I told her I did. She asked how in the world I could believe that in a world where there is so much pain and suffering? How could I reasonably hold such a position in a world where children are abused and bullied, diagnosed with terminal diseases like cancer, or often die tragically. She asked me how I would feel if I told a child, "God would protect them" and then something bad happened. What would happen to that little child's faith? I have to admit I didn't have much to say. The whole conversation caught me completely off guard.

I've been in ministry for over twenty years now. I've walked with families through all kinds of pain and suffering. I've seen death up close. I've personally witnessed and experienced tragedy. I am not blind to the reality of abuse. I am not blind to the struggles so many face. Nor was David when he penned these words in the Psalms. "Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life...For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies." (Psalms 54:4, 7) David knew pain intimately. Suffering was a constant companion. Death visited him regularly. This was the world in which he lived and yet he still looked to God for help. He still looked to God for protection and strength. Somehow, somehow David was able to see beyond the horizons of this life to the life to come. He knew God could be trusted. He knew God was good. He knew God loved His people. And so he trusted God for His salvation even if it didn't come in this life. Now, to be clear, David knew nothing of resurrection. Heaven and the afterlife were not categories he would have thought in. But there was an instinct deep within his heart that drew him to God and caused him to trust in His great faithfulness.

Unfortunately, the horizons of our world have shrunk to the point where they only include the boundaries of this life. Even Christians have lost sight of eternity. We get so focused on what happens to us in this life that we lose sight of the bigger picture and greater glory God is working to reveal in us. We lose perspective. We want more from this world than it can actually give. We expect more from this world than it can actually deliver. And because our expectations go unmet. Because our desires go largely unrequited. Because our hopes and dreams fail. We get disappointed. Disillusioned. And we blame God. O that we would learn from David! Rather than blame God, we should look to Him for strength! Rather than rage at God, we should see Him as our helper! Rather than accuse God of not being fair or just or true to His Word, we should look beyond our circumstances, beyond our feelings, and see the eternity God is preparing for us in His Kingdom.

Psalm 18 is one of my favorites. I love the imagery of smoke and thunder and hail and God literally "bending the heavens" to come to our rescue. When things are at their worst, God is always at His best. When David teetered on the brink of death and destruction, God was there to pull Him back. And yet, we didn't read any of this in 1 Samuel, did we? I don't remember earthquakes and fire and God showing up in His chariot? What I remember is David faithfully placing His trust in God. What I remember is David literally making God His refuge. What I remember is David in prayer. David seeking God's face. David worshipping God even in the midst of His struggles. And because David did these things, his eyes pierced the veil of this world and God gave him a glimpse of what actually happened when he escaped from Saul.

In the midst of your struggles, do you seek God? When life is at it's most difficult, we need to lean ever deeper into Christ. The disciplines of prayer, reading Scripture, and corporate worship become lifelines as we seek God's face. Daily submission to the will of God as revealed in His Word is essential for the believer who makes God her/his help. Daily discernment between good and evil, truth and error, is essential for the believer who makes God her/his refuge. Daily self-denial and taking up our cross is essential for the believer who seeks to follow Jesus.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 28-31, 1 Chronicles 10

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April 15, 2022
Spiritual Warfare

Readings for today: [1 Samuel 28-31, 1 Chronicles 10](#)

Last week, my wife and I attended a small group at our church who were grappling with the topic of spiritual warfare. We had a great evening discussing the book they had been reading and searching the Scriptures together. During the course of the evening, one person asked about the reality of ghosts and if we should be afraid of them. I immediately thought of the strange story of Saul and the witch of Endor.

Fear makes us do funny things. Stoke up enough fear and we may even be willing to compromise some of our most deeply held convictions. In an earlier season of his life, Saul had been faithful to the Lord and had expelled all the mediums and necromancers out of the land. These were people who specialized in communing with the dead. They spoke to spirits. They regularly trafficked in the demonic. And Saul rightly drove them out. But now Samuel is dead. The Philistines have gathered against him. When Saul saw the size of their army, he became afraid so he turned to the Lord for help. But the Lord did not answer him. So Saul did what he always did. He went his own way. He sought out a medium to see if he would be victorious in the battle to come. He did not get the answer he wanted. The medium did indeed summon the ghost of Samuel who, in turn, gave Saul the bad news about his own death and the death of his sons. It was so terrifying Saul became paralyzed with fear and couldn't move. Eventually, the medium convinced him to eat and he was able to return back to his camp.

What do we learn from such a story? I think the main point is clear. Saul's chief sin was not calling up Samuel's ghost. It was abandoning the Lord. All of Saul's sins had now come home to roost and he would pay for his transgressions with his very life. Second, fear is a powerful motivator. It will cause us to do all sorts of things we wouldn't normally do. Saul would never have consulted a medium unless a mortal fear had taken hold of him. Third, ghosts are real. Spirits are real. But they do not aimlessly wander the earth. They are not cursed to haunt humankind. They have no power or authority that we need fear. Saul doesn't fear Samuel at all but rather the news Samuel brings.

As a culture, we seem somewhat obsessed with ghost stories. There's a city in my part of the country where you can go and take a "ghost tour" of the main building and grounds. They tell stories about the strange things that have taken place there over the years. Weird noises. Bumps in the night. Supposed apparitions that have appeared out of nowhere. All of it's nonsense according to Scripture and certainly nothing for any believer to be afraid of. 1 John 4:4 says, "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." In other words, because we have the Holy Spirit living inside us, we do not need to be afraid of anything in this world or the world to come. We do not need to fear principalities or powers or rulers or authorities or any spiritual forces of evil that might exist in the heavenly realm. We have Christ and He is more than enough to overcome anything that might come against us. This is the truth King Saul lost sight of in his fear. Be strong. Stand firm. Stay alert and trust God to protect you.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 121, 123-125, 128-130

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April 16, 2022
Lift Your Eyes!

