

NOVEMBER 13, 2022

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



SERMON November 6 'Another Reaps What We Sow: David' 1 Samuel 16:1-13, 2 Samuel 12:7-14

This week we begin a series that piggybacks off of our last one on evangelism. We considered what evangelism looks like in it's fullest sense. Not just an invitation, but relationship. Not just welcoming to worship, but coming alongside to help people grow into a life changing and directing faith in Christ. As we lead up to Advent, we'll be looking at some figures in scripture that benefitted from this full approach to evangelism. We might not necessarily call it that, but in truth and spirit that's what it boils down to.

Evangelism is inviting someone into a closer, sometimes new, always life changing relationship with God and walking with them to help them achieve it.

This is all throughout scripture. Certainly in the Old Testament the idea of leading someone to Christ wasn't on the radar. It wasn't an option as He hadn't come yet. Nevertheless there are stories on stories where men and women were brought into deeper connection with God and it changed the direction and substance of their lives.

Today we look at David. He may not seem like he fits the description at first glance but in truth his life and those who came alongside him through it show us that he absolutely does.

We first see him called by Samuel. Samuel, the prophet of God has been tasked with seeking out the new king as King Saul had fallen into disfavor in God's eyes. David is just tending sheep like he does when Samuel comes to his father Jesse and asks to see Jesse's sons. One by one the parade with none of them being the next king. Samuel asks if there's another and sure enough the youngest, the unexpected, the unworthy is chosen and anointed.

This is David being "evangelized" not to Christ, but to a much greater life before God. And isn't this very much what we've been talking about the last weeks? Who is chosen? The unlikely. It wasn't for Samuel to choose who was worthy of the offer, simply to seek and make the offer. It's not for us to choose who is worthy of the offer of our love and Christ centered light. In fact perhaps frequently we are tasked just as Samuel was. To go to the one we don't think is the "right" one. The one who we don't think will accept the offer. If we have a little Jonah in us the one who doesn't deserve the offer. Yet many times this is precisely the person God wants us to go to.

David is being called into something so much bigger than himself. Israel isn't just a nation, they are God's nation. Like we are called to represent Christ to the world when we give our hearts to Him, so David is being called to represent God to the world as the leader of the nation of God's chosen people. Israel isn't just a political nation. It is also a nation steeped in religious tradition and spiritual reality. The prophets were a staple in the king's court. It wasn't just the place of the king to rule, but also his place to please God and seek God with how he ruled.

So David is anointed king, but it's not like he jumps right into that role. Saul still rules. David at the moment goes back to his family and sheep. It takes a journey, time, and people walking with him to eventually fulfill that role and become this man we know of who is the "man after God's own heart". So once he's called, and accepts it who ushers him through is akin to us when someone new enters the congregation seeking to know Jesus or simply find their way in this new community of which they find themselves a part. It takes help, nurturing, and guidance.

Strangely the King David would supplant in the early stages of his journey actually was instrumental in setting him up to become the king he would become. Saul green lit David to battle Goliath which established a reputation and courage for him. When he tried to back out of the offer of his daughter's hand in marriage to David he issued a seemingly impossible challenge. David would have to produce one hundred specific Philistine body parts. David offered up two hundred. Saul put David in military situations where David proved his warrior spirit and a profound ability to lead. This to the point

that people sang David's praises over Saul's, which drove Saul crazy. The point is that Saul saw promise in David and gave opportunity upon opportunity for David to grow into and develop that promise.

Once Saul had lost his mind and become murderous towards David, we see another who came alongside him in a very different way. Jonathan, Saul's son was David's best friend to the point that they were of one heart together. Jonathan warned David of his father's plots and anger. He was the one David could confide in and trust. He watched out for his friend. Were it not for Jonathan how many plots against David's life might have succeeded? If Saul was the leader who gave David opportunity, Jonathan was the arm in arm friend who supported him, who looked out for him, who loved him through his hardest parts of life on his journey towards kingship.

