

Name: _____

SERMON JOURNAL

February 12 - June 24, 2018

Consider using this journal not only for yourself, but also as an opportunity to meet with others in a small group. The Christian faith is about making disciples of Jesus. This journal provides a mutually blessed way for you to do precisely that. Below are some questions your small group may use for discussion each week.

Weekly Sermon Reflection Questions:

- Review the key scripture(s).
- Review the key point(s) from the sermon.
 - How were you encouraged?
 - How were you challenged?
 - What questions did it create?
 - What convictions did it bring?
- What was the pastor asking of you, even expecting you to do in response?
- How has the Lord spoken to you through this sermon?
- What are you going to do as a result?

Dear church,

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, claimed to be a “man of one Book.” The man was an incredibly well-educated person who knew Latin, Greek and Hebrew and read the classic works of literature. He even wrote his own books and pamphlets to help define the teachings of Methodism. But at his heart, he was a “man of one Book.” The authority for his life was Jesus Christ. While Wesley had his own personal experiences with Christ (“I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had saved me from the law of sin and death”), he aligned his life with the teachings of the Bible.

Likewise, we believe God has revealed Himself to us through the Living Word. We experience Jesus through various means, especially through the written word (the Bible) and the spoken word (teaching, preaching and faith-sharing).

It is our intent to HELP OTHERS FOLLOW JESUS by putting this sermon guide into action. This is a DAILY journal, not something just for Sundays. This is how it works: Monday’s text is the preaching text for the following Sunday and sets the tone for the week. Mondays also include an introduction. Our daily readings support the Sunday text, providing a broader understanding of the topic.

Our Lenten through June journal will be chapter/book studies:

“As It Is In Heaven” looks at worship through two chapters in Revelation (4-5).

“Lost and Found” is the story of a woman in great crisis in the Book of Ruth (4 chapters).

“Righteousness from Above” is Paul’s magnificent work in Romans 1-5.

In Christ, Tom

Tom

Scripture Readings

AS IT IS IN HEAVEN: *The Throne*

- 2/12 Revelation 4:1-6
- 2/13 Revelation 1:8-20
- 2/14 Revelation 3:19-22
- 2/15 1 Kings 18
- 2/16 Psalm 93
- 2/17 Psalm 100
- 2/18 Revelation 4:1-6

AS IT IS IN HEAVEN: *A Song*

- 2/19 Revelation 4:7-11
- 2/20 Nehemiah 12:27-47
- 2/21 Psalm 77
- 2/22 Psalm 126
- 2/23 Isaiah 6:1-10
- 2/24 Colossians 3:15-17
- 2/25 Revelation 4:7-11

AS IT IS IN HEAVEN: *The Lion*

- 2/26 Revelation 5:1-5
- 2/27 Genesis 49:8-12
- 2/28 Proverbs 19:12; 20:2;
Proverbs 30:24-31
- 3/1 Isaiah 11:1-9
- 3/2 Amos 3:1-8
- 3/3 1 Peter 5:8-14
- 3/4 Revelation 5:1-5

AS IT IS IN HEAVEN: *And The Lamb*

- 3/5 Revelation 5:6-7
- 3/6 Leviticus 14:10-31
- 3/7 John 1:29-36
- 3/8 Acts 8:26-40
- 3/9 1 Corinthians 5:6-8
- 3/10 1 Peter 1:17-21
- 3/11 Revelation 5:6-7

AS IT IS IN HEAVEN:

Prayers of the Saints

- 3/12 Revelation 5:8-10
- 3/13 Nehemiah 1
- 3/14 Psalm 86
- 3/15 Acts 1:12-14
- 3/16 Acts 6:1-4
- 3/17 Colossians 4:2-18
- 3/18 Revelation 5:8-10