Readings for today: [Psalms 121, 123-125, 128-130](#)

Psalms of Ascent. Many believe these were the songs Israel sang as they ascended to Jerusalem to keep the three annual festivals detailed in Deuteronomy 16. They are songs of worship. Songs of praise. Songs of thanksgiving. They express the deep gratitude the people feel towards God for all He has done for them. They sing them together. They sing them as they gather. One can almost imagine thousands coming to Jerusalem all singing these songs with one voice. It must have been a powerful, moving scene. In addition, many scholars believe these were the songs Israel sang at different high points in their history like the dedication of Solomon's Temple or the rebuilding of the walls during Nehemiah's time. Over and over again, Israel returned to these psalms to express their faith and trust in God.

Christians have built on this tradition of worship. Many churches throughout the world sing these psalms in worship. The Eastern Orthodox Church sings these psalms every Friday during Vespers. The Roman Catholic Church in the west schedules these psalms to be sung during daily prayer. The goal is to remind Christians we are on our own pilgrimage to a Heavenly Jerusalem and these psalms build the spiritual intensity of the worship service as we prepare for the reading of the gospel. It's a powerful thing to experience especially as we prepare for Easter.

Today we find ourselves reading these psalms on Holy Saturday. We've walked in Jesus' footsteps from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem to his last supper with his disciples to the crucifixion. Now his body lies in a tomb. The earth is dark and silent. The light of Christ has not yet dawned. But still we Christians sing. For we know things are darkest just before the dawn. We know what glory awaits us tomorrow morning! So we cry out with the Psalmist and all of God's people, "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." (Psalms 121:1-2) "To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens! Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid servant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us." (Psalms 123:1-2) "Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore." (Psalms 125:1-2) Brothers and sisters, something happens to us when we gather together to sing God's praises. Something transformative. Something life-changing. Death has been defeated! Sin's reign has been broken! Evil will not win for Christ has risen! He has risen indeed!

This is the heart of why we worship. This is why gathering weekly with a community of believers is so vital to the Christian faith. Yes, I know many of us worship Jesus daily on our own. Yes, I know many of us experience Jesus profoundly as we hike or hunt or spend time in nature. But neglecting the worship of God with the people of God places us at risk. It places us out of step with thousands of years of Christian history. It places us out of step with the will of God as revealed in Scripture. It's frankly arrogant and prideful and foolish to claim we don't need the church. God loves His bride. God loves His children. God loves having His family together. God loves hearing His people sing. God loves meeting His people in the sacraments. God loves teaching His people through His Word. Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them." (Matthew 18:20) The Living Christ making His dwelling yet again among us.

Readings for tomorrow: None

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April 18, 2022
The Experience of Holy Saturday

Readings for today: [2 Samuel 1-4](#)

My favorite part of Holy Week this year was Saturday. Strange, right? It's the day that often gets lost in the shuffle. It's the day of silence. The day where Jesus lay in the tomb. The day where nothing seems to be happening. If you're like me, you've never been quite sure what to do with this day. The roadmap for the rest of the week seems pretty clear. Palm Sunday is all about the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Maundy Thursday focuses on the Last Supper, foot-washing, and the new commandment to love one another. Good Friday directs our attention to the cross and the death of our Savior. Easter Sunday is the glorious celebration of the resurrection. Against this backdrop, Saturday seems mundane. Ordinary. Like any other day. I'm never quite sure what to do with it. This year, however, was different. I found myself reflecting on the "pregnant pause" between crucifixion and resurrection. The questions such a pause evokes. The doubts one wrestles with when it feels like God is silent. The struggles we have when it feels like evil has won.

Then I read the passages for today. It struck me that all of life is a kind of "Holy Saturday" experience. For the Old Testament saints like David, they lived in the great "pause" between creation and consummation and they made the best of it. In many ways, David was a reflection of his culture. He was a tribal warlord who could be capricious and arbitrary and violent. He kills the messengers who bring him the news of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan and Ish-bosheth while giving Joab a pass for murdering Abner. At the same time, he also could be gentle and humble and tender-hearted. Consider the lamentation he composes for Saul and Jonathan. He honors them in death though Saul had become his mortal enemy. He even has it written down and taught to all of the people of Judah. The civil war after the death of Saul lasts two years and costs many their lives. It's a dark time in the nation's history though in the end David is confirmed in his kingship and unites God's people under his rule and reign. Such is life on Holy Saturday. It's messy. Broken. Violent. Filled with all kinds of pain and suffering. And yet God remains patient and faithful. He works all things according to His will for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

What about us? We live in the great "pause" between the first and second Advents. Christ has come. Christ has died. Christ has risen. The empty tomb fills us with hope. It is the sure and certain sign etched in human history for all to see that God has indeed broken the power of sin and death. He will not allow evil to have the final word. Justice will be done. Creation will be renewed. All things will be made new. This mortal life will put on immortality and we shall reign with Him forever. In the meantime, however, we should expect the world to reflect the messy reality of Holy Saturday. Caught in the silence between resurrection and final consummation, we should expect to see wars and hear rumors of wars. We should expect there to be pain and sorrow and suffering. We should expect to experience tragedies of various kinds as we wait for the final revelation of the Son of God. Does this mean things are hopeless? Does this mean we should give into despair? Not at all! God is still at work! He is still patiently, faithfully, lovingly working out His will even in the midst of our mess. Through it all, God's promise remains true. He will use all things - good things, bad things, even ugly things - for the good of those who love Him and who look to Him and who offer their lives back to Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 6, 9-10, 14, 16, 21

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April 19, 2022
Emotional Roller Coaster

Readings for today: [Psalms 6, 9-10, 14, 16, 21](#)

I was born in Columbus, IN. One of my dreams as a young kid was to go to an amusement park outside of Cincinnati called King's Island and ride a famous rollercoaster there called the "Beast." When the Beast first debuted in 1979, it broke all existing records for the longest and fastest wooden rollercoaster in the world. The ride lasts more than four minutes and soars over 35 acres of wooded terrain. It has drops of 137 feet and 141 at extreme angles and has a 125 foot long underground tunnel. It reaches speeds of up to 65 MPH and has eight banked turns, some at 45 degrees. You can see why riding it would be every young boy's dream! Sadly, we never went to King's Island and I never got to fulfill my dream but I've loved rollercoasters to this day.

