

WELCOME 18th FEBRUARY 2024 – 1ST SUNDAY IN LENT '24 B

Psalm 119:33-37 & Matthew 4:1-11

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Along with your worship order you have **Growing Praise** inserts & **Bible Study Qs** that are able to lead you deeper into God's word/work in your life & help you share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.**

As we move into this week... "Roundabouts"... a pastor in the US told me they're building more of them there. I said, "The road crash toll will go up." He **agreed**... "People can't figure out the 1st, 2nd 3rd exit business." It's like the curse of Christmas toys or flat-pack furniture, "**Some** assembly required." It's more than just following instructions...it's that greater sense of direction/intention what the finished product is supposed to look like...or be...**goal**...

*Make me walk along the path of your commands, for that is where my **delight** is found...
Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me **life** through your word.*

Receiving the blessings of life & delight isn't like following a recipe for scones or an instruction manual for changing the oil in your car...step-by-step procedure-by-procedure until you get exactly what you want...

Life & delight are available only in relationship w/ the One who desires to give them abundantly...freely...generously *pressed down shaken together running over & dumped into your lap*... Life & delight are available only in relationship w/ the One who desires to walk **with you** into **HIS** fullness...

Jesus only ever issued one call...*Follow me*...Discipleship is to walk w/ Jesus such that all we are is absorbed in him...focused on him...directed by him...and where **HIS WORD** about God & about you is the word you trust to determine your identity & shape your life everywhere you are every day you **live**.

*Give me understanding & I will obey your instructions;
I will put them into practice with all my heart.*

Let's pray & then together live God's Word...

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

*Heavenly Father your Son Jesus came to this world to bring light & immortality to life. You sent Him as a bearer of joy & hope. Your Word speaks our name & calls us into life in its fullest measure. Speak to us today in our moments of joy & triumph or fear & distress. Rejoice with us in our celebrations & hold us in our griefs. Pour out your Spirit upon us that we may experience & share with those around us the life you desire for all your children. Above all things Lord draw us close to your heart. This day & every day may we know the full power of your Holy Spirit & the compassionate strength of your grace...
Through Jesus Christ we pray...Amen*

Let's sing again & then hear & put our hearts into God's Word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. When do you feel most under assault by "forces" larger than you?
2. When do you feel most defended by God?

1ST SUNDAY IN LENT '24 B – DISCIPLESHIP BEGINS WITH A “W”: WORD

I've probably shared ^b/₄ an experience from a long long time ago...I was over for dinner at some friends' home in Ohio & during the meal the daughter (@ 7th/₈th gr) shared she had decided ^w/_l some friends that they were going to the big dance at their High School & she needed to learn how to dance. It was one of “those” kinds of dances where you actually had to touch the person you were dancing ^w/_l...& their PE teacher wasn't helping...So after dinner, Rick (the dad) & I moved some furniture around in the lounge room & he & Liza had their 1st lesson.

He started by showing how he & her mom danced. Then he helped her move her feet in the proper pattern. Then they tried a couple of times & it was a bit of a mess. I think she was re-thinking her decision about the dance until finally Rick said, “Liza, take your shoes off...and come stand on my feet.” She giggled at first but as they moved around the room in synch ^w/_l the music a look of recognition grew on her face. She was getting it. He kept saying, “Don't look at your feet look at me. What matters is not getting the steps exactly right but that we dance together.” They did & it was gorgeous. There were smiles amid a few stumbles & joy in simply finding the rhythm in the music...& she was learning to dance.

*Make me walk along the path of your commands, for that is where my **delight** is found...
Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me **life** through your word.*

I think many of us were taught life ^w/_l Jesus, being a Christian, was like trying to dance by getting the steps exactly right. We were told we had to believe a specific set of teachings. We had to memorize correct doctrine. We had to recite the exact beliefs. Then we had to do it again. Then again. Then again. There was no margin for error BUT there were heaping helpings of guilt & more than a few doses of shame. Lather. Rinse. Repeat. Charis the “heretic”

What a far cry that is from...Make me walk along the path of your commands, for that is where my **delight** is found...Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me **life** through your word...OR EVEN...People do not **live** by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God...OR ESPECIALLY...This is my **dearly loved** Son, who brings me great **joy**.” Joy. Life. Delight. Love. What God has intended to share all along ^w/_l us...It really grabs me that last verse...God's shout of acclamation over his Son as Jesus is baptized, immediately precedes his being led/driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. The last words Jesus heard ^b/₄ he strikes out for the barrenness, darkness & desolation of his encounter ^w/_l the evil one were God's. He walks into this confrontation ^w/_l the confidence that God's joy, life, delight & love rest in him.

“This is my **dearly loved** Son, who brings me great **joy**.” **THEN**...Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. He goes to the wilderness having been told he is God's son. He confronts evil having heard he is beloved of God. He stands toe-to-toe ^w/_l the tempter knowing his Father is pleased ^w/_l him. Jesus has God's word on all of that ^b/₄ the 1st temptation. Whether Jesus says yes **OR** no to the temptations...he is God's son...he is beloved of God...God is pleased ^w/_l him. Those are not the accolades for successfully refusing the temptations. They are the preconditions to them. God's word of grace, God's gift of joy, life, delight & love always is first.