AS IT IS IN HEAVEN: *The Voice*

- 3/19 Revelation 5:11-12
- 3/20 Psalm 116
- 3/21 John 10:1-18
- 3/22 Luke 19:28-40
- 3/23 Luke 23:13-25
- 3/24 Luke 23:32-49
- 3/25 Revelation 5:11-12

AS IT IS IN HEAVEN: *The Fall*

- 3/26 Revelation 5:13-14
- 3/27 Genesis 1
- 3/28 Genesis 2
- 3/29 Genesis 3
- 3/30 1 Corinthians 15:20-28
- 3/31 1 Corinthians 15:42-49
- 4/1 Revelation 5:13-14

LOST AND FOUND: *A Family's Grief*

- 4/2 Ruth 1:1-7
- 4/3 Genesis 16
- 4/4 Genesis 38
- 4/5 Mark 10:46-52
- 4/6 Luke 10:25-37
- 4/7 Philippians 1:18b-30
- 4/8 Ruth 1:1-7

Scripture Readings

LOST AND FOUND: *Ruth's Choice*

- 4/9 Ruth 1:8-19
- 4/10 Genesis 24
- 4/11 Matthew 5:38-42
- 4/12 Luke 22:45-62
- 4/13 Psalm 94:16-19
- 4/14 Matthew 16:24-28
- 4/15 Ruth 1:8-19

LOST AND FOUND: *Naomi's Faith Crisis*

- 4/16 Ruth 1:20-22
- 4/17 Psalm 22
- 4/18 Psalm 23
- 4/19 Romans 8:18-25
- 4/20 Romans 8:26-30
- 4/21 Romans 8:31-39
- 4/22 Ruth 1:20-22

LOST AND FOUND: *Boaz, the Faithful*

- 4/23 Ruth 2:1-8
- 4/24 Psalm 89
- 4/25 Matthew 24:45-51
- 4/26 Matthew 25:14-30
- 4/27 Romans 12:9-13
- 4/28 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5
- 4/29 Ruth 2:1-8

LOST AND FOUND: *Risk and Reward*

- 4/30 Ruth 3:10-13
- 5/1 Genesis 12
- 5/2 John 1:1-14
- 5/3 Acts 7
- 5/4 Acts 16:6-10
- 5/5 Ephesians 5:25-32
- 5/6 Ruth 3:10-13

LOST AND FOUND: *A Family Legacy*

- 5/7 Ruth 4:13-22
- 5/8 Ruth 1
- 5/9 Job 42
- 5/10 John 14:1-21
- 5/11 2 Corinthians 1:1-7
- 5/12 Revelation 22:1-9
- 5/13 Ruth 4:13-22

RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM ABOVE:

The Gospel and the Spirit

- 5/14 Romans 1:1-6
- 5/15 Luke 9:1-6
- 5/16 Acts 2:1-41
- 5/17 Acts 9:1-31
- 5/18 Galatians 1:13-24
- 5/19 1 Corinthians 1:13-25
- 5/20 Romans 1:1-6

RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM ABOVE:

Called to be Saints

- 5/21 Romans 1:7-17
- 5/22 Ephesians 1:15-23
- 5/23 Galatians 3:10-14
- 5/24 Colossians 1:24-29;
Philemon 4-7
- 5/25 2 Peter 1:1-9
- 5/26 Romans 15:23-16:2
- 5/27 Romans 1:7-17

Scripture Readings

RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM ABOVE:

The Problem

- 5/28 Romans 1:18-2:4
- 5/29 Matthew 6:1-8; 33
- 5/30 1 Corinthians 6:9-20
- 5/31 Romans 8:1-17
- 6/1 Ephesians 2:1-10
- 6/2 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8
- 6/3 Romans 1:18-2:4

RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM ABOVE:

Adam One & Adam Two

- 6/18 Romans 5:12-21
- 6/19 Genesis 3
- 6/20 Romans 6:19-23
- 6/21 1 Timothy 1:12-17
- 6/22 Hebrews 9:23-28
- 6/23 James 1:12-15
- 6/24 Romans 5:12-21

RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM ABOVE:

The Solution

- 6/4 Romans 3:21-26
- 6/5 Romans 3:9-20
- 6/6 1 John 1:8-10
- 6/7 Isaiah 53
- 6/8 2 Corinthians 5:16-21
- 6/9 1 Peter 2:9-10, 3:8-13
- 6/10 Romans 3:21-26

RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM ABOVE:

Rejoice!

