The Power of Prayer – Calling 2019

August 18, 2019

Sermon: Called: Calling Around

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-7

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received* (Ephesians 4:1).

So what is this calling that we have received? And how do we live a life worthy of it? Well, our first calling is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. The “nuns” sang it in church and at the Sweet Sounds of Broadway a couple of weeks ago: “I will follow him wherever he may go…” Ephesians 4:2-3 tells us what following Jesus looks like: be humble, gentle, patient, loving, and seek peace with one another. (Ephesians 4:2-3) Sounds like the Beatitudes! Jesus then gives us the Great Commission: 1***9****Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* ***20****and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:19-20). Our calling is to **be** a disciple and to **make** disciples.

This week starts a new sermon series, which is actually part 3 of the Called series we started last Spring. As a church, we have committed to being part of a 3 year research grant, Creating a Culture of Calling. How would our lives and the life of our church be different if we saw our lives as a calling? The leadership team and staff have been learning about this concept and now it is time to bring it to the church body. Therefore, after this sermon series, I will be continuing to focus on our calling as disciples in our prayer time. No change happens without the foundation of prayer so I ask you to join me in praying for our church to become a church of people living lives worthy of our calling.

Let us pray:

* To hear God’s call every day
* For opportunities to share our faith story with others
* For our church to hear God’s call

Scripture for mediation:

*One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all*…(Ephesians 4:5-6a)

August 25, 2019

Sermon: Called in Suffering

Scripture: Psalm 22:1-5, 14-15, 19, 22, 24

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?* (Psalm 22:1)

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt like the psalmist when he cries out in this Psalm? You felt forsaken; abandoned by God. In the midst of difficult times, it is hard to feel God’s presence, let alone hear God calling. But God is there. Psalm 23:4 reminds us of that. God is with us in the darkest times of our lives. He is there to comfort us.

The psalmist reminds us of that at the end of Psalm 22:

*For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.* (Psalm 22:24)

And he is there to lead us out of our suffering.

That is how God calls us in suffering. He calls us to rest in his presence; to lean on his strength when ours is depleted.

And God calls us out of our suffering into a closer walk with him. It seems that one of two things happens when we go through times of trial; either our faith grows because we turn to God or we lose our faith because we turn away from God. Remember that we live in a broken world. Trials will come. We have a God who is with us in our suffering. He calls to us to grieve, to cry, to mourn, to be angry so that He can turn our sorrow into joy.

Let us pray:

* For God’s comfort in times of suffering
* For others who are going through trials that they may feel God’s presence
* That in the midst of suffering we will hear God’s call to us

Scripture for meditation:

*but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer.* (Psalm 66:19)

September 1, 2019

Sermon: Called Within

Scripture: Luke 17:20-21

***20****Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed,* ***21****nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”*(Luke 17:20-21)

Where is the Kingdom of God? This is a question that is asked of every ordination candidate. I have read lots of papers as an interviewer of those candidates. One common response is that it is both now and not yet. It is on earth and in heaven. Jesus tells us clearly that it is not something that can be observed, but it is in our midst. So if it is in our midst, where is it? John Wesley stated that the kingdom of God begins in our hearts. We are called by the Spirit from within our own hearts to be part of the kingdom of God. And when we listen, when we follow that call, the kingdom of God is in our midst. But we must take time to be still and listen.

In today’s world with all its injustice, violence, greed, and selfishness, it is difficult to see or believe that God’s kingdom is here. But the kingdom of God is present when acts of love, mercy, forgiveness, and generosity are shown. When we are obedient to the teachings of Christ (Matthew 28); when we share our stories of how God has been active in our lives; when we are bearers of God’s love, peace, hope, and joy the kingdom of God is in our midst. Imagine a world where this were to become the norm!