And especially...Jesus goes into the wilderness *led by the Spirit*. I always struggle to get a real image of what this looks like...but I think I was taught this was fraught & fearful...Jesus all alone half-starved & bedraggled under assault defending himself from the repeated blows of the evil one...nonsense. The Spirit walked Jesus into the wilderness (& ultimately the angels are there) Jesus doesn't enter the wilderness like a child at the drop-off lane at school...peck on the cheek & off you go... The temptation confirmed in Jesus his baptismal identity. He lived from the Father's voice of acclamation. He faced down the tempter from the strength of the love & delight of the Father. He refused to shift his allegiance, trust, & confidence away from God to some immediately available substitute that promises more now.

Why does Jesus use the Scripture...God's Word as his only weapon? Make me walk along the path of your commands, for that is where my **delight** is found... Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me **life** through your word. Life & delight are available only in relationship ^w/_l the One who desires to give them abundantly, generously & freely. Life & delight are available only in relationship ^w/_l the One who desires to walk **with you** into **HIS** fullness...In the wilderness, Jesus is delighting in the Word of his Father...he walks the path of beloved Son, in whom God finds great joy. It's not a test of strength but an affirmation of his heart living in synch ^w/_l the Father's...his feet in the exact steps of the Father's...Give me understanding & I will obey your instructions; I will put them into practice with all my heart.

Jesus is delighting in the Word of his Father...he walks the path of beloved Son, in whom God finds great joy. Those acclamations are the reality. They are his identity. Jesus could neither earn them nor lose them...Neither can we. The relationship God acclaims ^w/_l Jesus is the same relationship God initiates ^w/_l each one of us through our baptism into that Son's death/rez. In Jesus Christ crucified/risen/ruling each of us is a son/daughter whom God dearly loves & in whom God delights. Yes...you. **Remember:** Baptism is **NOT** my public profession of my private faith. Baptism **IS** the Father's public declaration of how he has felt about me since before time began.

It *is* my death & resurrection w/ Jesus...my dying & rising w/ & in him **BUT** it is HIS gift to me of the Holy Spirit to save/recreate me in Jesus' image...it is.

No temptation can change his mind...no success...no failure. That's your reality. That's your identity. And as the Spirit guided Jesus in **THIS** moment, you are forever held by the Spirit in **EVERY** moment. Don't think for a second that in the fire of some moment when you are faced w/ a choice to live out some other identity – something other than child of God – dearly loved child of God – in whom God takes great delight that the Father has left the building. The Father's love & delight in you does not stop at the desert's edge. He doesn't chuck you out into the deepest wasteland & say "Let's see if you can make it."

And in that moment when you're ready to "turn those stones into bread"...When you feel compelled to feed the hunger for attention/acceptance/approval...to say or do what's popular/easy but not right...to fill the heart-level vacuum - emptiness – restlessness - boredom & that sense of going nowhere so wherever we end up is ok as long as we're happy....to tell yourself I haven't killed anyone...when you know better but don't do better & cut corners, shade the truth, & give in to what everyone else thinks is ok? It's easy to justify. Everyone does it. No one got hurt. I deserve it. The ends justify the means. No one knew. My body/my business. **IN THAT MOMENT**, he's still there...*This High Priest of ours (Jesus) understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, & we will find grace to help us when we need it most.* - Heb 4:14-16

All temptations are the same...they all seek to corrode our confidence that what God has given is enough – that what God has promised will be sufficient – that God is trustworthy & sufficient & more importantly that God is who he says he is & we are who he says we are...loved, dearly loved, children in whom the Father delights...co-heirs w/ Christ possessors of every heavenly blessing...receivers of everything we need for life & godly living. All temptations seek to white-ant our trust in all we are & have at our disposal from the hand of God in the presence of his Son by the power of the Spirit. Honest opinion...among the fellowship of the tempted...I believe many Xns, lifelong followers of Jesus are actually scared of genuinely living from that assurance of dwelling in the life & love joy & delight of the Father w/ unlimited access to grace & power & provision everywhere we are every day we live. I believe we live small faith in our big God...Pr Jonathan Leeman writes, "God's Word, working through God's Spirit, is the most powerful force in the universe & in the church."...absolutely true...and Jesus only ever issued one call...*Follow me*...put your feet on his...your hands in his...your eyes on him...

Discipleship is to walk w/ Jesus such that all we are is absorbed in him...focused on him...directed by him...and where **HIS WORD** about God & about you is the word you trust to determine your identity & shape your life everywhere you are every day you live...There's real power here...when you & I live from that identity from that good news firmly planted in that promise of God to forever be with us & for us...then in every temptation satan must flee because Jesus has defeated sin/power of evil & they no longer have a claim on our hearts...satan must flee because in his death Jesus took sin/evil to death & by his rising gave us in return forgiveness, life & salvation & his relationship with the Father & now stands ruling over all things with hell crushed under his feet. We now live under the promises of the risen Jesus to thwart the plans & schemes of the tempter...now & always. Those promises...

The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. 1 Cor 10:13

But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory... because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world 1 Jn 4:4

Here's what else I know... Every day we will be confronted with a choice about whose way we will live, (God's or ours) whose will will be done, (God's or ours) whose purpose we will pursue (God's or ours) who will determine the shape of our life & the course of our day.

TAKE IT HOME - As you leave today, be specific & share w/ your neighbour...

What will you do this week, to put into *practice with all your heart* God's word of delight & love & the assurance of his strength in you?

With whom will you share your joy?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Be gone Satan...We belong to Jesus. We walk in his steps filled with his Spirit. Lord Jesus bring the fullness of your grace & strength to us so we cling to you in all times & circumstances & your love shines through us for your glory & the growth of your kingdom. Amen