- 6/11 Romans 5:1-11
- 6/12 Romans 4:1-15
- 6/13 Romans 4:16-25
- 6/14 Acts 14:21-28
- 6/15 James 1:2-4
- 6/16 1 Peter 4:12-19
- 6/17 Romans 5:1-11

As It Is In Heaven

*The worship of Revelation
meets the reality of life*

February 12 – April 1, 2018

AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Monday, February 12, 2018

Revelation 4:1-6

One of my favorite book titles is *The Last Days Are Here Again*. Most every generation since Jesus has believed He would return during their lifetime. Unfortunately, the Book of Revelation scares many of us. I encourage you to read: *Reversed Thunder* by Eugene Peterson. This book opened my understanding that Revelation was written by a man, John, in exile (knocked out of the ministry) - he lost his church, community and purpose in life. When this discouraged believer had a "revelation" from God, it got him back on his feet and reminded him the Lamb and the Lion (not Rome or Babylon) win. Christians need not lose their nerve. Churches must be instructed and corrected. Worship needs to be core. Worship (Revelation 4-5) follows one of the most famous verses in the Bible: "*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*" (Revelation 3:20) Worship centers, gathers, reveals, sings and affirms (*Reversed Thunder*, pg. 59). Main point: It's not WHAT is in heaven, but WHO is on the throne! As 4:1 shows, the door in heaven is still open! Let's read about and learn to worship God His way, just as Jesus taught us to pray: "*your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*"

APPLICATION: On a 1-10 scale (10 being the highest), how much do you feel you know about the Bible? About Revelation? What's the deal with "the throne?" And what's up with the numbers "24" and "7?" And who are the four with eyes everywhere - even in the back of their heads? Welcome to the wild, weird, wacky world of Revelation. If you don't understand it...don't worry about it. I need lots of help on this, too!

AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Monday, March 12, 2018

Revelation 5:8-10

I love writing these brief sermon descriptions from Revelation 4-5 and that we are now into our fifth week and we've not been talking about "I, ME, MINE or MYSELF." It's all been about *The Kingdom of God* (not the *Kingdom of Self*). Worship doesn't revolve around my preferences, desires or thoughts. Worship isn't about ME at all - it's all been about Jesus' throne, the songs sung to Him, how Jesus has come as the Lion and the Lamb who was slain and is worthy of praise. Revelation finally gets around to talking about "the saints." In *Reversed Thunder* (pg. 87ff), Peterson describes how God hears our prayers, collects them into bowls of incense and hurls them back to earth with powerful impact. He says about those early Christians: "Massive engines of persecution and scorn raged against them. They had neither weapons nor votes. They had little money and no prestige. Why didn't they have mental breakdowns? Why didn't they cut and run? They prayed." WOW!

APPLICATION: On a 1-10 scale, how comfortable are you with prayer? Do you pray primarily for your own needs or for others or for God's will to be done? Have you ever felt like your prayers just hit the ceiling and bounce back? How does today's scripture affect your thinking about prayer? What did Robert Murray M'Cheyne mean when he said, "Turn your Bible into prayers?"

