

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

MARCH 4 - 8, 2019

TOU

SERMON SERIES

A Study of Philippians

MONDAY

Genesis 16

This week we begin a new sermon series, “*Finding God in the Wilderness*.” This week’s sermon is titled: “*The God Who Sees*.” We are told in today’s passage that God sees. How we long to be seen, to be noticed. How often we put our best foot forward, hoping someone will see. Take a deep breath and re-read this passage. What do you learn about the character traits of each of the individuals? It is easy to sugar coat them. If what we see in this passage was the only thing that we knew about them, how might you characterize them?

Sarai is barren. In her culture she would have felt guilty, felt that God must somehow be displeased with her. She is also somewhat manipulative. She manages the lives of others to achieve her end. And Sarai has a jealous streak that causes her to strike out against others to blame them for her problems.

Abraham is not much better. J.C.L. Gibson says this of Abraham: “He allowed this pregnant girl, a stranger in a strange land—whose status and that of her unborn child depended entirely on his whim, whom he had not long since bedded, and whose only fault had been a little pardonable bragging—to be driven from his home. It was a craven display of cowardice.” In today’s passage Abraham is not at all the “Father of Faith” as we generally see him.

And then there is the slave Hagar—a woman without a voice, without rights. Today we might go so far as to call her a sex slave, and yet she is a woman who is able to make her attitude of superiority known to another. Hagar is a woman who runs around taking matters into her own hands, only to find herself alone, endangering herself and her unborn child.

These are the people God reaches out to. These are the people God sees and loves. **God sees you.** God searches you out—not because of what you do right. Even in the midst of all that is wrong, He wants you to know He sees you. His heart breaks for you. He has a purpose, a plan for you. Rest in that today, and share that type of “seeing” with another.

QUESTION

Do you know people like Sarai or Hagar? Have you ever felt like Sarai? or like Hagar?

PRAYERS FOR BRYANT AND ANNE WILHELMSSEN

Pray for the Wilhelmsens, who serve through Global Grace Mission. They have been wandering the Refugee Highways from Germany to Afghanistan for years. God has planted their family here in the shadow of the Alps, and it is here where they mingle and reach out to the asylum seekers.

TUESDAY

Genesis 16; Matthew 4:1-11

Ishmael: God has heard. The story of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar is the story of a God who hears our cries. Tomorrow we celebrate Ash Wednesday, a day of prayer, fasting and repentance. It marks the beginning of Lent, the season when we reflect on Jesus dying on our behalf. It is marked by 40 days of self-denial and Lenten spiritual discipline. The 40 days replicate the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness in fasting and prayer right after His baptism.

It was during the wilderness temptation that Jesus was tempted with the things of this world. Instead of giving in, He waited on God. He sought God, turning His back on the temptation to take things into His own hands. At the end of the 40 days, the angels came and ministered to Jesus. God heard Jesus. The challenge of Lent, the challenge of every day of our lives, is not to give into the temptation to do things the world's ways (like sending your servant into your husband to have a child), but to wait on God.

Three years after His temptation, Jesus cried out on the cross: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" It was on the cross that Jesus endured the silence of God so that we would not have to, so that we might have the assurance that God hears.

God makes a promise to Hagar. He includes her and her descendants in His Book. He blesses those whom later generations will call enemies.

It is easy to love our friends, but the call of Jesus is to love our enemies as well. God's plan at the end of the day is that all nations will be blessed through Abraham's descendants, through Jesus—even those who live in hostility against us. Jesus, in fact, died for those who lived in hostility against Him. From the cross, He spoke words of forgiveness.

At times we have all been enemies of God, but He heard our cry and has forgiven us. We have a God who hears. He hears our pain, even when we are not willing to listen to Him, and He responds. But He has also given us an example to follow, to wait on God, to follow His ways, to love our enemies?

QUESTION

Who do we need to hear? Who do we need to respond to? Who are the enemies we need to respond to in love and forgiveness?

PRAYERS FOR BRYANT AND ANNE WILHELMSSEN

Continue to pray for the advocate teams who are preparing new refugee believers for asylum court in Southern Germany. Even though the country opened its borders for many refugees a few years ago, this is no longer the case. They have stepped up sending them back to the nations of their origin.