David had another helper in Joab, his trusted general. Joab was a more practical advisor and friend. They didn't always see eye to eye, but Joab was there to help him sort through military and even governing decisions. One instance came after David's battle with his son Absalom where Absalom was killed....oddly by Joab. David's grief was so great that he was showing more care for Absalom and his army than his own. Joab was the one to pull him up and remind David that as king he needed to show gratitude. Here were the men who bled with him, the families of the one's who'd died with him and David is being more sympathetic to the enemy. His grief was real and likely blinding. He needed someone to remind him that even through his grief he had responsibility and there were attitudes and practices that were correct and incorrect. To honor his role he needed Joabs in place to see him through his hard spots and call him out on his blind spots. Which brings us to Nathan, one of the great prophets of the Bible. Nathan was David's spiritual presence as king. The one who would help him hear the voice of God through his reign and hold him accountable to conduct himself not as a worldly king with all the "rights and privileges" thereof, but as a king devoted to God and Godliness.

After David's incident with Bathsheba and having her husband killed, Nathan corners David with a story about a rich man mistreating a poor man. David is outraged at the story and Nathan quickly points out that David is the rich man in the story, guilty of adultery and murder, and has a steep consequence awaiting him. He walks with David as a spiritual guide. The interaction between David and Nathan is wonderful despite it being rooted in some significant misdeeds on David's part. Nathan is an example of what it looks like to walk alongside someone growing into their role and call before God. When mistakes are made he is honest but not unkind. He sticks with David, continuing their relationship. This isn't a "well, I'm done with you." It's a "you done messed up, but I'm still with you kid."

David's reaction is similarly exemplary. He doesn't get angry with Nathan. He's not defensive. He is confessional and remorseful. Ultimately he accepts his punishment and I would say to an extent learns from the moment. This is how we all must be when we are growing, which we all are continually. When we are loved enough to be brought up by someone walking with us, and moreso when we know they are right, we don't fight it. We listen, we learn, and we love more deeply. The questions before us are around who is who to us, and who are we to each other?

Who is your Samuel? The one who saw something in you and called you. Who is your Jonathan, the one who walks with you closely and dearly loving you through the journey? Who is your Joab? The practical voice that helps you sort through complications and choices to find the best road forward. Who is your Nathan? The one you turn to when the need of spirit is deep, or you need that honest, Godly perspective to help you live more rightly before God.

And

To whom are you Samuel? Who is God calling you to call? To whom are you Jonathan? Who has placed their utmost trust in you and leans on you as they invite you to lean on them? To whom are you Joab? Who seeks your counsel in the grit of life? To whom are you Nathan? Who sees you as a spiritual pillar and guide in their life?

None of this is light or to be taken for granted. For those who have invested in us we owe them gratitude. We owe it to them to take their investment in us seriously and strive to honor them by living into God's call on our lives. For those we are called to serve, we must do so diligently. It is a genuine honor and privilege to be in relationship with someone, much moreso to the point we can invite them into a personal faith. To be entrusted with deep and abiding friendship. To be give access to the vulnerable choices in someone's life as they seek guidance. To be entrusted with helping another find their spiritual direction and walk it more clearly and true.

Whomever it is, Samuel, Jonathan, Joab, or Nathan, hold that position dearly. Know you are an integral part in someone's journey through this world and making their way to the next. You never know when the one you are being asked to influence will turn out to be a David or someone even greater!

BIBLE STUDY Romans 1

Jumping into Romans, there are a few things that might be relevant to consider. The story behind the letters of Paul....or anyone...matter. Why and to whom is the letter written?

This is obviously written to the church in Rome. Paul hasn't been there. In fact while we know from Acts that he's destined to be there eventually, he doesn't know it! At the moment he's in Corinth, writing the letter, longing to visit Rome. Why?

A little later in the chapter he tells us. He's heard of the strength of their faith in Christ, and so wants to meet them in person. As he's done in so many other Gentile communities, Paul desires to build them up spiritually, as well as in number. Additionally, he shows us something of his character.

