



GPS GUIDE: JANUARY 29, 2023 G r o w . P r a y . S t u d y .

Series: Back to Basics

Sermon: Less is More

Monday: Read Isaiah 41:1-10

The 41st chapter of Isaiah is a magnificent statement of God's power. The prophet reminds these people in exile how and why the God of Jerusalem is different. Surrounded by people and powers they didn't understand, Jews were afraid, life was changing, they were unsure. Often, we can relate. We know what it is to be afraid—afraid of what is happening in the world, afraid of economic hardship, afraid for our children, afraid of the future. We need to hear these words from Isaiah reminding us of the power of God even in the midst of the tumult of life. God reassures us of God's ever-present love and grace and in God's promise we find hope to sustain us. What are you afraid of? How can these words from Isaiah offer you a promise of hope? A sense of peace?

Prayer: Lord, give us the confidence to let go of our fear even as we trust more fully in you. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Ephesians 2: 11-22

Rev. Alan Brehm says, "Paul affirms that the cross of Christ means that God's *shalom*—God's peace that brings new life—has been extended to all people, without exceptions, qualifications, or omissions!" The good news here is that *all* the barriers have been destroyed—the ones between heaven and earth as well as the ones we throw up around us to make ourselves feel "safe." In our world we're much more comfortable with posting a sign like "No strangers allowed" that reflects the suspicion and fear of our time. But perhaps it is time for us to acknowledge our fear, confront it, and turn that very slogan on its head. "No strangers allowed" means that we refuse to acknowledge the barriers and boundaries that divide our world. "No strangers allowed" means we acknowledge that God loves and accepts all people and therefore we do too. "No strangers allowed" means that in the Kingdom of God nobody is a stranger, therefore in this congregation nobody is a stranger. When have you felt like a stranger who was not allowed or included? How can our congregation better remove the lines in the sand and welcome all?

Prayer: Welcoming God, help us remove barriers and live in your shalom. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Psalm 71

Anne Lamott once wrote, "It's funny: I always imagined when I was a kid that adults had some kind of inner toolbox full of shiny tools: the saw of discernment, the hammer of wisdom, the sandpaper of patience. But then when I grew up I found that life handed you these rusty bent old tools -- friendships, prayer, conscience, honesty - and said 'do the best you can with these, they will have to do'. And mostly, against all odds, they do." It seems to me that Psalm 71 is one of those rusty, bent tools for people of faith no matter in what stage of life we find ourselves. This Psalm is primarily a declaration of an individual's trust and hope in God that can be voiced in various life stages: birth (v. 6), youth (vv. 5, 17), and old age (vv. 9, 18). No matter when it is voiced, one thing is sure: the Psalm's message of trusting and hoping in a faithful God is capable of enduring throughout the long-haul of life. When you look back over the span of your life when can you see that you have depended upon God? How has that trust in God shaped your life?

Prayer: You, O Lord, are my hope, my trust. Amen.

Thursday: Read Psalm 133

In the words of the Psalmist, we are reminded of the joy of living lives which are found to be at peace with one another: the joy of sharing generously one another's existence as we were created to do. It is the joy and peace which God longs for us in our relationships with one another; it is why Jesus came and lived and died and rose again that we might have peace with one another and with God. Life in all its fullness is life with each other and God. Is this not a great vision of whom we are meant to be as a human race - people who live together in unity: in joy and peace with one another? The idea of Jesus' resurrection inspired the early Christian communities. It was a radically new way of viewing life and death and gave hope a new direction. Jesus' resurrection was an anomaly for the prevailing Hebrew thought and Greek philosophy. God was doing something new and different, and this gave people hope. It was these things that kept people in that early church and inspired them to share the good news - God's peace had been declared and a new hope, a new future was promised in Jesus Christ. So it was, that from that small band of followers, great proclamation and deeds flowed generously and graciously into the world; the church blossomed and grew from a handful of followers to be the dominant faith in the world. What brings you joy? How are you sharing the abundant life you have in Jesus? How is God inviting you to rediscover Christ's call on your life?

Prayer: Lord, it is good and pleasing when we live together as one. Amen.

Friday: Read Luke 2:22-40

There are many amazing instances of faithfulness in the beginning chapters of Luke - Mary's faithfulness; Zechariah's faithfulness; the shepherds' faithfulness. But Simeon and Anna's faithfulness is astounding. At least the other three had visits from angels to rely on. Without so much as a nod from a passing seraph, Simeon looks at this tiny scrap of baby and sees the salvation of the world. Oh, to have the eyes and faith that Simeon had, the eyes and faith to recognize God's redemption in unlikely bodies and

the faith to proclaim it. How can I become a person who can recognize God's unfolding redemption, and respond with Simeon's words? What can we as a community do to cultivate the eyes of Simeon?

Prayer: Open my heart that I might see with faithful eyes. Amen.

Saturday - Read Psalm 78 1-4:

*My people, hear my teaching;
listen to the words of my mouth
I will open my mouth in parables,
I will utter things hidden from of old—
the things we have heard and known,
things our ancestors have told us.
We won't hide them from our children;
we will tell the next generation,
that our ancestors have told us.
- Psalm 78.1-4 (The Inclusive Translation)*

The author of Psalm 78 understands the power of story, and the absolute necessity of it. They understand that we cannot know God without stories; that we cannot know ourselves without them. The psalmist knows that we cannot be the people of God without telling the story of God, passing the story on to each generation. *Things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us*, the psalmist writes.

We speak of getting lost in a story, but part of what draws us to a story is the promise of finding: finding a different world, finding another time, finding ourselves. There is something in us that hungers for a story, an empty space that is shaped precisely to its contours. We reach for the threads that a story offers, we enter the rooms it opens to us, we inhabit the skin of another and somehow, in the hands of a good story, we are returned to ourselves. And we are perhaps holding the threads of our own stories a bit differently, or entering a new space within ourselves, or finding ourselves able to inhabit our own skin more completely.

Jesus understood that in a world where it can be so difficult to know God, to know others, to know even ourselves, a story can offer a language, a doorway, a point of entry. He knew how a story can take us a little deeper into knowing, a little farther down the road in our journey of return. A story offers faith.

We won't hide them from our children, the psalmist writes. And perhaps that's where the true power of a good story lies: that it unhides something, reveals something—and someone—we need to know. This is how your faith, becomes my faith, becomes our faith.

What stories are you listening to? What stories are you telling? How does your story reveal your faith? With whom are you sharing the story of your faith?

