

WELCOME 20th August 2023 – 12th Sunday after Pentecost '23 A

Exodus 33:11-34:10 & 34:29-35

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Pastor John is closer to "back"...still a bit to go...but not long. God's hard at work! In the meantime... **Growing Praise** inserts & **Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.** Link will be on website...Tuesday...

As we move into this week...

"This above all; **to thine ownself** be true
And this must follow as the night the day
Thou canst be false to any man."

Act 1 Scene 3 of Shakespeare's Hamlet. Lord Polonius gives his son Laertes his best fatherly advice ^{b/4} the younger embarks on a sea voyage. His blessing at his back, the wind in his sails, his advice firm in his memory **AND** "above all" – "You be you"

That's not unlike the 21st century's siren call of hyper-expressive individualism...live **your** truth...live **your** self-proclaimed identity...don't let anyone else's rules box **you** in...And only in fully expressing **YOU** can you fully genuinely engage those around YOU. (cannot be false if you're true to YOU)

And by every measure, that road leads to emptiness, loneliness, hopelessness & soul-devouring self-worthlessness. What a stark contrast to the **Bible**...

*There is a way that seems right to a person,
but its end is the way to death. – Pr 14:12*

Moses **said**, "O Lord, if it is true that I have found favour with you, then please travel with us. Yes, this is a stubborn & rebellious people, but please forgive our iniquity & our sins. Claim us as your own special possession." – Ex 34:9

To strike out on my own way ends in death...but to live out of God's gracious presence admitting my own self-inflicted brokenness is to experience life in its fullest & God's restoring presence, love, delight & joy at every step.

God calls us to know him intimately, to know ourselves truthfully, & to trust & claim his promises completely.

We'll explore & experience that grace & wisdom as our blessing today.

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Father you call us as your own & release us into this world for your purposes. Let every thought word & deed be held firm in your grace. Make our worship today & our lives in all things a reflection of your mission to this world & the path ahead for this band of disciples one that invites others into your life & love. Amid challenges & changes equip us by your Spirit for whatever tasks you have set for us. Infuse your wisdom into our hearts so that we discern your will & way in all things for your glory & the widened embrace of your kingdom in this city...through Jesus we pray... Amen.

Let's hear God's word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. How would you describe your relationship with God at the moment? Personal? Intimate? Formal? Distant? Non-existent? Strictly Business? Why do you think that is?
2. What are 2 things you could do to improve your relationship with God over the course of the week?

12 PENTECOST '23 A – A JOURNEY OF PROMISE: CLAIMING THE PROMISE

Once you see the words...you'll recognize it:

And now the end is here
And so I face that final curtain
My friend I'll make it clear
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain
I've lived a life that's full
I traveled each and every highway
And more, much more than this
I did it my way

Maybe a **photo**...Ol' Blue Eyes himself. *My Way* was his signature song especially toward the end of his career. An anthem to hyper-expressive individualism. Not surprising others adopted it as "their own"...like **Elvis**. Every verse drips with self-congratulation, pride, hero-in-their-own-drama arrogance... "Regrets"? Sure... "But I did what I had to do."

For what is a man, what has he got?

If not himself then he has naught from Shakespeare to Sinatra to...Sinead O'Connor?

Like I mentioned to the kids earlier...When's the last time you really read an owner's how-to manual? Many manufacturers no longer print them because hardly anybody reads 'em...they're available online if you really want it. Most of us seem happy figuring stuff out on our own & only looking at the instructions when things don't work right.

AND That's how we relate to God. God who created us in His own image & breathed his own life into us – God who *IS* the source of our life & the One who gave *HIS* Word on how it was meant to be lived...Yet most of us plow along on our own, doing it **our** way...living **our** truth, pursuing **our** best life & only think about God or ask for help when things don't go according to **our** plan.

Maybe that's why I'm always drawn back to guys like Nehemiah & Daniel. Both of whom know the mess we make of life when we strike out on our own...Both write from exile...the absolute pit of disaster for God's people. Daniel's been in Babylon 70 years...Nehemiah writes as the exiles are starting to go back & rebuild Jerusalem...but both know what's essential... **Daniel 1st**...

I turned to the Lord God & pleaded with him in prayer & fasting. I also wore rough burlap & sprinkled myself with ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God & confessed: "O Lord, you are a great & awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant & keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you & obey your commands. But we have sinned & done wrong. We have rebelled against you & scorned your commands & regulations. We have refused to listen to your servants the prophets, who spoke on your authority to our kings & princes & ancestors & to all the people of the land. Lord, you are in the right; but as you see, our faces

are covered with shame. This is true of all of us, including the people of Judah & Jerusalem & all Israel, scattered near & far, wherever you have driven us because of our disloyalty to you. O Lord, we & our kings, princes, & ancestors are covered with shame because we have sinned against you. But the Lord our God is merciful & forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him...O my God, lean down & listen to me. Open your eyes & see our despair. See how your city—the city that bears your name—lies in ruins. We make this plea, not because we deserve help, but because of your mercy." – Dan 9:3-9 & 18