Let us pray:

* To hear God’s call in the stillness
* To hear God’s call in the Word
* To not just be hearers of the Word but doers
* For God’s kingdom to be in our hearts, in our midst, and in the life of PHUMC

Scripture for meditation:

*Be still and know that I am God* (Psalm 46:10)

September 8, 2019

Sermon: The Prodigal: Father

Scripture: Luke 15: 11-13, 20-24

*“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him* (Luke 15:20).

This is one of my favorite scriptures describing the character of God. He longs for his children to return to Him and He stands at the ready….waiting with arms open wide. The song “When God Ran” by Phillips, Craig, and Dean describes this scene:

He ran to me, He took me in His arms, Held my head to His chest,  
Said "My son's come home again!"  
Lifted my face, Wiped the tears from my eyes, With forgiveness in His voice He said  
"Son, do you know I still love You?" He caught me By surprise, When God ran...

God calls to us from within our hearts, but so often the world drowns Him out. Yet He waits patiently for us to hear the call and to turn our attention and our lives back to Him. We all wonder off, ignore God’s call, think we can do it on our own, or have a better plan. Those of us who have a relationship with God don’t get too far before we realize what the prodigal son realizes: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.” We turn back to God, seeking forgiveness and direction. But there are so many who are lost in this world. They long for someone to say “I love you” in the midst of their brokenness. We are called to be instruments of God’s love to them. Let us return to God so that we can hear how He calls us each and every day.

Let us pray:

* For those who are lost to find God’s compassion
* To embrace our call to be children of God
* For the “nones” and “dones” who have given up on church
* To hear God’s call each day to return to Him

Scripture for meditation:

*…return to me with all your hearts…*(Joel 2:12)

September 15, 2019

Sermon: The Prodigal: Lost Younger Brother

Scripture: Luke 15:11-21

***21****“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’* (Luke 15:21)

I am a recovering perfectionist. I am my own worst critic. I will be harder on myself than anyone else ever could be. I have felt this sense of unworthiness; a feeling that I will never be good enough. Can anyone else relate?

The problem with perfectionism is that we feel that we have to be perfect in order to be called a child of God. Therefore we miss the blessing of God’s grace. We have to remember that none of us is worthy….not one. (Romans 3:10). We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). It is by the grace of God and the blood of Jesus that we are made right with God. He calls us to receive this grace and forgiveness. When we say “no we are not worthy” we are rejecting God’s love and grace. It is a kind of arrogance to think that our sins are so bad that we are not worthy to be called a child of God. As Pastor Dave shared this week, there is no sin that is too great for God’s grace.

When we do not allow ourselves to receive God’s love and forgiveness, then we cannot respond to God’s call to forgive others. What is that line that we say each Sunday? “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Sometimes the one we have to forgive is ourselves.

God wants to lavish us with love. He is just waiting for us to ask and to open our hearts to receive.

Let us pray:

* To receive God’s forgiveness
* To answer the call to forgive as God forgives
* To hear God call us His child
* To live into the call to be a child of God
* For our church to respond to God’s call to help others hear their call to be a disciple
* For the continued disaster relief work in the Bahamas and Carolinas

Scripture for meditation:

*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!* (1 John 3:1)

September 22, 2019

Sermon: The Prodigal: Lost Older Brother

Scripture: Luke 15:11-12, 25-32

***28****“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.* ***29****But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.* ***30****But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’* (Luke 15:28-30)

One of my favorite old TV shows was “Boy Meets World.” There were two brothers, Eric and Corey. In one episode, the brothers were arguing over something and older brother Eric says “Life’s tough. Get a helmet!” Life is tough and unfair sometimes. When is the last time that you felt you were treated unfairly? How does God call us in those moments or seasons?

I think about the thousands of people displaced in the Bahamas. How is it fair that they received the full impact of the storm and Florida was spared? How is God calling to those who have lost everything?