Reading the Psalms feels a bit like riding a rollercoaster. Today's selection begins in grief with David "flooding his bed" with tears. It moves to praise as David recounts all the "wonderful deeds" of the Lord. Back down to despair as David experiences the absence of God and feels abandoned in his "time of trouble." From there, David experiences conviction, realizing it is only the fool that says in his heart, "there is no God." And then to hope as David clings to faith, trusting God to be his "chosen portion and cup." Finally, David finishes with praise for who God is and what He has done. It's quite a ride.

Life can often feel like a rollercoaster and that's why the Psalms continue to resonate after all these years. They express the full range of human emotion and give us permission to approach God authentically and honestly and openly with our feelings. David approaches God with anger, frustration, hopelessness, fear, anxiety, depression and despair. He also approaches God with joy, excitement, trust, hope, deep faith and confidence. He never seems to be anyone but Himself before the Lord. This is perhaps what I love the most about him. I used to struggle to be "real" before God. I used to worry that if I didn't have the right words to say or approach God with the right attitude in my heart that I would be rejected or worse. But as I've traveled the rollercoaster that is my life and experienced all the ups and downs, the high peaks and low valleys, the sharp turns and drops that make me catch my breath; I've realized God has been sitting in the seat next to me the whole way. He knows my every thought and every feeling and He embraces me as I am.

It's two days post-Easter. If you're like me, the joy of that beautiful morning has already been challenged. Arguments at home. Family members in and out of the hospital. Dogs tearing up my backyard. Changes in carefully laid plans. The pressure of preparing for another Sunday. All of these things can stack up on me if I'm not careful. And the temptation I face in my own life is to stuff the feelings, put my head down, and plow forward. But that ignores the invitation of the Psalms. God wants me to bring all that I am feeling to Him. He wants me to continuously lay whatever burdens I may be carrying at His feet. Each and every morning I have the opportunity to come before Him to receive the strength I need for that particular day. Each and every evening, I have the opportunity to reflect back and thank Him for His provision. The key is approach Him honestly. Authentically. Openly. Holding nothing back. Let the One whose name is Faithful and True provide you with grace to meet your every need.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 1-2, Psalms 43-44

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April 20, 2022
Biblical Genogram

Readings for today: 1 Chronicles 1-2, Psalms 43-44

The genogram is a tool that has become very popular in recent years. Invented by American psychiatrist Murray Bowen in the 1970's, it is designed to illuminate hereditary family patterns that are passed down to each generation. Those patterns can be positive or negative but they are often extremely helpful for individual who want to grow in their self-understanding as to why they think and feel and react the way they do. Families are emotional systems in which each individual plays a particular role. The more one understands the role they are called to play and why they are called to play it, the more they can help the system move towards greater health and wholeness. The less one understands about the role they play, the more apt they are to perpetuate it.

One can only imagine what might be revealed if we did a genogram of the first two chapters of 1 Chronicles! If you've been tracking with us through the Bible in A Year this year, you know the stories. They're not always pretty. It's one of the things I appreciate most about the Bible. It never seeks to white-wash any of the Old Testament saints. Their sinful tendencies are put on full display for all to see. Deception. Abuse. Violence. Suffering. Pain. Abandonment. Polygamy. Incest. It's all right there in the family tree. And yet God remains faithful. He chooses this particular people, despite their deep brokenness, to be His very own. They will bear the weight of His glory. They will be entrusted with His Word. They will inherit the promises. They will be His covenant partners as He seeks to make Himself known to the world.

The same holds true for us today. I love how the Apostle Paul describes it in 2 Corinthians 4:7, "For we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." We are all jars of clay. Cracked and chipped in many places by the things we've experienced in this world. Into our hearts, God has deposited the treasure of the gospel and His desire is to make Himself known in us and through us despite our deep brokenness. It is through the cracks of our lives that God's light shines. It is in the mess of our lives that God meets us. He is not afraid to call His own. He is not afraid to adopt us as His sons and daughters. He is not afraid to make us covenant partners in the great work He is doing to reach the world with His message of grace, hope, and love.

All of us are products of the family system that produced us. All of us are shaped - good, bad, and otherwise - by the interactions we have with the generations who've gone before us and the ones who come after us. All of us have a role to play in our family system and the more we allow Christ to transform us in that role, the more we can leverage it to help our family system become a greater reflection of the gospel.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 49, 84-85, 87

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April 21, 2022
God's Extravagant Gifts

Readings for today: [Psalms 49, 84-85, 87](#)

Recently, my wife and I were reflecting back on our life together. We've been married almost 26 years. Been together almost 30. We've raised four kids together. We've lived all over the country. We've traveled to many faraway places. Done ministry in all sorts of contexts. We've been rich and we've been poor. We've had good times and bad times. We've experienced deep intimacy and deep brokenness. But perhaps the thing that struck us most as we looked back was the the extravagant goodness of God. He has given us so many gifts over the years. Gifts we did not deserve. Gifts we could never earn. And as we reflected on these gifts, we found ourselves experiencing a range of emotions. Shock. A little embarrassment. Humility. Followed by a deep and profound sense of gratitude and thankfulness.