*There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death. Daniel knows that as well as anyone...Lord, **you** are a great & awesome God! **You** always fulfill **your** covenant & keep **your** promises of unfailing love...But **we** have sinned & done wrong... rebelled...scorned...refused...Daniel knows king after king turned to idolatry sorcery injustice foreign alliances...everything imaginable but trust in Yahweh...anything but repentance/returning to God relying on God's strength to lead/guide/save his people*

Daniel saw devastation & destruction & he knows it was deserved. But ^{w/in} that just judgement, Daniel also knows God promised to restore & rebuild & reclaim his broken fallen beloved people...70 years & Daniel knows the only way forward is by God's grace...according to God's very heart...the Lord our God is merciful & forgiving... We make this plea, not because we deserve help, but because of your mercy. God we know you owe us nothing, but according to your goodness your holiness your mercy...lead us out of death into life again. Make your mercy the defining mark of our lives

*As that restoration begins, God's people tire & falter in the process...they cease the work of rebuilding their city & its walls; so God lifts up Nehemiah: **When** I heard this, I sat down & wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, & prayed to the God of heaven. Then I said, "O LORD, God of heaven, great & awesome God who keeps his covenant of unfailing love with those who love him & obey his commands, listen to my prayer! Look down & see me praying night & day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family & I have sinned! We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, & regulations you gave us through your servant Moses. Please remember what you told your servant Moses: 'If you are unfaithful to me, I will scatter you among the nations. But if you return to me & obey my commands & live by them, then even if you are exiled to the ends of the earth, I will bring you back to the place I have chosen for my name to be honoured.'"*

Again...God's leader clings for dear life to God's promises & God's character not from a position of strength or what is deserved or owed by rights...but the exact opposite...because of God's mercy forgiveness through repentance. Complete openness vulnerability & brokenness **b/4** the Father. "Claiming the promise" means claiming only what God has promised...

I grew up in the Bible belt of the US. I lived among Xns who genuinely believed you could “name it & claim it” (blab it & grab it)...That you could simply plop open the Bible to any promise God had ever extended & say, “God I’ll have that one thanks.” We can’t put words in God’s mouth...We can only receive what God has said in the humility of those who deserve nothing. Look at Moses...

If it is true that you look favourably on me, let me know your ways so I may understand you more fully & continue to enjoy your favour. Remember this nation is your very own people.” The Lord replied, “I will personally go with you, Moses, & I will give you rest—everything will be fine for you.” Then Moses said, “If you don’t personally go with us, don’t make us leave this place. How will anyone know that you look favourably on me—on me & on your people — if you don’t go with us? For your presence among us sets your people & me apart from all other people on the earth.” And then...

“O Lord, if it is true that I have found favour with you, then please travel with us. Yes, this is a stubborn & rebellious people, but please forgive our iniquity & our sins. Claim us as your own special possession.” Moses makes it clear...1st foremost God gives himself: let me know **your** ways so I may **understand you** more fully & continue to enjoy **your** favour. For **your** presence among us sets **your** people & me apart from all other people on earth... God if it’s not obvious that you’re running the show & calling the shots & providing the wisdom strength guidance love & provision...if it’s not clear from 1000M that I’m walking in your steps...then I’ve screwed it up again. If people look at me & can’t tell

I said it the other week...I’ll say it again...Exodus points straight to Jesus: Jesus said, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, & Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” — [Jn 17:3](#) Apart from that intimate relationship we find only emptiness, loneliness, hopelessness & soul-devouring self-worthlessness. 21st cent is scarred by just that...mental health struggles & crises, rising suicide rates & drug abuse... Every survey of teens registers greater/greater levels of distress & diffusion Why? Because generation after generation has been told that true happiness & fulfilment are found w/in...do it your way...to thine ownself be true...What utter complete rot! I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection **AND** the sharing of his sufferings becoming like him in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! — [Php 3:10-11](#) Somehow even the pain I experience leads me deeper into Jesus...You thought cancer & trauma & that heart-rending moment that soul-deep frustration came to destroy you! No! It’s meant to draw you into the cross where healing begins & wholeness is restored & resurrection defeats death!

[Jer 9:23-24](#) - This is what the Lord says: “Don’t let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches. But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me & understand that I am the Lord who demonstrates unflinching love & who brings justice & righteousness to the earth, & that I

delight in these things.” If your life reveals **anything other** than intimate knowledge of & life w/ the Father...If all we do is glory in me/myself/I that way leads to death.

“O Lord, if it is true that I have found favour w/ you...please travel w/ us. Yes, this is a stubborn & rebellious people, but please forgive our iniquity & our sins. Claim us as your own special possession.” 2nd God only works with sinners. God doesn’t have a pure humanity – a sinless species to draw from. All God has is us & we’re a mess. But when God our Saviour revealed his kindness & love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sin, giving us a new birth & new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Because of his grace he made us right in his sight & gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life. — [Titus 3:4-7](#)

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time & died for us sinners... God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners ...For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God. — [Rom 5:8-11](#)

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TAKE IT HOME – As you leave today...be specific & share with your neighbour

Which of God’s promises will you trust more deeply & claim more fully this week?

With whom will you share that confidence in God?

Let’s pray with that in mind...

“Lord, do whatever you need to do **IN** us, so you can do whatever you want to do **THROUGH** us so that all whom we know in this city & beyond might be called into the embrace of your love, the fullness of your power & the joy of your purpose...through Jesus Christ...Amen.