THE VOICE

Monday, March 19, 2018

Revelation 5:11-12

I thought this was an amazing word study. I was greatly surprised to see how often the word, “voice” is found in the Bible (198x). There is the voice of poor Esau crying out for justice after his deceitful brother, Jacob, stole his blessing (Genesis 27:22-38). There is the anguished voice of King Darius crying out to Daniel to discover if he was still alive after being thrown into the lion’s den (Daniel 6:20). There is the voice of the “Good Shepherd” in John 10. The voices of many are in the Book of Revelation (33x): Jesus, God the Father, angels, the living creatures and the elders. Revelation 6:10-11 have voices crying out for justice: *“How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”* Next week is the final week of Jesus’ earthly ministry, but we will look ahead at all the voices crying out.

APPLICATION: I think of three primary voices: The voice of **God the Father (HE)**, the voice of the **congregation (WE)** and the voice of the **individual (ME)**. How are you able to identify with the joy of the Psalmist in 116 that God has heard his voice? Can you describe times in your life when you felt you were heard by God or that you heard from God? Have there been voices from the congregation who have spoken to you? How can that best be replicated? How are you using your voice for the Kingdom of God?

AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Monday, March 26, 2018

Revelation 5:13-14

Everything was “good” or “very good” in Genesis 1 and 2. But “the fall” of Genesis 3 is when sin entered the world. Adam and Eve were booted from the Garden, and the ugliness of sin spread. Their son, Cain, murdered his brother, Abel. When confronted about his missing brother, Cain responded with a shrug, “*I don’t know - am I my brother’s keeper?*” The murderer killed his brother and felt he was the victim. Read Genesis 4, too. The same thing happens today – people sin and blame God and everyone else. Sin’s essence is being self-absorbed. Sin (people don’t even like to use this word today – maybe a “sinful dessert”) is “the big ME.” It’s *The Kingdom of Self*. Genesis 1-2 pictures God’s original intent for harmony and peace on earth, but when sin rang the doorbell and the original pair opened it, all hell broke loose with others, oneself, creation and especially with God. How do we get things back together again? Thus, the lament of Revelation that no one was able to open the scroll. People were doomed. That’s when the One seated on the throne came. The Lion/Lamb appeared to remove what the first Adam had done. Our story of worship ends with the phrase “fell down.” However, it isn’t falling into sin – but falling into worship. Easter Sunday, the Lamb is resurrected and the Lion returns. The antidote of “the big ME” is to worship God. It shifts the focus to the Holy One like nothing else. Worship makes us sing. Worship makes us love. Worship makes us fall down. Worship transforms us.

APPLICATION: Have you seen the crucifixion and resurrection scenes in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*? How are you struggling with “the Big ME?” How does “the Big ME” interfere with worship? What keeps you from worshipping God? What are you doing about it?

LOST AND FOUND

Finding Hope in a Family Crisis

April 2 – May 13, 2018

LOST AND FOUND

Monday, April 2, 2018

Ruth 1:1-7

We move from the “other worldly” Revelation 4-5 to a very “real world” family crisis. The background of the story cannot be missed. The previous book, Judges, ends with this cryptic note: “*In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.*” (Judges 21:25) Self-centeredness is a recipe for broken relationships.

Ruth begins with a famine that relocates Naomi’s family. Naomi’s husband and both sons die. She is completely devastated and destitute. With no safety net, she will be homeless. Her options are slavery, prostitution or death. Her only hope is to “set out on the road” back to her hometown of Bethlehem. There are some hard roads in the Bible for Hagar (Sarah’s handmaiden), Tamar, and Rahab of Jericho, Bartimaeus, the man on “The Good Samaritan Road,” and Saul/Paul. Jesus traveled the “Palm Sunday Road” on his “Triumphal Entry,” but that road was leading Him to Gethsemane and the cross.

Good things eventually happen, but EVERYONE will experience loss. We all will grieve at some point in life. However, we have hope in the resurrection. The Lion/Lamb win. We also have “your prayers” and “the Holy Spirit.” Be sure to read Philippians 1:18b – 30. God helps us. We can help each other, too. I recall this song: “*The road is long with many a winding turn, that leads us to who knows where. But I’m strong, strong enough to carry him, he ain’t heavy, he’s my brother.*”

APPLICATION: What road are you on and who is walking it with you? How do you typically cope with crisis and loss? How do you help others who have experienced loss? How has God shown Himself to be faithful in the midst of these situations?

