

June 23, 2024

Will you pray with me - May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be a acceptable to you O God, our Rock and our Salvation. Amen

We have an exciting event starting tomorrow in the life of our church - Vacation Bible School. You have heard about it and know that there might be a few spaces open if you are in grades k- 5 you can still sign up.

So I am wondering - for you grown ups in the room.... When you were a child might you have gone to Vacation Bible School? Or maybe you weren't a student at Vacation Bible School - perhaps you were a teacher? If you had the chance to go - what was the best part for you? Arts and crafts? Music? Bible Stories? Snacks? What did it for you?

I attended VBS as a little girl - like maybe at three years old. I loved it - and then when I became a pastor I taught for 10 years. As a little girl and an adult - I loved learning/teaching the Bible stories - maybe a precursor of things to come and I also loved learning the songs.

Now it is possible that our first two scripture passages were ones that you might have learned at VBS or in Sunday school. Let's do a quick review.

Our first lesson is the story of David and Goliath. David is a shepherd boy with a heart for God. And it is David that as a grown man wrote the 23rd Psalm. Young David has served king Saul as a shepherd and has protected his flock from lions and bears almost with his bare hands.

David knows that the only way he could have survived those confrontations is because of God's protection. David knows the havoc that this giant guy has been inflicting on the people and he feels that he can help, that he has to help. That just as before, God will give him the strength to defeat this giant. And so Saul, the current king, dresses David up in a suit of armor of the day. But David can't move in it, it is too cumbersome, too much for him and so he takes it off. He trusts in his agility and his God and he takes five smooth stones and his sling shot and goes off to kill this huge man. Goliath might have been six and a half or maybe nine and half feet tall, the particulars don't matter. What we need to know is that he is big and he is mean and he has been terrorizing Israelites for 40 days... And David calls upon God and runs in to do battle with Goliath. And amazingly using his slingshot David shoots one small stone right in to the middle of Goliath's forehead, with such force that bam!! - Goliath falls to the ground - dead.

I had a wonderful friend named Dan. He was great at Dad jokes (he called them Dan jokes) and would often share “pastoral Jokes” with me as he heard them. I have been saving these about David and Goliath for just this moment – I mean how often do you get to use them – bear with me – they are cheesy....

Q: Who is the greatest babysitter mentioned in the Bible?

A: David - he rocked Goliath to sleep.

Q: Why was Goliath so surprised when David hit him with a slingshot?

A: well because The thought had never entered Goliath’s head before.

Now what are we to take from this story besides the cheesy jokes? What I believe we might want to remember is that David knew that his strength and protection came from God. And so does ours....

Our passage from Mark is perhaps even more a familiar one. The disciples and Jesus are on the lake, a storm comes up and the disciples are really frightened. Now you’ll remember that the disciples are for the most part fishermen, and they are used to be working on the Sea of Galilee, which is known as a challenging body of water as it is surrounded by high hills and the area is notoriously windy. It must have been an over the top wild storm for the disciples to be frightened, but they were and they called out for Jesus to help them. And in just a few words Jesus calms the sea and the disciples are safe. What we might learn or remember from this story is that Jesus is always with us, always....

Now our third lesson this morning is one that we may not be familiar with. It comes from Paul’s second letter to the church in Corinth. Paul has written to these new believers before on particular topics like love which we know from 1 Corinthians 13.

But this second letter is different. It is thought to be a combination of two letters written to the folks in Corinth. Whatever the original form, is not that important. what is important is that in this letter we find Paul defending himself. As one commentator puts it “he finds his apostleship under sharp attack and the people for whose welfare he feels deeply responsible for are near the edge of spiritual catastrophe.”<sup>1</sup>

Spiritual catastrophe – do you ever feel that, or find yourself on the edge of it? What does it mean? Well perhaps it means to be or to feel disconnected, distant from God, abandoned, unworthy of God’s love, unable to abide by God’s rules, caught up in things we shouldn’t be caught up in. . Perhaps being near the edge of spiritual catastrophe means finding ourselves unable to stay away from those things we know can cause problems for us. In this letter Paul

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<sup>1</sup> The Discipleship Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version, p. 1967, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2008.

tells the people in Corinth that there are difficulties in life, every one has them – life is hard, well that is an understatement. Life can be very hard.

We can all have this catalogue of hardships that we have to deal with every day. Paul lists some that do not pertain just to the new community of the church in Corinth but to Paul - himself - as well. Now as you hear this list you might say “well, that’s all well and good but it is not a list that we in 21<sup>st</sup> century Winchester can relate to.” As you listen I ask you think and reflect- affliction (yup), hardship (I understand that), calamities (yup, get that too), but these next three I can’t relate too – beatings, imprisonment, riots - I can be thankful I can’t relate, but unfortunately many folks can. And then Paul closes with the final three - labors, sleepless nights, and hunger - those most of us can understand - in all sorts of forms.