I believe that first God calls us to be honest with our emotions. If we are angry, be angry. If we are sad, be sad. If we are frustrated, be frustrated. Pinning up our emotions is not good for us, so God invites us to share them with Him. He can handle our pain, our anger, our sorrow. The psalmist writes “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1) Jesus spoke those very words on the cross. (Matthew 27:46)

But God doesn’t leave us there. He then calls us out of our anger, sorrow, and frustrations. He calls us to be in His presence, reminding us that we are not alone. And He calls us out of our suffering, leading us toward hope. *Hope does not put us to shame because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us* (Romans 5:5). We can put on a “helmet” when life gets hard; the helmet of salvation which is art of the armor of God (Ephesians 6:11-17). God’s presence and protection is with us always.

Let us pray:

* For those who are dealing with a difficult situation
* That we may hear God’s call in the midst of our struggles
* For healing in the midst of our suffering
* For hope for the broken and lost

Scripture for mediation:

*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.*

September 29, 2019

Sermon: The Prodigal: The Feast

Scripture: Luke 15:17-24

***22****“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.* ***23****Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.* ***24****For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.* (Luke 15:22-24)

We live in a culture that focuses on the negatives. The media is quick to point out everyone’s flaws, mistakes, and things that are going wrong. Social media has become a place of shaming, bullying, criticizing, and complaining. Though there are news stories that feature acts of kindness and some Facebook posts and tweets are inspirational and encouraging, but they are few and far between. How might our lives change if we celebrate more?

God calls us to give thanks and to celebrate! Psalm 100 says that we are to shout, worship, and sing songs of thanks and praise to celebrate God’s goodness. Psalm 149 tells us to sing, play instruments, and dance in praise. What is it that we are celebrating? God! God is the giver of all good things and we are to shout with joy and praise each and every day. When we come together in worship, it is a celebration of God. When we celebrate communion, it is the celebration of what Christ has done for us. How would our worship change if we had an attitude of gratitude and celebration?

We are also called to celebrate the people that God surrounds us with. Paul starts out many of his letters (Philippians, 1 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians) with thanks for the people of those churches. Who is in your life that you are thankful for? How do you celebrate them? Do you celebrate them? Imagine how your life or theirs lives might change if you celebrate each other more.

This week, focus on those things that you are grateful for and celebrate them!

Let us pray:

* Giving thanks to God for our blessings
  + For our church
  + For the people in our lives
  + For opportunities to serve God
  + For God’s grace
* Celebrating God’s goodness

Scripture for meditation:

*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.* (Psalm 107:1)

October 6, 2019

World Communion Sunday

Sermon: It Must Be God’s Will

Scripture: James 1:2-3, 13-14, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)

***16****Rejoice always,* ***17****pray continually,* ***18****give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

A common phrase people use is “It must be God’s will.” Well, that is all fine and good when things go well, but not so much when things go bad. It is hard to hear “it must be God’s will” when a tragedy strikes a family or community. But for some it provides comfort knowing that there must be a greater plan in the midst of tragedy. The truth is, we don’t know what God’s will is. His thoughts are not our thoughts; his ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8). It is more accurate to say that God didn’t will this to happen, but God has a will within this circumstance.

Romans 8:28 says *that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose.* God calls us to draw near to Him. He calls us to trust Him; to follow Him. Then, even in the midst of trials, we can hear God call to us. We can hear Him calling us out of the ashes and making something beautiful. Have you ever come through a difficult time and maybe wondered where God was while you were in the middle of it? Then you look back and can see His hand leading you, guiding you, holding you; working for your good. That is God’s will!

It is only in His Word that He reveals in part His thoughts, will, and way. In 1 Thessalonians, we read that it is God’s will for us to rejoice, pray, and give thanks in all circumstances. In James 4:8, God calls us to draw close to Him. Jeremiah 29:11 tells us that God has plans for us; not to harm us but to give us hope and a future. But we don’t know the specifics of that plan. We must listen as God calls to us each day and as we follow Him closer and closer, we will understand His will more and more.