RUTH'S CHOICE

Monday, April 9, 2018

Ruth 1:8-19

Orpah can't be blamed for her choice. She did nothing wrong. But the name of this book is not "Orpah." Ruth made the "second mile" commitment. There's a sermon in here somewhere about the difference between kissing someone and clinging to them – would you rather have a kisser or a clinger in your life? Maybe it's not an either/or choice, but this probably won't be the sermon 😊. The "kiss" also makes me think of Judas. One of my favorite Bible stories is "Rachel's choice" (Genesis 24). Because Rachel did more than was expected, her reward was far greater than she could have imagined. Thank goodness for Ruth's choice! Imagine where Naomi would have been without her. Naomi uses an important Hebrew word (245x in OT) that is hard to translate into English, "hesed." She uses it to bless Orpah and Ruth. It means "faithfulness, grace, kindness and never-ending love." "Hesed" is used in Psalm 94:18 *"your love, O Lord, supported me."* Naomi exhibited marvelous grace to her daughters-in-law here. She insists they NOT go with her. She wanted them to do well in life. Remaining with her was the opposite of success. Sometimes, when we lose our lives, we find them. At least that's what Jesus said.

APPLICATION: Why do you think Ruth was determined to go with Naomi? What experiences have you had in starting over as Ruth and Naomi did? What did you leave behind? What did you gain? Who or what are you most committed to, and is this a God-honoring tie?

LOST AND FOUND

Monday, April 16, 2018

Ruth 1:20-22

“Can THIS be NAOMI?” They didn’t recognize the poor lady in the little town of Bethlehem. The folks must have been saying things like, “Who is that?” When Naomi left Bethlehem, she had a husband and two sons, and though things were hard, she had a future with hope. Things are SO BAD when she returns they don’t even recognize her. She went from being young and healthy to old and haggard. “Naomi” means “pleasant” but she said, don’t call me “pleasant” call me “bitter.” Suffering and adversity often go hand-in-hand with bitterness. Naomi, like Job, couldn’t understand what she had done to have ticked off God so much. Where is God when it hurts? We must reconcile God’s sovereignty with human suffering. I believe one of the biggest problems Christians (ESPECIALLY American Christians) have is a lack of a “theology of suffering.” One of my axioms is, “If my faith can’t work in the emergency room, it doesn’t work.” Many Christians think life is going to be a never-ending source of happiness and joy. Yes, we have those moments. But we also have “the other.” It cuts both ways. Remember Psalm 23 follows Psalm 22. Do some “deep reading” and thinking on Romans 8:18-39. While we may never understand “why” certain things happen in life, we can always remember WHO is with us and WHERE we are headed. We win because of the Lion and the Lamb!

APPLICATION: What is your “theology of suffering”? In light of Hebrews 11:1, what do you think causes a person’s faith to grow? In light of Romans 8:24, when is hope most valuable or necessary? What Bible verse(s) are most helpful to you during times of suffering?

BOAZ, THE FAITHFUL

Monday, April 23, 2018

Ruth 2:1-8

Boaz is introduced. I like how one version (ESV) translates his name: “Worthy.” In our Revelation 5 study, they were looking for someone in heaven who was “worthy” to open the seal. Jesus came to the rescue. In Ruth, “Mr. Worthy” is Boaz. He lives up to his name! Remember this story is thousands of years old. Think how much culture has changed in America in the last 50 years. Keep that in mind as you read the Bible. The story is not from our culture. It is not what we expect from the Bible. Yet, the Bible is full of the unexpected. I also like it because Ruth occurs during the period of the Judges (*everyone did what was right in their own eyes*). Nobody paid attention to the speed limits then. It was chaos and anarchy. But here’s this faithful, honest guy. There are ALWAYS people like this, whether at school, at work, in our family or at church. And we all have the capacity to live faithfully, too. “Loyalty” is what we ask of people when they take membership vows: *Will you be loyal to Jesus Christ as expressed through Asbury UMC, and will you uphold it by your prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness?*” Faithfulness is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. It is an essential component of marriage, too. We’re going to be looking at faithfulness in our readings this week.

