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PRESBYTERIAN POST



SEPTEMBER 2020

**Behold, I am doing a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?**

**I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.**

~ Isaiah 43:19 ~

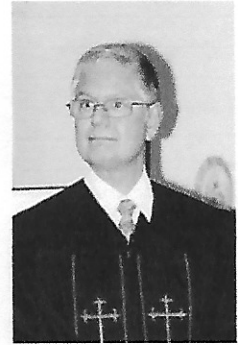
From the Desk of the Pastor



But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and,

beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

~ Matthew 14:27-33 ~



Remembering the Sacred in the Storm.

We are living in stormy times. As I am writing this, it is projected that two hurricanes may soon hit the U.S. Gulf Coast at the same time. But I am thinking to myself that we have more than two socio-economic hurricanes hitting our nation right now. There is the Coronavirus pandemic with all the sadness it brings; there is the economic devastation that trying to control the pandemic brings; there is a national election in a season of grave incivility and partisan polarization; and there is the issue of race relations, protests, and violence. We are indeed living in very stormy times.

Storms can be very disorienting. Storms can bring about uncertainty and a fear response. Just like a startle can trigger an animalistic fight or flight response, life's storms may cause us to forget that there is an all knowing, all wise, all powerful, and all loving God who holds in check all history to shepherd the best outcome for all of Creation. It is easy to lose sight of such lofty convictions when we are being spun around and battered by the circumstances of our day. This article is about getting reconnected with the grounding truth of God.

On 21 August, I had the privilege of talking to our Youth Group on the subject of Race Relations. It must be very confusing to the youth of our nation. Young people are very impressionable and they are bombarded with subtle and not so subtle messages all day long, especially if they are on social media. If they are acquiring their understanding of the world through social media, it means parents

may have little idea what it is they are taking in. What I shared with the youth is what I wish now to share with you. It is a biblical world view of the heart of God concerning race relations.

Our Youth Group lesson started with two great truths that we find in the first chapter of the first book in the Bible. These two great truths anchor all of Scripture. First, God says that all Creation is his. No other entity designed it, made it, or governs it. Then God says the most amazing thing about his design of human beings; God said that we are made in his image and likeness.

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

~ Genesis 1:26-27 ~

This is an awesome teaching. God wants us to know that he made us with a very special design and for a very special purpose. Our design makes it possible for God to comfortably dwell within us and us within him. There is a compatibility within our spiritual DNA and God's. I am sure this is one reason why God invites us to call him *Father* and Jesus *Brother*; we share spiritual DNA.

Being made in the image and likeness of God has many implications, some of which are spelled out in Scripture and others which can be inferred. I explained to the youth, that God tells us the reason that it is wrong to murder another human being is that they are made in the image and likeness of God.

*Whoever sheds human blood,
by humans shall their blood be shed;
for in the image of God
has God made mankind. ~ Genesis 9:7 ~*

A secular world view does not teach that murder is wrong because we are image bearers of the Most High God, our Creator. But this is precisely what God says. The world may have all sorts of practical reasons to outlaw murder, but those practical reasons have zero moral authority. Murder is morally wrong because God said so and God said so (in part) because we are made in his image.

In our Youth Group lesson, we talked about where this kind of thinking leads us. God tells us it is wrong to lie to another human being. Why? God tells us it is wrong to steal from another human being. Why? Why are we prohibited from slandering someone? Why can't we call someone bad names? Why can't we treat someone unfairly? One of the reasons is that they are made in the image of God¹. Doing unto another human being is like doing it unto God.

[The teaching of Jesus] 31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'²

¹ Another reason we are prohibited from these behaviors is that we are made in the image of God and such behaviors are incompatible with that image (our truest identity).

² Matthew 25:41-46 41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' 44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' 45 "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' 46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

~ Matthew 25:31-40 ~

Youth Groups provide for funny dynamics, because it was right around this teaching that someone made an awkward comment and one of the youth said, “You’re messed up.” The comment was innocent enough; that’s the way youth talk. Still, it was an opportunity to point out that such an expression flies in the face of our Lord’s guidance to us. We may encounter ideas that are “messed up” [at least to our way of thinking] but we are not free to call an image bearer of God “messed up.”

Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. ~ Matthew 5:22 ~

So far, we have focused on the things that we are not free to do because our fellow human being is made in the image of God. But, are there things that we are obliged to do for the very same reason? The Matthew 25:31-40 citation above seems to make a strong argument that the answer is yes. It seems that God rewards kindnesses. But does God require us to do kind acts? Short is ...yes!

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

~ Micah 6:8 ~

God requires more of his people than avoiding injustice or doing unkind acts. God requires his people to be part of the kingdom come. We then talked about justice and fairness. The youth were being quite patient as we sat around the fire pit, drinking hot cocoa and warming up from being in the pool for two hours. Justice means a lot of things. Rather giving a shopping list of specifics (very many specifics can be found in Scripture) it is sufficient to reflect on the *Golden Rule*:

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

~ Matthew 7:12 ~

The Golden Rule really is a great teaching. We do not need to go looking for specifics in Scripture for whether or not this action is allowed or that action is to be avoided. The *Golden Rule* allows almost all of us to get it right almost all the time. How awesome is that!