Let us pray:

* Continually, giving thanks to God in all our circumstances
* That we will hear God’s call to us each day
* For all who are in the midst of trials and tragedy
* That they will hear God calling to them in the midst of their circumstances

Scripture for meditation:

*In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been* ***called*** *according to His purpose* (Romans 8:28).

October 13, 2019

Sermon: It is What It Is

Scripture: Philippians 4:11-13, Romans 8:28 (NIV)

***11****I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.* (Philippians 4:11)

“It is what it is” has become a popular phrase. I suppose it could be an expression of contentment or acceptance. However, I believe that in our current culture most of the time it seems to be tainted with feelings of frustration and resignation. It has become a response when we don’t know what else to say. A response of “it is what it is” shows little to no empathy. It sort of sounds like “suck it up and get over it!” The phrase can also be a cop out not to take action that deep inside we know we need to. “Oh well, it is what it is and I can’t do anything about it.”

The Serenity prayer teaches us to accept those things that we can’t change, but to take action on those things that we need to: “Lord grant me the serenity to accept the things that I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Paul has a secret. He says he has learned to be content no matter what his circumstances may be. “It is what it is” in Paul’s life is accepting and acknowledging that no matter what, God is with him. He knows that he knows that he knows.  *I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength* (Philippians 4:13). This is God’s call in our lives. To be strong in our faith. To know that no matter what we face, God will not abandon us. That God will call to us in the midst of whatever life throws us to follow Him.

Food for thought: “It is what it is” could be considered a statement of ambiguity and redundancy as “it is” is stated twice. How does it relate to the Caller who states *I am who I am* (Exodus 3:14)?

Let us pray:

* For contentment in our circumstances
* For acceptance that does not led to resignation or lack of responsibility
* For words that do not cause harm but comfort
* For PHUMC to continue to seek and hear the call of God in our mission and our ministries

Scripture for meditation:

*I am who I am* (Exodus 3:14)

October 20, 2019

Sermon: Let Go and Let God

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:12, 2 Timothy 2:3, Mark 9:24, 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)

***7****Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.* (1Peter 5:7)

The phrase “Let Go and Let God” has been around for a long time. I can remember when I would get stressed out about work, school, or life in general, my dad would say “Let Go and Let God.” He was trying to be helpful, but sometimes it wasn’t. Sometimes I needed to process the situation or the stressor. If we “let go” too soon, we are probably just denying our pain, or stuffing it down. So just like in comedy, timing is everything.

We know that we need to let go of whatever is causing our distress. But it doesn’t just happen. It is a process. It cannot be done without going through the emotions of whatever we are struggling with. That’s why saying “Let go and let God” is not always a helpful response to someone who is hurting.

The first three steps in a 12-step recovery program are designed to help a person let go of power and control: admit that we are powerless, believe that only God can restore us to sanity, and surrender our will and lives to God.

These first 3 steps are usually the hardest for most people. It takes time to “let go.”

The scripture today from 1 Peter is a verse of calling. It calls us to action. God calls us to give our trials, our stressors, our disappointments, our grief, our frustrations….ALL OF IT….to Him. It is a call to surrender. But we don’t want to let go. We like to have control or maybe we feel we have to hold on to it as some sort of penance for what we have done. Yet God calls us to let it go. When we finally give it to God, he casts it into the sea of forgiveness and forgetfulness. And then, as Corrie ten Boom says “He then puts up a sign on the bank which says ‘No fishing allowed.’”

Let us pray:

* That we are thoughtful in our responses to people who are hurting.
* That we listen with compassion and resist the urge to “fix it.”
* That we allow ourselves and others to go through the process of letting go.
* For a time of rest in the arms of our Lord.

Thought for meditation:

*I surrender all.* (UM Hymnal 354)

October 27, 2019

Sermon: Just Forgive and Forget

Scripture: Hebrews 8:12

***2****For I will forgive their wickedness  
    and will remember their sins no more.”[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+8%3A12&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30105a)*]* (Hebrews 8:12)

Forgiveness is a common theme in the New Testament. Jesus tells us that we are to forgive those who trespass against us (Matthew 6:12); to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39); to leave the altar and go seek forgiveness for someone we may have hurt (Matthew 5:23-24). He tells the parable of the Unmericful Servant (Matthew 18:21-35). He even says “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34) as he was dying on the cross.