APPLICATION: Read verses 10-23 also. Naomi asks Ruth a great question in vs. 19: “*Where did you glean today?*” To “glean” means to gather leftover grain. John Wesley taught theology should be practical and pragmatic, not academic. It should be the fabric of our lives and experiences. We could reflect daily on this, too: “Where have you gleaned today? ...What improvements have you made in grace or knowledge? What have you learned or done?” Reading Ruth challenges us to replicate its examples of faithful living.

LOST AND FOUND

Monday, April 30, 2018

Ruth 3:10-13

I repeat what was in the journal last week: *Remember this story is thousands of years old... The story is not from our culture. It is not what we expect from the Bible. Yet, the Bible is full of the unexpected.* Today's reading seems scandalous. Ruth takes an enormous risk. But "no risk – no reward." We are supposed to use what has been entrusted to us. It's called "stewardship" in the Bible. Today we honor our graduates. "Commencement" doesn't mean "to end" but "to begin." Just as there are two pedals on a bicycle, so it's said that there are two aspects of faith. One pedal is God's pedal. But God doesn't do all the work. We have a pedal, too. We must cooperate. But we don't do all the work, either. It's a classic "faith + works" response. Now, this isn't about salvation, mind you! We are saved by grace alone, not because of works (Ephesians 2:8-9), but we are to live out our faith in cooperation with God (Ephesians 2:10). If Abram had not left after God called him (Genesis 12), he would have missed out on becoming a great father. Moses left Egypt, returned, and left again and became a great man. In marriage, *"A man shall leave his father and mother..."* Jesus left heaven to move into our neighborhood (*"the Word became flesh"*). He told us to "leave" as well (Matthew 28:18-20). We see it in Ruth, too. Rewards don't happen without risks.

APPLICATION: Read Ruth 3 today. What risks did Naomi, Ruth and Boaz each take in chapters 1-3? List all the ways you can. How did their courage, in spite of their feelings, help them "pedal the bike"? How did their steps of faith open up the possibility for God to demonstrate His faithfulness in return? In what areas of life do you find it difficult to move forward or take risks because you don't want to make a mistake or a wrong move?

A FAMILY LEGACY

Monday, May 7, 2018

Ruth 4:13-22

We wanted to end our story about Ruth on “Mother’s Day” as it is about her legacy. Genealogies in the Bible are usually found in the beginning of the book, not at the end. The Book of Ruth is an exception. Boaz and Ruth have a son they named “Obed.” Obed has a son named Jesse. And Jesse has a son named David, who became the great King of Israel. Naomi, who had been in such disgrace, became forever linked to David. Ruth 4:17 is a wonderful verse: *“The women living there said, ‘Naomi has a son.’”* Go back through and re-read Ruth 1. Who would think that, “and they all lived happily ever after,” is how this story should end? Naomi has prevailed. Things worked out far better than she could have imagined after her catastrophic loss of her husband and two sons. The ending of Ruth reminds us how the Book of Job ends (42). It reminds us of Jesus’ final instructions to His disciples (John 14). Paul reminded the Corinthians how they have received “comfort” from God through the Lord Jesus Christ even though they have suffered. It reminds us of the hope we have in the Bible (Revelation 22:1-9) that we will live forever. As Christians, ultimately, we cannot lose. As Christians destined for heaven, we have an important legacy to leave behind on earth.