In this is love...not that we loved God but that He loved us. (1 John 4:10) God is the most extravagant giver of all time. His mercies are new every morning. Manna appearing each and every day. He throws open the storehouses of heaven in order to care for those He loves. I love how Psalm 85 puts it, "Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky. Yes, the Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way." (Psalms 85:9-13) Surely we do not deserve such divine attention! Surely we have not earned such divine blessing! Surely we are not worthy of such an honor and yet God's love remains. He gives what is good. He causes the land to yield it's increase. His salvation comes to those who fear Him. His glory fills the earth. God is vigilant. Always watching. Always on the lookout. He never sleeps. He never rests. He never takes a day off. He is always there for us. He is at work when there is scarcity and when there is abundance. He is at work when the outlook is good and the forecast sunny and He is at work when things are trending downward and it looks like rain.

I know it's easy to question such goodness. We look around at the world and we see the starvation. The poverty. The disease. The death. We wonder where God is in the midst of it all. The Bible's answer is clear and unequivocal. He is there. Right in the middle of it all. Right in the thick of things. Saving. Securing. Providing. Comforting. Rescuing people from the bondage of sin and death in this world in order to bring them home to Himself. He's also at work in us. Those who have plenty. Those who have abundance. Those who are healthy and strong and blessed with tremendous resources. He moves on our hearts. He moves in our lives. He propels us out to the ends of the earth to be His hands and feet. What a marvelous thing it is to be invited to partner with God's Spirit in what God is doing to save the world!

It is humbling. It is a little embarrassing. Certainly shocking that God would choose me. But I am overwhelmed by a deep and profound sense of gratefulness and thankfulness. I do not deserve this honor. I have done nothing to earn it. I am unworthy in every which way. But God is gracious. And God's love for me remains. Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift! (2 Corinthians 9:15)

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 3-5

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April 22, 2022
Communion of Saints

Readings for today: 1 Chronicles 3-5

There is an old story about a pastor who went to visit a parishioner whom he had not seen for a while. It was a cold morning so when the pastor showed up, the man had the coffee hot and a roaring fire going in the fireplace. They both sat down and the pastor asked how things were going. The conversation ranged from work to family to health to life in general. The man was doing well. Finally, the conversation got around to faith. And the man started to talk about how he didn't need the church to worship God. He was doing just fine on his own. Praying. Reading the Bible. Walking through the woods. As he spoke, the pastor didn't judge. Didn't condemn. He simply reached over and with the tongs, took a coal out of the fireplace and placed it on the hearth. As the man spoke, his eyes kept going to the coal. At first it burned nice and hot but as time went on it began to grow cold. Having lost it's connection to the fire, it eventually burned out.

Life with God is like that. Life with community is like that. I can't tell you the number of people I have spoken with over the last two years who've experienced this loss of connection. Pre-COVID, their lives were so busy. They were pulled in so many different directions. They didn't have time to build deep, spiritual friendships. Once COVID hit and life locked down, they had nowhere to turn. No one to call when they were struggling. No one to lean on when times got tough. The result was isolation and loneliness. Feelings of depression and despair. They tried to medicate with alcohol or marijuana or opioids but those things only provided temporary relief. They desperately needed to rekindle their relationship with God and His people.

The people of God have always drawn so much strength from one another. The people of God have always felt this strong connection both to those who came before them and to those who come after. The genealogies of the Bible may seem dry and boring at first glance. Just a bunch of names on a page. And yet each person represents a story. Each person represents a connection to God and His promises. Each person has a testimony to share about the faithfulness of God in action. Maybe it's Jabez who prayed to God for protection. Or Reuben who experienced the loving discipline of God for his mistakes. Or Judah who experienced the grace of God covering His sin. Over and over again, these names tell a story. The story. Our story. This is our family history. Our family tree. And as we tap into this story, we experience a deep connection to the One who made us. The One who loves us. The One who has come to rescue us.

How are you connecting to God today? How are you connecting to God's people? How are you helping others connect? It's not complicated. All it takes is the discipline of time and effort. As life begins to ramp back up against now that we are emerging from the COVID crisis, we have the opportunity for a reset. We have the chance to chart a new course. Intentionally set some new patterns in our lives so that deep, spiritual friendships can form. If you need help, I always recommend the following four spiritual practices to those who wonder how to begin building connection with God and others...

Daily Devotional Time: Spend time each day in prayer and reading/reflecting on Scripture. Find fifteen minutes, twenty minutes, even thirty minutes or more just to be with God. Use your commute. Use your lunch hour. Use your break time. You won't regret it.

Weekly Gathered Worship: Find a local church and plug in. This is especially true in the new era of online worship. Make sure to gather in-person as much as possible with God's people for worship each

week. Don't approach it as a consumer experience (i.e. what did I "get out" of it today) but rather trust God to create a "cascading" effect in your life on a subconscious level as you commit to worship Him on a weekly basis.

Join a small group: Find a few Christian friends and start meeting together intentionally for encouragement, vulnerable sharing, and accountability. Pray for each other. Talk to each other. Intentionally do life together. Will it be messy? Yep. Pursuing authentic relationships always is because we are all "authentically" sinful! :-) Press through the difficult conversations. Practice forgiveness and grace. You will find deep connections building as you do.

Find a place to serve God's Kingdom: Don't just build this "connection" for yourself! Find a way to share it with others. As you go out to serve Christ and His Kingdom, you will become someone else's point of connection to God and to community. Isn't that awesome? God will use YOU to be His hands and feet in another person's life.