We are called to be disciples of Jesus. So do we think forgiveness might be an important part of our calling as disciples of Jesus? Yes. Is it easy? No. Nor should it be. Sometimes we think that because we are Christians, we must forgive any one immediately for the hurt they have done to us. Forgiveness is a process. Remember last week how I said letting go is a process? Well, sometimes the things we need to let go of are resentments we carry. And only love and forgiveness will help us to let go of those. But we must go through the pain and hurt. We can’t avoid it. Otherwise, it is not true forgiveness. And the hurt will continue to pop up until we truly face it.

God says “I will remember their sins no more.” God can do that. We human beings can’t. We can’t forgive and forget. But we can rely on God to guide us through the process of forgiveness and heal the hurt in our hearts.

Let us pray:

* To receive God’s grace and forgiveness
* To help us forgive those who have hurt us
* For those who carry resentments to begin the process of laying them down
* For forgiveness from those we have hurt

Scripture for meditation:

*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34).

November 3, 2019

Sermon: Just Trust God

Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34

***34****Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.* (Matthew 6:33-34)

Oh how true that statement is! “Each day has enough trouble of its own.” And each day also has a considerable amount of joy, but we miss it if we are too worried about tomorrow. Do you ever consider how much time you spend worrying about things that are yet to come? We think the very worst thing is going to happen and we dwell on it; fret about it; ruminate over it. This is called catastrophizing. We imagine every scenario and rehearse our response in our minds. Or perhaps we have fears that something might happen. We let our fears and worries consume our thoughts. Our worries and fears give Satan a stronghold in our lives.

My grandfather nicknamed me Worry Wort. I was always worrying about everything: what other people thought; if I would do a good job; about getting hurt; getting good grades. The worry continued well into adulthood. In my experience, every time that I worry or become anxious about something, it never is as bad as I had anticipated. Over time, I have learned to trust that God is at work in my life, and that I don’t need to spend quite so much time dwelling on the fears and worries. This doesn’t mean that I don’t worry, but I try not let the worry consume me.

When we are going through a difficult time in our lives, well-meaning people often tell us not to worry and to trust God. Very true statements, but it once again does not allow us to acknowledge or validate our feelings. When life is hard, trusting God is not easy.

Let us pray:

* To let go of our worries and fears.
* To trust that God will be with me each day.
* For family and friends who are facing difficulties and worrying about tomorrow.
* For those who are grieving – This Sunday is All Saints Day. Let us remember those who have died this year and continue to hold their families in our prayers.

Scripture for meditation:

*Seek first his kingdom* (Matthew 6:33a).

November 10, 2019

Sermon: Who is my Neighbor?

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

***36****“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”* ***37****The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”*

As we live into our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ, we must heed the teaching of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). We are called to be good neighbors and we encounter people every day. Are we being good neighbors? Perhaps we ask the same question the expert of the law asks: “Who is my neighbor?” The simple answer is anyone who is in need. And we have people in need all around us. Do we see them?

The point of this story that jumps out to me is that the “people of faith” are the ones who did nothing. A priest and Levite (a descendent of Levi who holds high position in the temple) left him at the side of the road. In fact, they walked to the other side of the road to avoid him. Samaritans and Jews did not get along, but who is the one who stops? The Samaritan.

I personally struggle with this. As much as I hate to admit it, I can be like the priest or the Levite. Either I am so focused on the tasks that lie before me, I don’t see the person in need or I tell myself I don’t have time. I miss opportunities to “be a good neighbor.” If I’m paying attention to God’s call, He tells me to stop and listen. He tells me who needs a hug, a listening ear, a note, or something more.