In our Youth Group, we try to emphasize understanding the heart of God, so that our faith does not become a bunch of rules. Verses like Leviticus 27:19 help us: "*Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow.*" [It is worth reflecting on the distinction between doing injustice and withholding justice.]

We finished up with what may have been a surprising teaching to our youth. But boy, is it near to the heart of God! We said that God can't stand it when people get religious, while refusing to do kindness and pursue justice for the downtrodden, marginalized, outcast, and vulnerable. I summarized from the Isaiah passage below. After all, the kids were eager to get back in the pool before finishing up for the night. I include the entire passage for our consideration.

"The multitude of your sacrifices — what are they to me?" says the Lord. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood! Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. [my emphasis added] Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. Come now, let us settle the matter," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; but if you resist and

rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

~ Isaiah 1:11-20 ~

It is a powerful teaching, that God does not want to see our religious activities when our hearts are not aligned to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Of course, God does not expect perfection, but if we are unwilling to “learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed” then we are also refusing to *walk humbly with our God* (Micah 6:8).

Please do not miss the heart of this teaching. It is not good enough to avoid doing injustice. It is not good enough not to oppress the downtrodden. It is not good enough to not abuse the fatherless or the widows. God says that we are to go out of our way to seek justice, and defend the oppressed and take up the cause of the fatherless and to plead the case of the widow. Sitting on the sidelines grieves the heart of God. God likens inaction to “Your hands are full of blood!” (Isaiah 1:15)

Lessons, such as our youth lesson on that Friday night, are never complete. Race Relations can be really hard, perplexing and even frustrating. Still, God provides us with a lot of teaching that helps us understand his heart on this topic. God’s People are Called to be instruments of truth, love, justice, and shalom. We are, each of us, on a lifelong journey and how we understand our own Calling evolves over time. The constants are God’s love for us and God’s providential care for all Creation. And, after all, it is these constants that enable us to get through the storms.

... there is an all knowing, all wise, all powerful, and all loving God who holds in check all history to shepherd the best outcome for all of Creation.

Pray: Father, we live in a sacred time of unrest and disquiet. We know that through Christ you enable us to know a Peace that passes all human understanding. You promise that storms will not overtake us, but rather it is possible for us to walk above the stormy waters, as long as we stay focused on your Calling to us. Would you please grant me wisdom and courage that I might rise to the challenges of these days and be an instrument of your peace everywhere you Call me? Help me to bless others in matchless Name of Jesus. Amen.

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SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS

SEPT. 6	Barbara Elsenheimer
SEPT. 7	James Robords
SEPT. 10	Julie Timmerman
SEPT. 10	Mark Stover
SEPT. 10	Liz Kernan
SEPT. 11	Dan Moore
SEPT. 19	Olivia Chatain
SEPT. 21	Ethan Rodriquez
SEPT. 27	Darla Kennell

EARLY OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

OCT. 1	Joanne Kame
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CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY

Christian sympathy is extended to the family of Betty Emo. Betty was a seventy-year member of our church.



SEPTEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

Sept. 25 Nick and Brecken Jones

MISSION COMMITTEE REPORT

Last month our Mission Committee made a donation to the Camp Whitman Fund. If you have an organization or a family that you feel is in need and who you would like this committee to make a donation to, please let Lorraine Glidden know and she will take it to the Mission Committee for consideration.

NEWSLETTER

If you are receiving this newsletter and would like to be taken off our mailing list, please let Darla Kennell know at darla.kennell@yahoo.com. If you are receiving a hard copy of the newsletter and would like to receive an electronic copy, please let Darla know.

NEWS AND NOTES

DID YOU KNOW....

There is an organization in America called: Full Circle America (Empowered Aging). Headquartered in the state of Maine. An article appeared in our Evening Tribune this summer relating they had been given some funding by Care Compass Network Innovation Fund. They were ready to make it available to more Senior Citizens in our Steuben County under the auspices of Full Circle America. This program is with Steuben County's Office for the Aging (SSSF) program out of Bath, NY. SSSF is a non-profit, independently administered fund.

They gave their phone number, which I called. They immediately came the next day to talk to me. Their pamphlets on this program are titled "Smart Devices to help you age in Place" (Empowering Seniors to Age in Place) under this they outfit your home with different gadgets that are interactive with the Person/s. I also am given a Dr. to call if I have questions about my health. They refer you if needed to your own local Doctor.

There is a fee (first few months are free) depending on your income but the fee is very reasonable. They asked for my Social Security income and that was all. All devices they put into my home were free to me.

I have the Evening Tribune article and the program's pamphlets if anyone wishes to read them.

Lorraine Glidden