Do these four things over the course of a lifetime and I can pretty much guarantee you will grow a deep, abiding relationship with God and with His people. Will there be disappointments along the way? Yes. Will you feel hurt at times? Absolutely. Is it easy? Nope. Not in our world. But nothing worth doing is ever easy and that is particularly true when it comes to the most important relationship in our lives! So place your trust and your hope in Christ and let Him lead you to the abundant life He promises!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 6, Psalms 36, 39, 77-78

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April 23, 2022
Evangelism

Readings for today: 1 Chronicles 6, Psalms 36, 39, 77-78

I once worked for a denomination where evangelism was often referred to as the “E” word. It was a perjorative term. They didn’t like it. Didn’t want to do it. Didn’t really believe it necessary on some level. They would much rather focus on social issues and lobby for certain political progressive positions. But talk about Jesus? Share the gospel? That was a non-starter. Every few years, they would produce a survey and at least a few of the questions focused on whether or not belief in Jesus was required for salvation. A majority of pastors and denominational leaders voted “no.” When asked if they had shared their faith with a non-believer in the last year, most of the people sitting in the pew said “no.” Of course, things aren’t much different in my current denomination. While everyone acknowledges the call to evangelize, very few actually put it into practice. 80-85% of our churches have plateaued or are in decline. In a recent survey it was revealed that far too many pastors do not spend any time at all sharing the good news with lost people outside of Sunday mornings. Sure, we may have a better handle on our theology but we still seem to suffer from the same spiritual malaise.

Psalm 78 says, “We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments...” (Psalms 78:4-7) It is God’s greatest desire to be known. To be loved. To be in relationship with His people. It’s why He walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden. It’s why He revealed Himself to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It’s why He spoke to Moses from a burning bush. It’s why He delivered Israel with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. It’s why He sends prophets, raises up kings, and, in the fullness of time, sends His only begotten Son into the world. He wants to be known!

The primary instrument He uses to make Himself known is us! His chosen people! His adopted sons and daughters! His bride! His body! His church. It’s why every gospel contains a Great Commission. It’s why the Book of Acts begins with a command to go to the ends of the earth with the message of the gospel. It’s good news! It’s great news! It’s the best news!

Evangelism begins in the home. With our children. Our children’s children. One generation tells the next of the mighty and awesome wonders of God. One generation testifies to the next of all that God has done. Fathers and mothers sharing the good news with their children over dinner. Driving in the car to the next practice. Prayers before bedtime. Grandfathers and grandmothers sharing the good news with their grandchildren as they take them to the zoo. For a walk in the park. Playing with them on the playground. Families worshipping together. Reading Scripture together. Praying together. This is how the faith is passed on. But it doesn’t end in our homes. It extends outward to our neighbors as we engage in acts of service and selfless love. It extends to our co-workers as we connect over coffee breaks and at lunch. It extends to our classmates at recess or on off-periods together. It extends to those we encounter as we go about our daily lives. A smile. A kind word. Graciously letting someone go in front of us in the line at the grocery store. It extends even further as we engage cross-culturally both locally and abroad. As we serve the less fortunate. Speak for those who have no voice. Care for those who are hurting. Comfort those who are sick. Come alongside those who are lonely. All in the name of Jesus.

A favorite theologian of mine once said, “Christians should all live questionable lives.” Not because we engage in sin but because our lives should be such models of grace and unconditional love that it will make people curious. It will make them want to ask us why we live the way we do. This should be true of our children as they grow up in our homes. True for our neighbors who live around us. True for our co-workers and classmates with whom we spend so much time.

So who do you know who needs the gospel? What are you doing to share the good news with them? Are you praying for them? Are you looking for opportunities to engage in spiritual conversations with them? Are you serving them? Blessing them? Have you invited them to join you in worship? Or in small group? Or on a mission? God desires all should be saved and come to a knowledge of His truth. And to accomplish this great mission, God has sent you. God has sent me. God has sent His people into the world.

Readings for tomorrow: None

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April 25, 2022
The Dark Night of the Soul

Readings for today: Psalms 81, 88, 92-93

Spiritual crisis is real. The consistent witness of God's people throughout history testifies to the fact that there will be seasons when God seems so distant. When our lives seem so dark. When the light of Christ is hard to find. When the comfort of Christ seems long in coming. During such seasons, we feel overwhelmed by fear. Doubt. The cares and worries of this world press in on us. We feel trapped. Alone. Unable to be consoled.

St. John of the Cross, a 16th century Spanish Christian, famously coined the term, "The Dark Night of the Soul." It refers to particular seasons in the Christian life where we feel stripped of God's presence. It's not true, of course. God is still very much present in our lives but we do not feel Him. We do not experience Him. We do not sense His tender mercies and affections. During such seasons, we feel a void. An absence. And it causes us to wrestle on a deep, foundational level with our faith.

I experienced such a season for 19 months while living in Sun Prairie, WI. The ministry I had been called to was failing. My relationship with those I was accountable to was a disaster. I was struggling daily with fear and doubt and depression. So consumed was I by my own needs, I neglected my wife and children. Things got so bad that my wife gave me an ultimatum. It was either her or the ministry. I was at the end of my rope. I resigned. No idea what was next. No idea how I would feed my family. No idea how I would care for those I loved most in this world. I felt so alone. So afraid. For months I cried out to God. I would pace our living room most of the night praying. Begging. Frustrated. Angry. Where was God when I needed Him most? Where was God when things were at their worst? I was in spiritual crisis and it felt like God was not there.

These experiences are not unusual. St. John of the Cross. St. Paul of the Cross. Mother Theresa. All testify to similar experiences, though their "dark nights" lasted decades. The author of Psalm 88 was clearly familiar with his own "dark night." "O Lord, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you...For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol...You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep...Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon? Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?...O Lord, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me?...You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness." (Psalms 88:1, 3, 6, 11-12, 14, 18) It's a depressing Psalm. One of the few with no resolution. No final ascription of praise. The psalmist seemingly feels God's absence on a visceral level and is left all alone in darkness.