Don’t let the busyness of your life prevent you from hearing and responding to God’s call. Hear Jesus’ words: ‘Go and do likewise.” Take the time to be a good neighbor.

Let us pray:

* To slow down our busyness so that we can hear God’s call
* For our neighbors
* To seize the opportunities that God puts before us to be a good neighbor
* For those men and women who dedicate their lives in service to others

Scripture for meditation:

*Love one another* (John 13:34)

November 17, 2019

Sermon: How do I “neighbor?”

Scripture: Mark 12:28-34

***29****“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+12%3A28-34&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24703a)*]* ***30****Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+12%3A28-34&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24704b)*]* ***31****The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’[*[*c*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+12%3A28-34&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24705c)*] There is no commandment greater than these.”*

Love your neighbor **as** yourself.

We are called to love. Period. Love God. Love our neighbors. Love ourselves. Love our enemies. I remember a choir song I did years ago. The lyrics were “let your first thought, let your very first thought be love.” What a difference we could make in this world if our first thought was always love. First Corinthians 13:13 reminds us that the greatest thing is love - *And these three remain: faith hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

But it is not that easy. It is not so easy to love our neighbors. Sometimes people are just hard to love. What about the co-worker, classmate, or family member who is just on your last nerve? We become frustrated, hurt, angry, irritated. So what are we supposed to do in those circumstances? Love anyway.

It is not easy to love ourselves either. Many of us are our own worst critics. So then we are not following the commandment *love your neighbor as yourself.* We can break it down to “love your neighbor…love yourself.” Sometimes we are the neighbor we need to love.

We are called to love as God loves. *God so loved the world …* (John 3:16). That is a tall order that we cannot do under our own power. With God’s help, however, we can learn to love. I have been reflecting on Pastor Dave’s sermon from yesterday. Two things stood out to me:

1. Be kind. Be kind. Be kind.
2. If we want Christians to be more civil, Christians need to be more …Christian.

They’ll know we are Christians by our love. Let our first thought be love.

Let us pray:

* That our first thought is love
* For God’s love to flow through us
* For those who have not experienced God’s unconditional love
* For those “neighbors” who are hard to love

Scripture for meditation:

*If I…do not have love, I am nothing.* (1 Corinthians 13:2)

November 24, 2019

Sermon: What do I say to My Neighbor?

Scripture: 1 John 4:7-12, 19-21

*No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.* (1 John 4:12)

*Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.* (1 John 4:20-21)

Where have you seen God? Scripture says that no one has ever seen God (1 John 4:12). We have not seen His face, but I would argue that we have seen God; or at least evidence of God. I see God in every rainbow, in every sunrise or sunset. I saw God when I was at the Grand Canyon and Zion Canyon. I see God in my son and in my husband. I see God in a newborn baby or in a couple getting married. I even see God in my dog Lizzie’s big brown eyes. (Dog is God backwards!) God is love so wherever we see love, we see God.

Do we see God in each other? We are all created in the image of God. It is hard to wrap our minds around that because we all look so different. However, it is more than the physical appearance. As image bearers, we have the capacity to reflect God’s love in a variety of ways. When we perform random acts of love we see a glimpse of God. When we speak to one another in kind and loving ways, we can see God.

Ephesians 4:15 tells us to speak the truth in love thus building the body of Christ. When we let “unwholesome talk” come out of our mouths toward another or about another, we are not reflecting our love for God. John’s words here are convicting - *Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar.* Sometimes it is difficult to see the image of God in others. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t there. There is enough hate in this world. We are called to love. No, we are commanded to.

Let us pray:

* Eyes to see God in our neighbors
* That our words and actions will be a reflection of God’s love
* For our “neighbors” who have been impacted by acts of hatred – let us sow love

Scripture for meditation:

*His love is made complete in us* (1 John 4:12)

December 1, 2019

Sermon: Christmas Is Calling: Hope – Mary

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38 (NIV)

***28****The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”*

***29****Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.* ***30****But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.* (Luke 1:28-30)

The angel was the messenger of God’s calling to Mary. The angel tells Mary not to be afraid and then tells her what God is calling her to do. I suppose if an angel appeared in my house and said “Greetings” my first reaction might be fear. When God calls us it can be scary. Fear is a reason many do not respond to God’s call. But Mary responded with obedience. She found favor with God.

