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Sermon
RHC
6.6.21

- We have been in the midst of a fantastic series based in part on the book “What if Jesus was Serious?” by Skye Jethani
- Jethani takes us through the “Sermon on the Mount” in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapters 5-7
- Today we are going to deviate from our planned script, but only partially
- While I am not drawing directly from Jethani’s book today, I am wanting us, nevertheless, to hold fast to this concept of the absolute seriousness of our faith

Let us turn to Joshua 22 for today’s Scripture reading:

Joshua 22:1-6

New International Version

Eastern Tribes Return Home

22 Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh ² and said to them, “You have done all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded. ³ For a long time now—to this very day—you have not deserted your fellow Israelites but have carried out the mission the Lord your God gave you. ⁴ Now that the Lord your God has given them rest as he promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan. ⁵ But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you: to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to keep his commands, to hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.”

⁶ Then Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their homes.

Deuteronomy 6

New International Version

Love the Lord Your God

6 These are the commands, decrees, and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² so that you, your children, and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³ Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.^[a] ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Jeremiah 31:33

New International Version

³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord.

“I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

- Loving God is not something to be taken lightly. In fact, our Old Testament speaks of loving God at least 310 times. Our New Testament comes up with a tally of at least 348 times!

- Now, I know it is much easier to talk about loving God, or about doing just about anything, than it is to do it! In fact, when it comes to following God's commands, truthfully, they (His commands) are impossible for us to live out apart from the infilling of the Holy Spirit.
- A few weeks, on May 23rd, we celebrated Pentecost Sunday. That is the day we remember the magnificent event of God's Holy Spirit falling on the first believers, 120 of them, in "the upper room" in Jerusalem.
- So what was that experience that the early church initially experienced and then continued to experience as it grew and multiplied and spread literally all over the world?

The ancient prophet Joel spoke of this experience himself;

Joel 2:28-29

New International Version

The Day of the Lord

²⁸ "And afterward,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your old men will dream dreams,

your young men will see visions.

²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Many of us know or perhaps think we know what following God means. And some of us are right. But also, many in our modern, era, what is often called the "post-Christian world",

Life is not so simple.

It is in fact quite tumultuous, unpredictable, and seemingly out of control.

There is a PBS docu-series out right now called, "World on Fire". It is a life-like yet fictional portrayal of the lives of several families and their experience of living through the explosively out of control Nazi invasions of Europe and the ensuing war that literally engulfed all of Europe and North Africa. What we see in this film is the reality that we so often want to hide from;

This world and what is happening around us is out of control:

Today is no different than at any time in human history. Life has always been chaotic. Ever since the fall of humanity.

Covid

Riots

Divisions

Markets up and down

Wars and rumors of wars

Artificial Intelligence Developing

And a world seemingly careening out of control

But what is the antidote for anxiety?

Where is deliverance from our Depression?

Who will be the salve for our stress?

The hidden place for our harrowing times?

Be the infallible answer to our fear?

Our comfort and calm in the calamity?

Actually, our answers lie not in a religion, though studies show people do turn to religion in crisis, not in the ability of our government to care for us, though that may help;

No, our answers are not in our ability to control what is going on around us, though we all must do our part to do the right thing.

No, our answer is in the Person of Jesus Christ. When all else is stripped away, as it was for the original Apostles 2,000 years ago, what is left is the unvarnished faithfulness of Jesus Christ alone. I am sometimes discouraged from sharing too personally from the pulpit, understandably. The pastor's time of preaching and teaching should primarily be that. However, as I found myself tasked with giving you the message today, and then found myself realizing I didn't have but a short time to prepare for today; the question that popped into my head was this: If we were given say just 10 or 15 minutes in which to give, as the Apostle Peter said; in 1 Peter 3:15

New American Standard Bible

¹⁵ but ^[a]sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a ^[b]defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, but with gentleness and respect;

Paul said in 2 Timothy 4, [New International Version](#)

Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.

So today, I stand before you to tell you a bit of my story:

Born at a very early age

Like my father said before me, "I was born with nothing, and I still have most of that"

I, like each of you, came into this world, helpless, and yet hopeful;

Unable and unknowing, but with the ability to grow, learn and be the unique creation that God had for us to be;

But the world we came into was not the world God originally designed.

Folks, this is not the Garden of Eden.

We are told in Scripture that this is actually the devil's domain. He is the prince of the power of the air.

And he has legions of demons under his command. And not a one of them will speak truth.

I stand today before you as someone who grew up within organized religion; Presbyterian churches for the most part

However, truthfully, my religion was external. It was doing good works because it was "the thing to do"

It was what my parents and grandparents before me did. It was what my older siblings did.

And then, at 15, something that would change my life forever happened.

Friends of our family in Albuquerque New Mexico, where we had lived for 4 years while my Air Force Father was stationed there, told my parents about Jesus. They told them that Jesus is real. That He is alive. That He loves each and every one of us. And that the Scripture that says He and His Father, through the Holy Spirit, would come and make their home in them, if they would turn to Jesus and not asway.

So my folks packed up the car and took our family on a road trip from Dayton, Ohio, to Albuquerque. And the Moore family, adults, and teens, shared the life-giving message that Jesus Christ IS Alive! My parents gave their lives to Jesus Christ, asking Him to come into their hearts and to baptize them in His Holy Spirit.

I ended up going to a big Jesus Rally put on by a Youth organization called Young Life. I, too, gave my life to Jesus Christ. I did and He did. Came into my life that night.

I would like to say that was the last of my troubles. It was not.

Long story short, returning to Dayton Ohio and "the old way of life", I ran from God. I ran hard and fast and furiously away. I will spare you the details, but I made a royal mess of things.

I got in trouble with the law, breaking law after law after law

I got in trouble at school, breaking those rules over and over again.

I sank into the deepest abyss in life. I suffered debilitating depression that I tried to cover with alcohol and worse.

Things go so bad I came close to ending my life. And on the way risked many others lives.

You know what? The Lord came to me during the darkest of times and actually comforted me. He asked me in my heart if I was ready to "come back to him". I refused.

But you must know, God does not give up on any of us.

I deserved nothing, but I received His undying love.

Within months of graduation and living far far away from Ohio, way up in the Rocky Mountains of Montana, I gave my life back to Jesus Christ, lock stock and barrel.

Oh it was not easy, and it was not quick. I fell, as I still do. I stumbled as I still do. I made mistakes as I still do.

My brother gave me a book called, "Prison to Praise", written by a US Army Chaplain, in which he taught that God wants us to praise Him in and through all of our struggles. He also taught that what happened at Pentecost was still available to believers today. To be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Emerged in His Spirit.

I asked God for my life to be completely His, no matter what it took or takes. I asked to be filled with the Holy Spirit, which was promised long ago in Joel and talked about in Acts.

And what I found was that Jesus is true to His word. He came and made His abode with me, fills me with His Spirit, and teaches me His Word.

Up to now this has been the Rob story. But in closing I want to say, this is the story Jesus wants for each of us. Not my story, but yours. For we are all part of His Body, the Body of Christ.

And it is through our sticking together, walking with Christ, following His commands by the power of His Holy Spirit, that we can weather life's storms, and come to the point, as Paul did, of saying, "To live is Christ. To die is Gain." Philipians 1:21

And that is my life verse, modified a bit; "Whether I live or die, I live for Christ". And that is all I know.

Let us pray...