Maybe what we can take from this is that we all have, in one form or another a catalogue of hardships – None of us is exempt from difficulties - and when they do happen, how do we deal with them? What do we do to avoid being on the edge of spiritual catastrophe?

Might the answers be in the form of questions using these passages as a base?

Bear with me ----

Who or what is the huge giant in our lives? What is it that terrorizes us? What is the modern day armor that doesn’t fit us well, that might keep us from seeing where our strength truly lies?

What is the storm on which our personal boats are being tossed – what is it in our lives that keeps us unsettled , unable to concentrate, unable to focus - what is our storm?

What are our catalogues of hardships? What is on our list that can makes life challenging and sometimes difficult or hard?

Now take a minute and put all these things in your mind’s eye –

As we prepare to deal with that giant problem, that giant pain in our lives, that six and a half foot, nine and a half foot difficulty. Who is there to help us win the battle – who is there to empower us just like David was empowered – who is there to give us words, wisdom, encouragement and strength?

Got that storm and the boat? Look in the stern – look in the back of that boat? Who is there with us, never leaving us? Who is there?

And as we deal with that list, that catalogue of hardships that we face, or have faced or will face again – who is there with us?

The answer I am suggesting today is that God is there.

A few weeks ago Will offered us a great message on the the Trinity – Father (Creator), Son(Christ) and Holy Spirit – God in three persons, blessed Trinity. Well God comes to us in these three different forms so that no matter where we are, no matter what our circumstances we can feel God’s presence, know God’s love in these three forms – so that somehow God can get through to us, walk with us, be with us....

In his message Will reminded us that God simply is love.

So here is the next question - how do we see God? how do you see God? If God is to be with us at the back of the boat, helping us deal with the giant problems, with our catalogue of hardship - how, where do we see God? How do we see God?

In May I had some health issues, requiring a hospital stay and some serious time at home. I was blessed to see God - coming in the form of many of you. I saw God as love in hospital visits, phone calls, emails and texts. I truly saw Jesus in you as you brought medical equipment to my home so I could be at home safely. I saw God’s love as you showed up at my front door with lovely meals. In the time you spent with me, sharing some of those meals so I wouldn’t be alone.

I encourage us to look for how God presents God’s self to us - in those whom God sends to us. And I think there is more. Might God present God’s self in the beauty we find in the world around us - in the flora and fauna on the small scale or the grand scale? Might we see God’s love in the pets in our lives? In the music that we surround ourselves with? Might it be in art in all its’ multitude of forms which opens our eyes to God’s love?

Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) is often regarded as the greatest Protestant theologian of the 20th century. Some have called his body of work "a theology of the Word.”

Ryan Fraser from Freed-Hardeman University (Jackson Sun 4/4/19) tells this story that other’s have told as well about Barth. Some question if it is true or not, but the message is powerful and important so we are going to go with it.

The story is told about an occasion when Barth was asked, "What is the most profound thought that ever entered your mind?"

After a brief moment of reflection, Barth replied, "The most profound thought I have ever known is the simple truth: Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

“Jesus loves m this I know for the Bible tells me she” A simple truth - that we can carry with us in all that we do. Might you have learned this song in Sunday School or Vacation Bible School? Again it is a powerful message and most importantly a true message.

I'd like us to sing just the first verse but to make it just a bit more special we are going to add some American Sign to it. As I find it helps hammer this message into my heart. Here is how we sign the chorus.

*Yes - take a hand and make it into a fist and bob it back and forth, resembling a head nodding.*

*Jesus - Touch the tip of the middle finger of your dominant hand into the center of the palm of your non-dominant hand. Then touch the tip of the middle finger of your non-dominant hand into the palm of your dominant hand. Memory aide: think of the nails through His palms while on the cross.*

*Loves - form fists with both hands and cross your arms over your chest, creating a gesture that resembles giving yourself a warm and affectionate hug. This sign visually conveys the emotion of love through a self-embrace.*

*Me - point at yourself or touch your index finger to your chest*

*(Repeat 3 times)*

*Bible - Sign for "Jesus"; then 'book', placing the hands palm to palm for the backs of a book and opening them."*

*Tells - using index finger point ay your chin and then bring index finger out*

*Me - point at yourself or touch your index finger to your chest.*

My friends, may our hearts and minds be open to all the ways that God is present in all aspects of our lives.

Amen and Amen