

Our Living God
22nd Sunday After Pentecost – Year C
November 10, 2019
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Church of the Good Shepherd, Dunedin, FL

- SERMON -

The Deal -

A young boy had just gotten his driving permit. He asked his father, who was a minister, if they could discuss the use of the car. His father took him to his study and said to him, "I'll make a deal with you. You bring your grades up, study your bible a little and get your hair cut and we'll talk about it."

After about a month the boy came back and again asked his father if they could discuss use of the car. They again went to the father's study where his father said, "Son, I've been real proud of you. You have brought your grades up, you've studied your bible diligently, but you didn't get your hair cut!"

The young man waited a moment and replied, "You know Dad, I've been thinking about that. You know, Samson had long hair, Moses had long hair, Noah had long hair, and even Jesus had long hair...."

To which his father replied...."Yes, and they WALKED everywhere they went!"

(Pause)

A father's guidance. So important, isn't it?

Whether we have or had an earthly father to guide us and teach us, one thing we can know. We have a heavenly Father, God the Father, a living God, who loves us, wants only the best for us, and will love us through eternity.

He is not a myth; He is not a story made up merely to give us something to cling to when things get tough.

Even Job, who we read from this morning and who went through so much, said,

Job 19

“For I know that my Redeemer lives”

Job knew our God would never leave us or forsake us. Which means, in the moments when it seems IT’S not working according to our plan, God still has a purpose for your life. He’s still near, even when your heart is broken. He’s still near even when you don’t feel the momentum on Monday that you had on Sunday. He’s not a far-away God. He’s not standing off in the distance waiting for you to get your act together. He’s the God of my gaps. He’s there when I’m guilty. He’s there when my faith is gone. He’s there when my hope is low.

In Paul’s first letter to Timothy this morning he said, (4:7- 9) – “Train yourself for a holy life! While physical training has some value, training in holy living is useful for everything. ... Our hope is set on the living God, who is the savior of all people,.... Command these things. Teach them.”

So, what is it Paul wants us to teach? Prior to this reading in I Timothy 4 – in Chapter 3 starting in verse 14 Paul writes to Timothy:

“I hope to come to you quickly. But I’m writing these things to you so that, if I’m delayed, you’ll know how you should behave in God’s household. It is the church of the living God and the backbone and support of the truth.” He continues to say, “Without question, the mystery of godliness is great: he (Jesus) was revealed as a human, declared righteous by the Spirit, seen by angels, preached throughout the nations, believed in around the world, and taken up in glory.”

When we invite God into our lives, understand He does not simply wish to stay in your guest room. Many people wish to have a God to call on when things go wrong in our lives – when we or someone we love has a health issue, or when our children don’t live like we wish they would live, we’d love a Jesus around to help straighten them out.

We have a living God and we, as his children, are in His family – just like you and your children, or your parents - are family. You may have experienced that stage in the lives of your children when they were teenagers or young adults, when they wanted to have us around - when things got rough, but otherwise, ‘don’t interfere in my life, mom and dad’. There’s a book I read when my sons were teens called Get Out of My Life, But First Could You Drive Me and Cheryl to the Mall? By Anthony E. Wolf, Ph.D. Does this sound familiar? You may have had kids that sound like this. You may have BEEN the kid that sounds like this with your parents. Thankfully, they/we usually grow out of this.

This is how many Christians are. We want Him in our dark times, “but don’t interfere with my life, Lord”.

Many people feel this way because they think before we can ask God to be in our life, we have to get our act together,

quitting all of our bad habits, maybe memorizing parts of the Bible – and all of that is good and wonderful. But the good news is God doesn't force Himself on us, and the better news is, He's there with open arms when we're ready to come to Him.

Do you remember the story of Jesus on the cross and the thief who hung on the cross next to him? When that thief said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" Jesus, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God, the standard of perfection, the One in whom the radiance of the glory of God shown for all to see, looked back at a dying thief who represented any sin you want to mention in this room and said, "I tell you the truth, today – today! – you will be with me in paradise." Today, not after you have taken a confirmation class and made changes in your life. And the thief died, and was in glory on that day in the presence of God.

But we are here today, not in God's glory, but here, in the process – with a Living God. Who is here with us – in the process. Inviting God into our lives does not mean that your life is going to immediately look like paradise. But God is in the process.

I know He's in the process because He sat at the table with His disciples before His crucifixion. And I know God is in the process because after His resurrection He sat at the table with Cleopas and another disciple and He blessed the bread. I know that the same bread that He blessed, He broke. And I know that same bread that was broken, was still blessed when He gave it to them.

See, the thing you need to know about your life is that even when you're broken, you're still blessed. The reason I am

blessed is because the hand of God is on my life. As long as the bread was in the hands of Jesus it was blessed no matter what form IT was in. And so, in every stage and every season of my life He's blessing me – Process.

Salvation is not about a product. Salvation is a relationship with a living God, whether we feel we are being blessed or broken. There are stages in our life, some call it a journey, but it's a process.

(Pause)

As many of you know, Bob, my husband, and I have been living in St. Petersburg. We've been serving and worshipping here at Good Shepherd for coming up on six years in January. Bob and I finally made the decision to try to find a place up here. Some very generous friends allowed us to use their winter home here this summer while they were up north to allow us to focus on doing just that. After some disappointments, and knowing our northern friends were coming home soon, I've got to say, I was MORE than disappointed and stressed.

But I, too, am in process.

I will say that Bob and I did find a lovely condo where we just moved into a couple weeks ago - right here in Dunedin. Yay!

But I refuse to stand up here like I have "arrived". I'm not the deacon because I've arrived. Please don't be too disappointed, but I'm not perfect! I'm the deacon because God anointed me to the ministry of helping others along their journey. And when I go through stresses and frustrations,

afterward I find I relate better to those I minister to because I understand their stresses and frustrations.

Our lives, our process, our journey has stages – some good, some not so good. But I am reminded of a conversation years ago when I was going through a very difficult time in my life and I really wanted to get past that stage in my life. And someone said basically, “I understand you want to get past this stage of what you’re going through, but I encourage you to show up for every stage, because every stage will have challenges, battles - but it will also have blessings. And through each stage you will grow and be better prepared for the next one.”

And as we go through the stages of our salvation process, though there is something we didn’t think we would ever make it through, but our living God walked with us and got us through it. And I’m sure if we look back, we can say, “I may not be where I want to be, but thank God I’m not where I used to be!”

So, when we face the next difficult stage in our life, it’s good to have that experience in our past because we can look back and borrow from the confidence of what God has brought us through and use it for our next battle!

The grace that gave me salvation is the same grace that will strengthen my faith and walk me through the next difficult battle. It’s when you say, “God, I can’t. God, I don’t know how. God, I don’t know what to do”, you can remember that the grace of our LIVING God is with you, and will lead you, guide you, carry you when necessary.

There’s an old hymn titled The God of Abraham Praise.”
Some of those words say:

Our living God, Ancient of everlasting days, the great I AM.
His spirit still flows free.
We praise you, Living God, we praise your holy name.

Remember these words in a few minutes as we partake of the
bread that is blessed and broken – yet still blessed - for us.

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