Twice the word “favor(ed)” appears in this passage. We have read or heard this scripture many times, but did you ever really pay attention to the word “favor?” When you think about it, was it really a good thing? Those who have been favored by God did not have an easy life: Moses, Noah, Daniel, David , Paul and Mary. Mary was called to be the mother of Jesus. What an amazing calling to be chosen to birth the Savior of the World. But from the beginning, life for her was not easy. She was an unwed pregnant woman whose betrothed almost divorced her. They had to travel many miles at the end of her pregnancy. There was no room in the inn, so she gave birth in a stable. They had to flee to Egypt to protect him. We don’t have a lot of information about his childhood, but I’m sure it wasn’t easy. And then to watch as your Son is falsely accused, beaten, and crucified is almost too much to bear. How can this be God’s favor? Where is hope in the midst of all of this?

Favor is connected to grace and it is by God’s grace that we are saved. Grace is defined as “the freely given and unmerited favor and love of God” (dictionary.com). Years ago I found a definition of grace that I have pondered in my heart: “Grace is God’s active presence and transforming power in our lives.” So God’s favor, or grace, is His unconditional love and presence in our lives. So Mary, Moses, Noah and all the others had God’s favor, because God was with them in the midst of their struggles. And that is where we find Hope.

Let us pray:

* That we will hear God’s call to hope
* That we will know God’s favor – His love, grace, and presence
* To be messengers of Hope
* That all may know Jesus is the Hope of the World

Scripture for mediation:

*The Lord is with you.* (Luke 1:28)

December 8, 2019

Sermon: Christmas is Calling: Peace – Joseph

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

***19****Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3A18-25&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23164b)*] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

***20****But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.* ***21****She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[*[*c*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3A18-25&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23166c)*] because he will save his people from their sins.”* (Matthew 1:19-21)

Peace… this is probably the farthest thing from Joseph’s mind. The woman he was to marry was with child. The life he had planned was falling apart. It was not peaceful. Yet, he was a kind man and willing to divorce her quietly; peacefully as not to disgrace her. Then he receives a different call. A call away from what was culturally expected. A call to trust in a change of plans. A call to not be afraid.

Often we get **our** plans turned upside down. We look to blame someone or something for messing up our lives. We seek justice from life for the unfairness of it all. We live in fear. And as long as we carry the anger, vengeance, and fear we will not know peace. Joseph found peace in the midst of the chaos. He found peace in spite of the fact that life was not going according to his plan. And that peace comes from Christ. Jesus said to his disciples*, peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid,* (John 14:27). The angel said “do not be afraid” to Joseph. So perhaps peace is the calming of our fears in the midst of life’s difficulties. We must seek God’s kingdom first, and the gift of peace will be given to us.

We are called to be people of peace. Jesus said *blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God,* (Matthew 5:9). Paul tells us *as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone,* (Romans 12:18). This cannot be done under our own power. We must ask for and seek out the peace Jesus describes; the peace that is not of this world.

Let us pray:

* To hear God’s call away from the cultural expectations
* That in the midst of trials, conflict, or hardship we will experience God’s peace
* That we will be God’s peacemakers
* For peace on earth

Scripture for meditation:

*Peace I leave with you…* (John 14:27)

December 15, 2019

Sermon: Christmas is Calling: Joy – Shepherds

Scripture: Luke 2:8-20

***10****But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.* ***11****Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.* ***12****This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

***15****When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”* (Luke 2:10-12, 15)

Have you noticed that in the past three weeks there has been a common phrase in the scripture verses? “Do not be afraid.” The angels said it to Mary, to Joseph and now to the shepherds. In fact, the phrase, or a similar phrase “fear not” appears more than 100 times in scripture. And as we have seen, a few of those occurrences are in the Christmas story. The angels begin their message with a reassurance. They were bringing Good News of Great Joy!