So why does God allow the dark night of the soul? Why does God not rescue us from the depths of our spiritual crises? What are such experiences seemingly so common and even necessary for the Christian? I believe it is how we learn the meaning of true faith. True faith must move from the head to the heart to the gut. To the depths of our being. It must become the fundamental reality of our existence. It must transcend what we think. It must transcend what we feel. It has to come from a place so deep within that it can never be overcome.

Mother Theresa endured her "dark night" from 1948 until her death in 1997. She once wrote, "Where is my faith? Even deep down ... there is nothing but emptiness and darkness ... If there be God—please forgive me. When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven, there is such convicting emptiness that those

very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul.” Some have suggested she lost her faith. Not true! In fact, her suffering was very much like that of Jesus on the cross who cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In the end, Mother Theresa hoped her personal letters would be destroyed lest “people think more of me and less of Jesus.”

I wouldn’t trade those 19 months of spiritual darkness in Wisconsin for anything. God had removed any sense of His affections. God had removed any sense of His abiding presence. Doubts and fears assailed my soul as I was stripped to the bone. In the depths of my despair, I was haunted by this one question...do I really believe? Do I believe in God when nothing makes sense? Do I believe in God when I cannot feel His presence? Do I believe in God when all is darkness all around me? Is God more real to me than my thoughts? My feelings? My fears? My doubts?

There’s no way to know the answer to such deep questions unless one is willing to walk through the valley of the shadow of death to the other side. Thankfully, at the end of my own dark road, I found God waiting for me there. I found my faith renewed and strengthened in a way I could never have imagined. And I do not harbor any illusions that somehow my journey is at its end or that I won’t have to walk yet another dark road in the course of my life. What I do know is that God has driven my faith deep into my gut. Deep into the bedrock of my being. And though it can be shaken, it can never be destroyed because God is more real than my circumstances. God is more real than my feelings. God is more real than my thoughts. God is more real than my doubts. God is more real than my fears. God is the fundamental reality of my life and I am thankful.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 7-9

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April 26, 2022
Cultural History and Identity

Readings for today: [1 Chronicles 7-9](#)

The key verse in today's reading is 1 Chronicles 9:1, "So all Israel was recorded in genealogies, and these are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel. And Judah was taken into exile in Babylon because of their breach of faith." Why are all these names important? Why are the generations laid down with such detail and specificity? Why record Israel according to their respective tribes? What's at stake here? Identity. Connection. History. Israel took their history seriously. Even after they were carted off to exile in Babylon and were faced with the temptation to intermarry and lose their connection to their past, Israel remained faithful. They knew God had set apart the Levites to serve Him as priests. So the Levites remained set apart as priests even in exile. They knew God had given authority to the tribe of Judah to reign and to rule. So the tribe of Judah continued to serve as princes and leaders for God's people. They knew David and Samuel had set apart certain families as gatekeepers, guardians of the Lord's treasury, etc. So they made sure these families retained those roles. And when Israel finally did return from exile, you see the descendants of these great men and women re-connecting to their glorious past.

Most of us have never experienced exile. Most of us have not had our cultural identities wiped out. We've not had our history erased. We've not had our connection to our ancestors severed. At the same time, many among us have had this terrible and tragic experience. I think of the Native American men and women I have known. Their people lived on this continent for hundreds of years before the arrival of the first European explorers. They lost their land. They were forcibly relocated. They were forced to forgo the key rituals and give up the key rhythms that connected them to their history and their tribal identity. Their stories are terrible and heartbreakingly. I think of the African-American men and women I have known. Their ancestors brought over on slave ships across the Atlantic. Their connection to their land severed. Their connection to their history erased. Their connection to their past lost. They were given new names. They were forced to take on new identities. They suffered in slavery for hundreds of years including economic slavery after officially being emancipated during the Civil War. Their stories are terrible and heartbreakingly.

It's vital for those of us who have not suffered at the scale of others to humble ourselves and listen to those who have endured such pain and loss. It is important for us to become advocates for them as they seek to recover their cultural identity. We must become allies with them in their fight to re-connect to their cultural past. We must pluck up the courage to face the difficult and complex issues that often arise as a result.

I certainly don't pretend to have all the answers. I know the way forward is difficult. But I have to believe as we work for the good of one another. As we celebrate the history and culture and diversity God has created among human beings on this planet. As we help each other re-connect to something deeper. A deeper identity. A deeper story. A deeper truth. I have to believe God will reveal Himself in that process in a powerful way because this "genealogical impulse" exists within all of us. In a very real sense, Israel's story is our story for all of us can ultimately trace our lineage back to the same common source. Adam and Eve. The first man. The first woman. Made in the image of God by the hand of God for the glory of God. This is truly our heritage.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 5:1-10, 1 Chronicles 11-12, Psalms 133

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April 27, 2022
The Power of Unity

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 5:1-10, 1 Chronicles 11-12, Psalms 133

Psalm 133 is my favorite Psalm. Mainly because I have seen it in action. I have seen what happens when God's people truly serve Him with one heart and mind. I have witnessed the miracles that take place when God's people put aside their egos, their needs, their wants, their desires in favor of serving the Kingdom. I have watched God's Spirit move when God's people humble themselves. Deny themselves. Pursue forgiveness and reconciliation. Lay aside their need to be safe, both physically and emotionally. It is powerful. Life-changing. It transforms villages. Towns. Cities. Entire tribes, regions, and nations.