APPLICATION: Read Ruth 4. Naomi (the doubter), Ruth (the outsider), Boaz (the faithful), you and me... none of us is worthy to have a place in eternity with God but for the “hesed” (faithfulness, grace, kindness and never-ending love) that He offers us. What losses are you or have you experienced in life? How is or did God help you find your way through it? What legacy are you leaving, spiritual or otherwise? You may not see clearly the redemption of your loss or pain until you reach heaven, but God IS a God who redeems and THAT gives us hope.

RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM ABOVE

Discovering who you are in Christ

May 14 – June 24, 2018

RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM ABOVE

Monday, May 14, 2018

Romans 1:1-6

Romans was written by “the Apostle Paul.” An “apostle” is a person “sent” on a mission. Paul’s mission had been to persecute Christians, but he was changed by a personal encounter with the resurrected Christ. His given name, “Saul” (Hebrew, meaning “to ask of God”), was changed to “Paul” (“Paulus” in Latin meant “small” or “humble”). Instead of zealously persecuting Christians (see Galatians 1:13-24), he was filled with a new mission to HELP OTHERS FOLLOW JESUS. The gospel is not about us qualifying to be “good enough” for God to love and accept us; the gospel is about accepting Jesus Christ as Lord. In our six verses today, the greater emphasis is upon what God the Father has done in Jesus Christ the Son and how the Holy Spirit calls us to Himself. We may not be identified as “apostles, prophets, teachers or evangelists,” but all Christians have received Christ and obediently live in mission to help others follow Jesus, too. Receiving the gospel means our sins are forgiven, we are loved, we have a purpose in life to share this faith with others and to be part of the church that does the same. When this life is over, we go to live in heaven with Jesus. The “gospel” literally means “good news.” Indeed, it is the greatest news of all. Today’s message is about this gospel. The Holy Spirit empowers the gospel.

APPLICATION: What does this passage teach us about Jesus? What does it tell us about Paul? As a follower of Jesus, what does it tell you about yourself? Do you consider yourself a servant of Christ? If so, how is it manifested? At the end of this week (after you’ve done the readings), reflect on your own experience with the Holy Spirit.

CALLED TO BE SAINTS

Monday, May 21, 2018

Romans 1:7-17

Paul is writing to Christians in Rome, though he had yet to travel there. He calls the Christians “saints.” Some church traditions hold “saints” to be people who have earned this title by some action (be a virtuous person, perform miracles, etc.) but Paul used the term in an entirely different way. He says that all of the Christians in Rome were “called to be saints.” Thus, a “saint,” according to Paul, wasn’t an especially virtuous believer, but one who was “set apart for special use.” A saint in the Bible is alive, not deceased. A saint is a believer. Paul was writing to the saints (not capitalized) in Rome. His introduction (verses 8-17) is full of gratitude and optimism about their calling. 1:16 describes the gospel. 1:17 is THE verse that so greatly impacted Martin Luther and inspired the Protestant Reformation (see *Martin Luther* by Eric Metaxas, pg. 95). Salvation is not earned by trying to be good, but righteousness is revealed from God. This keeps us from being “unrighteous” (1:18 – 32) or “self-righteous” (2:1-29). As Metaxas writes, “We aren’t sick and need healing, we are dead and need resurrecting.” How do you become a saint? Through the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION: Have you ever thought of yourself as a saint? What about the person next to you in the pew? On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable are you with this designation? Righteousness means “right standing” before God, it is achieved by Christ and imparted to His followers. In light of this, how would you describe the “power of the gospel”?