WEDNESDAY

Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 4:1-19

It is believed that Abraham was in his seventies when he left Haran to follow God's lead to the Promised Land. It was at least 25 years later when he had Isaac. Moses was 40 when he fled Egypt. The burning bush was 40 years later, and the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years. David was on the run from Saul for a number of years before Saul died and David became king (most likely at least a decade, give or take, after Samuel anointed him king). Elijah, after calling down fire from heaven and defeating the priests of Baal, fled 40 days into the desert before hearing the still small whisper of God on Mount Horeb. After Jesus was baptized, He immediately spent 40 days in the desert. And Paul did not begin his public ministry until at least 3 years after his Damascus experience. We live in a society that expects things instantaneously. God's work is often a lot slower.

Today is Ash Wednesday, the traditional beginning of the season of Lent. This is 40 days, not counting Sundays, until Easter. It's 40 days of preparation before we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. It's 40 days of reflection, introspection, repentance and self-denial. What might it look like for you to allow yourself to be set aside in preparation for God's work in your life? What might it look like for you to spend time waiting on God?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.” What might God be calling you to die to in order that new life might be born in you? How might you spend the next 40 days in order to open yourself up to a new work of God in your life? Maybe spend time fasting and praying. What might you give up? What might you take on? Might it be giving up some time on an electronic device or Facebook? Might it be giving up a meal, coffee, or chocolate? What might you take on? Reading a Christian book or more Scripture? Serving another person in some compacity? Spending time silently waiting on God? Being intentional about memorizing some Scripture? Keeping a journal and reflecting on God?

QUESTION

Ask God how He wants you to take advantage of this Lenten season. God has great plans for you, but first comes a time of preparation. How will you enter into this season of preparation, or will you let it go to waste?

PRAYERS FOR BRYANT AND ANNE WILHELMSSEN

Pray for ongoing children’s ministry among refugees from about ten various nations. They are learning more about who Jesus really is each week. Many of them are sent by their Muslim parents to Bryant and Anne to learn about Jesus.

**“The word devotion draws upon the Latin root for ‘vow.’ it’s a centuries-old word that conveys a solemn promise, a zealous dedication, an ardent love. It connotes loyalty, commitment, consecration, and sacrifice.”
What does it mean for you to be devoted to Jesus?**

In John 12:1-11 Mary of Bethany, in a gesture of unashamed, humble extravagance, anoints Jesus with a pint of exquisite perfume. The reaction of Judas is one of questioning rebuke. Might not this have been sold and the money given to the poor. “The contrast could not be more pronounced: Mary is generous; Judas is greedy. Mary is humble; Judas is arrogant. Mary is selfless; Judas is self-centered. Judas stands aloof; Mary kneels in humble adoration ... Mary has purchased a burial ointment fit for a king ... In contrast to so many depictions of Jesus’ followers as haplessly, cluelessly, and then terribly disillusioned by Jesus’ death, Mary here offers knowing devotion. She accepts the unnerving truth that her Lord will work his wonders in an unfathomably countercultural, even scandalous, way.”

What does it look like for you to be “devoted” to Jesus?

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This year during Lent I will give up:

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This year during Lent I hope to:

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Today I sense God telling me:

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Lent is a time of confession and reflection. As we begin this season, during the next few days ask yourself these questions from John Wesley:

1. Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I really am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?
2. Am I honest in all my acts and words, or do I exaggerate?
3. Do I confidentially pass on to another what was told to me in confidence?
4. Can I be trusted?
5. Am I a slave to dress, friends, work, or habits?
6. Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying?
7. Did the Bible live in me today?
8. Do I give it time to speak to me everyday?
9. Am I enjoying prayer?
10. When did I last speak to someone else about my faith?
11. Do I pray about the money I spend?
12. Do I get to bed on time and get up on time?
13. Do I disobey God in anything?
14. Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?
15. Am I defeated in any part of my life?