We see this on display especially in our readings today about King David and his mighty men. It's powerful to watch God unite the hearts of men as they gather around David. They defend him with their lives against overwhelming odds. They take great risks like invading an enemy camp to bring him a drink of water. They achieve incredible feats of valor in order to win David his kingdom. Over and over they declare their allegiance. "We are yours, O David!" "We are your bone and flesh!" "You are our shepherd and prince!" The result is a powerful wave of national unity. "All these, men of war, arrayed in battle order, came to Hebron with a whole heart to make David king over all Israel. Likewise, all the rest of Israel were of a single mind to make David king."

True biblical unity requires us to relinquish "self" in favor of others. It requires us to lose our individual identity in favor of the whole. It requires us to consider others more important than ourselves. It requires us to risk. Risk being hurt. Risk being wounded. Risk feeling rejected. It requires us to have courage. Courage to forgive. Courage to pursue reconciliation. No matter what the cost. No matter how many times we get burned. It requires honesty. Transparency. Self-reflection.

True biblical unity requires the church to lay aside it's need to compete. Extend it's brand. Criticize other parts of the Body as if "we have no need of them." It requires leadership to get serious about working together. Working with and for one another. Willing to sacrifice our buildings, budgets, and attendance in order to expand God's Kingdom into the communities where we serve. It requires mutual submission and accountability. A willingness to step aside and relinquish our platforms when we fall into sin. It requires a radical commitment to love God and neighbor at the expense of our organizations and institutions. Self-denial and picking up our cross is not just a call to the individual Christian but to the church as a community as well!

True biblical unity requires a radical re-orientation of the heart. It is incredibly difficult and challenging which is why it happens so infrequently in Scripture. The unity David experiences as he builds his kingdom will soon give way to division as his own children betray him. We have to constantly be on guard because we are our own worst enemy. Our hearts naturally resist unity because it requires literal death to self. And we have such a strong instinct for self-preservation.

Ultimately, unity is not something we can achieve through our own strength. It must be a movement of God's Spirit. "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:13) Have you drunk of the one Spirit? Have you tasted the goodness and glory of God? Are you walking with the Spirit? Keeping in step with Him in all your ways? Unity comes as we relinquish more and more of our lives to the Spirit's control. Both as individuals and as churches gathered in His name.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 5:11-6:23, 1 Chronicles 13-16

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April 28, 2022
Worship

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 5:11-6:23, 1 Chronicles 13-16

What is true worship? It is the worship God both deserves and demands. Believe it or not, God cares deeply how He is worshipped. In 1 Chronicles 13, we see what happens when God's people - with sincere and authentic devotion in their hearts - fail to worship God in the way He commands. The people have gathered. They're excited to bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. They call the priests. They call the Levites. They plan a huge celebration. The whole nation is present to witness this incredible moment. They build a new cart to carry the ark in the procession. David and all of Israel are celebrating, singing, dancing before the Lord with all their might. But then an ox stumbles. Uzzah, seeking to protect the ark, puts out his hand to keep it steady. The Lord strikes him down. One can imagine the shock of the crowd. In an instant, all the music and dancing and celebration stops. Silence. Long, prolonged, awkward silence as the people come to grips with what's just happened. David is angry. He pouts for three months, refusing to come to grips with the fact that he himself is somewhat responsible for what happened. His decision to do what was convenient (build a cart to carry the ark) rather than what God demanded (Levites carry the ark on their own shoulders) is ultimately what cost Uzzah his life. Fast forward to 1 Chronicles 15. A different picture emerges. David is ready. He is humble. He submits to God's will. He decrees that "no one but the Levites may carry the ark of God, for the Lord had chosen them to carry the ark of the Lord and to minister to him forever." (1 Chron. 15:2) Once again, the celebration commences. Singing. Dancing. Music. Right sacrifices. God is pleased. God accepts the worship David offers because it is singularly focused on honoring God.

What does true worship look like in our context today? Obviously, none of us know where the Ark of the Covenant resides. (Except Indiana Jones, of course!) The ceremonial laws that governed Old Testament worship have been fulfilled in Christ. Does this set us free then to worship as we choose? To do what feels good? To set the needs of the worshipper above the clear, biblical command to worship God and Him alone? I don't think so. So what then is true worship? Is it a feeling? A style? An experience? And how do we know if we've engaged in true worship? Is it because we leave feeling inspired? The preacher's message warmed our hearts? We've eaten the bread and drunk of the cup? The music for the morning matched our musical tastes? What are the hallmarks of true worship? Authenticity? Sincerity? Sentimentality?

Sadly, worship in 21st century North America has turned largely inward. It is focused, evaluated, planned, and produced for the human experience. It caters to the preferences and tastes of the worshipper. It is designed primarily to make the human being feel inspired, motivated, and connected. This "inward turn" is as true for the small church as it is for the mega-church and every church in between. And it's why we see so many Christians bounce from church to church to church over the course of their lives. Long gone are the days when one would invest their entire lives into one community come hell or high water. Long gone are the days when Christians would heed the biblical command to actually practice forgiveness and reconciliation when relationships get hard. Long gone are the days when Christians would die to self, laying aside the consumer tendencies of taste and personal preference. As a result, long gone are the days when the church produced robust, courageous, bold, self-sacrificing disciples of Jesus who would give their lives for the sake of the gospel and the Kingdom of God in this world. Not that it never happens, it is simply more of an exception than a rule.

Today's passage challenges all of us. It challenges me as a pastor to think deeply about the primary thrust of my worship planning. Am I seeking to bring God glory and honor or am I seeking to meet the

needs of God's people? When I evaluate worship, what do I measure? Attendance? The emotional engagement of God's people? How many times they say amen? ;-) Or am I more focused on the clarity of the gospel message as it was proclaimed through music, Word, and sacrament? It challenges you as a worshipper to think deeply about your own goals in worship. Why do you come? Is it to get something out of the experience? Is it to feel emotionally uplifted and encouraged? Do you evaluate worship based on how much you liked the music or the preaching? Or do you come to bring God glory and honor? Do you come with a heart to offer yourself as a living sacrifice before Him? Friends, our primary duty in worship is clear...we are to worship God and enjoy Him forever. This, in fact, is the chief end of our existence.