The shepherds were called in the midst of their work day to drop everything to go see this joyful happening! What happens in our day when we get interrupted? Irritation, frustration, anger maybe? Probably not joy! But the shepherds responded to the call with joy.

Joy is different than happiness. Happiness is an emotion often dependent upon circumstances. Joy is dependent upon God. It is confusing to say that we can find joy in the direst circumstances. That is because no matter what happens, we always have God with us…Emmanuel. He is our joy!

I remember that song we sang as children:

“I have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart…WHERE? Down in my heart to stay!”

Let us be like the shepherds and respond to God’s call with joy! We have joy in hearts….share the joy!

Let us pray:

* To see the signs of God’s call
* To respond without fear
* For opportunities to be messengers of the Good News of Great Joy
* For the joy of Christ to fill our hearts

Scripture for meditation:

*…the joy of the Lord is your strength.* (Nehemiah 8:10)

December 22, 2019

Sermon: Christmas is Calling: Love – The Wise Men

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2%3A1-12&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23171a)*] from the east came to Jerusalem* ***2****and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”* (Matthew 2:1-2)

“Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, Love divine.

Love came down at Christmas, stars and angels gave the sign.” (UMC Hymnal #242)

Gift giving is a tradition of the Christmas season. Contemporary traditions include Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Giving Tuesday, holiday sales and the craziness and stress of finding just the right gift.

However, God was the first gift giver. God sent his Son as a gift to the world; the perfect gift. And when this gift of love came down to earth, the angels sang and the star shone bright in the sky to let the world know. The star led the Wise Men to Divine Love, the greatest gift of all. They came bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They bowed down to worship the baby of Bethlehem; the King of Kings; the Savior of the world.

Jesus calls us to love…to love God and to love one another. We show God love by worshipping Him and following Jesus. And we show God love by loving one another. For God is love and anyone who doesn’t love doesn’t know God (1 John 4:8).

Love came down at Christmas. Let us live a life of love, worshipping God and sharing God’s love with everyone.

Let us pray:

* To worship in Spirit and in truth
* To seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness
* For generous hearts to give our best gifts to God
* For the world to know the love of Jesus

Scripture for meditation:

*For God so loved the world…*(John 3:16)

December 29, 2019

Sermon: Christmas is Calling 365

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6

*For to us a child is born,  
    to us a son is given,  
    and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
    Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
    Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* (Isaiah 9:6)

Merry Christmas! The time that we have been waiting for is finally here! We have been talking about the hope, peace, joy, and love of this advent season. We have viewed the Christmas story through the lens of “calling;” Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, and the Wise Men all received a call from God. I want to remind us all that we are called to be living our lives with that hope, peace, joy, and love year round. It’s not just for Christmas.

How different the world would be if those of us who know Jesus lived our lives like we knew Jesus. Too often the world squeezes out the hope, peace, joy, and love that we receive from our relationship with Jesus. Every day we need to remind ourselves that “unto US a child is born; unto US a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6) Every day we have the Mighty God who calls us to follow Him. Every day we have the Wonderful Counselor who guides our thoughts and our actions. Every day we have the Prince of Peace who calls us to live peaceably with one another and to be filled with the peace that passes all understanding. Every day we have the Everlasting Father who calls to us, comforts us, leads us, guides us, loves us.

Now that Christmas is almost over, don’t let the hope, peace, joy, and love of the season end. Let us carry the Gospel story and our own stories into the New Year. Let every day feel like Christmas!

Let us pray:

* We will live our lives worthy of the calling we have received (Ephesians 4:1)
* To continue the message of Christmas throughout the year
* To receive and share God’s hope, peace, joy, and love

Scripture for meditation:

*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6)