THE SOLUTION

Monday, June 4, 2018

Romans 3:21-26

The famous psychiatrist, Dr. Karl Menninger, wrote a book in 1988 with an interesting title: *Whatever Became of Sin?* His thesis was that sin is old-fashioned and outdated. We've grown beyond it. Yet, look at all the continual chaos all over the world. What's wrong? Obviously, it's the other person's (or group's) fault. If "those people" would just behave, we could all get along. We are all for education, science, technology, ending poverty, economic and political freedom, etc. but these are not addressing our ultimate problem. The real problem is what Menninger was describing in his book – sin. And it's not the sin in YOU, it's the sin in ME. I am the problem. Until we take personal responsibility for our sinfulness, we will never get well. In other words, EVERYBODY NEEDS THE GOSPEL. When we admit we all have problems and all of us are lost, we can meet people where they are. To quote Eric Metaxas again, "We aren't sick and need healing; we are dead and need resurrecting." The solution to our problem is not more self-effort or despair, but it is trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This is God's great gift that is available to all.

APPLICATION: Looking at these verses, what is humanity's great equalizer - In the negative sense? In the positive sense? God set a righteous standard, but it is not within our capacity to live up to it, so God provided the means of righteousness. Faith in Jesus Christ is the way we receive the righteousness that is from God and become empowered to live according to His standard. To be justified is to be declared "not guilty." How is this status before God achieved?

RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM ABOVE

Monday, June 11, 2018

Romans 5:1-11

Unfortunately, in our sermon series, we have skipped over the wonderful text of Romans 4. Paul tells the story of how Abraham believed God and was “credited as righteous” (when in fact, he was a sinner, too). Too many people believe that we get our religion the “old-fashioned way – we earn it.” Paul is belaboring the point, that it is “faith alone” (the Latin term is “sole fide”) that brings us to salvation. As we prepare for Vacation Bible School this week, we pray our children will make faith professions in Jesus Christ. We think about 50 children who did this last year. We want to work with parents to help children follow Jesus. Many people dream of winning the lottery, but if we won it, we would never get anything near the incredible gifts God gives to us in Jesus as described in Romans 5:1-11. God knows everything about us and loves us anyway. That is remarkable. God is acting on our behalf in Jesus. Even when we are going through troubles, as all of us will have in life, we can still rejoice. This is yet another reason why we want to HELP OTHERS FOLLOW JESUS. He is the key to life. REJOICE! Let’s not allow circumstances to steal our joy. God even uses our suffering to accomplish His purposes (James 1:2-4). As the Apostles said, “We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22) And “Let’s not grow weary in well doing.” (Galatian 6:9)

APPLICATION: According to Romans 5:1-11, in what three things should we rejoice? Why? Do you find yourself trying to earn God’s love or forgiveness? His approval or the approval of others? How do you know God loves you (look at verses 5 and 8)? How might this knowledge begin to set you free from the “performance trap”?

ADAM ONE AND ADAM TWO

Monday, June 18, 2018

Romans 5:12-21

Adam #1 was the original “dusty” man of Genesis 2-3. His name means “humanity” in Hebrew. The “Fall” is when sin entered the world. “Original sin” describes the impact of Adam #1 upon his relationship with God, with others, within himself and even within creation. The doctrine of original sin explains why things are so messed up in our world. Adam #1’s sin was passed on to everyone like some plague. It explains how death came into our world. Though Adam #1 was the “original sinner,” that trait has been passed on to every human being. It is hard for many people to believe something done thousands of years ago could have such an overwhelming impact. There are a lot of ways to look at doctrines of the faith, and not all of them fit into nice, tidy packages. For all of its mystery, original sin does explain how humanity continually ends up with such bad actors. It explains a lot of human misery and suffering. The Good News is that there is a second Adam, Jesus. Jesus came as our Savior to help us receive a gift – grace. His actions were completely opposite of Adam #1. Adam #2 was obedient, not disobedient. Adam #2 brought justification, not judgment. Adam #2 brought eternal life, not death. Adam #2 offers reconciliation, not condemnation.

APPLICATION: The first Adam represents all of human nature (sinful) while the second Adam, Jesus, gives us a new nature - His! Our new nature is one of righteousness that comes from above. Looking back through the text, what benefits do we gain as recipients of Jesus’ righteousness? How is it, do you think, the righteousness we have before God is both immediate but also ongoing?