THURSDAY

Genesis 16, Isaiah 54-55

How do you describe yourself? How do you see yourself? As a slave? As a barren person not living up to your dreams, your visions, your hopes? Do you see yourself as helpless, as a victim, as powerless? God made promises to Abram and Sarai, but rather than waiting on God, rather than obeying God, rather than looking to give God glory, rather than resting in God, they took matters into their own hands; they lived out of their own ingenuity and efforts. The results of following the world's ways are loss of identity, loss of freedom, loss of joy, enslavement.

In our 21st century society, we believe we are free to make ourselves into whatever we desire to be. The possibilities are endless, we believe, limited only by our imaginations and lack of effort. But such is the lie that enslaves. Such is the lie that brings sorrow, conflict, defeat.

God makes promises. More than that, God fulfills promises, miraculous promises, and miraculous fulfillments—by His ways and in His timing. When we rest in Him—in His gracious provisions and gifting—rather than in our efforts, there is singing, there is the enrichment of life and discovering new possibilities. We cannot create our identities or find ourselves by ourselves. We discover authentic life by waiting on and trusting in God. Then we discover who we are as being children of God.

During the season of Lent, we do without, we fast, we set more time aside for seeking. In doing this, we leave the treadmill existence of making life about us, making life about what we accomplish, and receive life as a gift. We receive the gift of our identity from Jesus. In the Lord's Prayer, after addressing "Our Father, who is in heaven," Jesus says, "Hallowed be Thy Name." This is a confession that the One whose name is to be lifted up is not ours, but God's. Life is all about Him, not about ourselves. When we make life about us, our thoughts are too small. When we make life about Him, our barrenness turns into fulfillment. God comes to meet us in the midst of the wilderness of this world to bring forth a springtime of harvest. But it all begins by letting ourselves be found and by waiting on Him.

QUESTION

When have you tried to make a life for yourself rather than allowing God to give you a fulfilling life?

PRAYERS FOR BRYANT AND ANNE WILHELMSSEN

Pray for our refugee Bible study now numbering 35-50 people weekly. Many are eager to know more about Christianity and are prepared to give up Islam. Pray that God gives us wisdom to disciple them into a close relationship with the Good Shepherd.

FRIDAY

Genesis 16; Genesis 21:14-19

Reading this story from our 21st century American perspective is hard. At times one wonders why such stories are even in the Scriptures. On the surface, just about everything runs counter to the moral standards that Jesus calls us to live by. Where is the redemptive value in this story? It is always easy to stand back and judge another culture. When we do, we often miss the point of the story, and, maybe even worse, we miss where God might be speaking to us. Someday people will look at much of what we do and wonder how we too could have gotten it all wrong.

On the surface, one thing that is hard about this story is that God tells Hagar to go back to Sarai. He tells her to go back to the person who has been hurtful and abusive. What? Again, we need to get below the surface of our 21st century reading of the story. Hagar is a slave; in Genesis 16 she is a runaway slave. To continue on means her life will be in grave danger. By trusting God and going back, she will eventually be free. This will happen in Genesis 21 when Abraham will send her away after Isaac is born. On that occasion God will come to Hagar again, and this time He will bring provision and direction.

But here is the point. Often times God's first words to us are to go back. They seem strange. Go back to the place of pain. Go back to the place of insecurity. Go back and ask forgiveness. Go back and say you are sorry. Go back and set things right. Our immediate response: "But God, if I go back, I will be taken advantage of. God, if I go back, I am not sure I will be able to handle the emotions involved. God, help! I can't go back."

But we don't go back alone. We go back having had an encounter with God. We go back with God. We go back with His promises. We go back as changed individuals. And our going back actually allows God to bring release and freedom and the fulfillment of the promise.

QUESTION

Where is God telling you to "go back" with Him and revisit some circumstance to allow God to bring release and freedom from the situation?

PRAYERS FOR BRYANT AND ANNE WILHELMSSEN

Pray for local churches in their city. Christians tend to shy away from investing time with refugees due to the overwhelming needs that accompany this kind of ministry. Pray that German Christians are willing to open the doors of their churches to the needs of refugees.

Sources

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- Timothy J. Keller. Sermon on December 1, 1996, "Hagar and the Son." *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013.