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

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April 29, 2022
Integrity

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

Recently, a friend of mine went through a job change. He was notified he would be let go because his company was “going in a different direction.” The news came out of the blue. All of his performance reviews had been exceptional. He hit every mark the company ever set for him and often exceeded them. None of that seemed to matter. The boss just wanted to make a change. As you can imagine, he went through a range of emotions. There was the initial shock when he first got the news. Shock gave way to anger as he wrestled with the injustice of it all. Anger turned to frustration as he processed the years he had given to this company. Frustration became hurt as he realized how deeply this decision wounded him. In the midst of his hurt, he felt fear and anxiety rise up as he pondered what he would do next. Starting a job search at his age and station in life was no easy task. Would he be able to replace his income? Would he be able to provide for his family? He was pretty close to retirement so how many years did he really have left? I imagine many of us have gone through these experiences ourselves or walked through them with those we love. It’s not easy.

The temptation, of course, is to retaliate. To get back at those who’ve hurt us. To justify our anger and frustration and lash out. We might work to undermine. We might spread rumors or gossip about those in positions above us. We might seek to recruit others to our cause and create all kinds of conflict in the office on our way out. Sow seeds of discontent. Exploit opportunities to create dissension. Those kinds of things. Some might even take things to an extreme and try to take the company or the person responsible down with them. It can get ugly.

“What would God have me do?” This is the question my friend asked me. I took him to some of the Psalms we read today. I pointed him beyond his circumstances and challenged him to think about the bigger picture. Do you want the blessing of God on your life? Do you want the favor of God to go before you? Do you want to walk before God with a clean conscience and a pure heart? Then walk as blamelessly as possible. Do what is right. Don’t give in to the temptation to slander or return evil for evil. Remain humble. Stay focused on Jesus. Trust God is sovereign over all things - including injustice - and nothing can stand in the way of His will for your life.

The ultimate test of faith is what happens when we come face to face with a circumstance that is unjust or unfair. In those moments, we are faced with a choice to either “walk our talk” or go our own way. If we can keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. If we can keep our minds set on eternal rewards. If our treasures are truly in heaven, we will find ourselves looking to please God rather than man and this is the essence of godly integrity.

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

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April 30, 2022
Our God Is Too Small

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

Our God is far too small. The human mind is simply too finite to fully comprehend the height and depth and breadth of His majesty and glory and splendor. His wisdom is higher than our wisdom. His ways are higher than our ways. His power is limitless. His knowledge unsearchable. His love unconditional. His grace knows no ends. There are no boundaries to God. No barriers. Nothing He cannot do. Nothing He cannot accomplish. Nothing stands outside His will. Nothing opposes Him. Nothing threatens Him. Nothing can move Him. “For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord...” (Psalms 89:6)

Our God is far too small. In an effort to understand Him, we tend to cut Him down to our size. Reduce Him to a much more manageable state. We question His goodness. We question His omnipotence. We question His wisdom. Rather than stand on the truth that we are made in God’s image, we reverse engineer the process. We remake God in our image to our everlasting regret. For the god we “make” is an idol. Weak. Empty. Imperfect. A god who can do nothing, see nothing, accomplish nothing. A god who cannot be trusted or relied upon in the most difficult of circumstances. A god who is helpless in the face of our suffering. A few years back, a friend of mine rehashed an old argument on suffering. She wrote, “We have three options in the face of real suffering. 1) God is not good. 2) God is not loving. 3) God is not all-powerful.” Her argument is that surely a good and loving and all-powerful God would not allow suffering in the world therefore we must question either His goodness, His love, or His power. But this is a false premise. This is an argument made without all the facts. We see from such a limited perspective. Her god is too small.

Consider for a moment what my friend is really asking. If God had chosen to remove suffering and pain from the world at the beginning of time. If, even after Adam and Eve fell into disobedience, God would not allow human beings to suffer the consequences of the choices they made; what would that do to free will? What would that do to human agency? What would that do to human choices? It would destroy them. We would never grow into maturity. Never become the partners God created us to be. And even more fundamentally, it wrecks the whole purpose of the Cross. If suffering and pain is always evil and therefore always to be avoided and always wrong, then the suffering and pain and death of Jesus also falls into that category as well. Perhaps God is bigger than we realize?

Our God is far too small. And that is why we need to immerse ourselves in God’s Word. God’s Word clearly proclaims the goodness and love and power of God. “O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O Lord, with your faithfulness all around you?...The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it, you have founded them....You have a mighty arm; strong is your hand, high your right hand. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.” This is our God! The Glory of Israel! He is mighty to save! Mighty to deliver! Faithful in love! Over and over again, our God declares His love for His people. Never leaving them. Never forsaking them. Even when we run from Him, He will relentlessly pursue. Even when we reject Him, He will never abandon us. “My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens...Blessed be the Lord forever! Amen and Amen.” (Psalms 89:8, 11, 13-14, 28-29, 52)

Friends, there is only one way to see God for who He truly is. Only one way to know God on His terms. First, we must trust His revelation of Himself. We must look to Jesus in whom the fullness of

God was pleased to dwell. He is the pre-eminent and unique and complete revelation of the One True God. Second, we must trust His Word. The Word of God is the unique and authoritative witness to the truth of God. We must trust God's Word and lean not on our own limited understanding. We must trust God's Word more than what we think or how we feel. We must believe God is who He declares Himself to be or we have so little hope.

Readings for tomorrow: None

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