That he uses the term "mutual" lets us know that he isn't just coming to instruct or build them up. Paul anticipates that they will build his faith and grow him as well. This is incredibly significant. Paul is a sort of "super apostle", but he's not going to lord that over them. It's not all about him, it's also about them. Paul is living into his own words that he's written to the Corinthian church in a separate letter.

The church, or body of Christ, is made of many different members, each with their own purpose. No one is singularly above any other because each and every role is vital to the ministry and health of the church. For a pastor or apostle to plug in as anything more than their role arrogantly assumes that they may have a corner on the Holy Spirit. We know in truth the Holy Spirit speaks through every believer, and so frequently the direction, vision, and mission of a congregation is found through corporate discernment rather than by in individual command or edict.

There is wide though that Paul is writing for two purposes beyond just letting them know of his desire to see them. The first is laying out a very solid description or writing of his theology for the Roman church. Who is Jesus? What is the nature of sin? What does God desire from us? And so forth.

Also the church in Rome is likely experiencing a bit of conflict. The emperor Claudius had banished a large number of Jews from the city, presumably because there was too much conflict within Judaism over this new group of Jesus followers. How to keep it from affecting the city? Boot them out. This is how Paul came to meet Priscilla and Aquila.. They were Roman Jews forced out of Rome. That the Gentile Christians weren't asked to leave lets us know that at least at this moment things weren't as bad as they would eventually get in terms of persecution.

It also means that the church in Rome for years was pretty much run by Gentile believers. After a number of years, they would have developed their own style and flavor of Christianity apart from the Jewish influence.

Once Claudius died, the Jews returned. The Jewish believers came back to a church that had moved on in their absence, and likely had aspects they didn't agree with and/or recognize. This would certainly cause some friction. So Paul is also addressing both Jew and Gentile in the letter hopefully to help them mend fences and recognize that they are one under the common banner of Christ.

With all of this now said, we see the beginning of the chapter is a somewhat lengthy introduction of Paul. He lists himself as servant, apostle, and set apart. The sense of "servant" is more akin to slavery to the King. For Paul the King is Christ. His "calling" is twofold, both happened at the same time. Calling is conversion for both, and for Paul also the call to be an apostle to the Gentiles. In an odd turn of events, Paul hears both at once. This is unique as typically a new convert wouldn't be given such a lofty task, but Paul was no ordinary Jew. His understanding, education, leadership, and zeal separated him from the crowd. In many ways he was "set apart". Set apart in character and set apart as having a call story very different and unique from the other apostles.

He comes right out of the gate with some heavy theological realities. He notes Jesus as the prophesied Messiah. He also note both Jesus' humanity and divinity. He is born in the line of David, which also fulfills the messianic prophecy that he would be a King in that lineage. At the same time Jesus is divine, the Son of God, confirmed by His resurrection from the grave. Jesus is both God and man in one.

He ends the greeting with an affirmation of the Gentiles incorporation into the promise of salvation, and then a very formal sounding "hello".

Following this is the portion where Paul talks of his desire to come to them previously discussed.

Expressing his eagerness, Paul throws us back to Acts once again. His message isn't just for the educated, cultured Greeks. It is to non-Greeks as well. For everyone. This includes the barbaric and uncouth. Paul holds to this through his life if we recall the shipwreck on Malta. The inhabitants were considered a "barbarous" people. Yet Paul wasn't dissuaded from ministering there.

That he mentions he is "unashamed" is also significant. This communicates a boldness on Paul's part. We need to keep in mind that he is looking to go to Rome, the capital of the empire. The home of the emperor, whom the people are called to worship as a God. Earlier Paul's slavery was to the King, Jesus. To preach a King other than and superior to Caesar was a risky endeavor. It could even be considered downright treasonous. It took guts. But Paul isn't worried because what he preaches is the very "power of God." And again, Paul helps with a theological and chronological reality.

The salvation came first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles. This isn't a "pecking order" kind of remark. Paul isn't placing the Jew above the Gentile here. He's just telling a historic reality that Christ Himself noted in His own earthly ministry. Jesus' ministry was geared primarily at the Jews. In fact the region where it took place was quite small, largely in Galilee and Jerusalem. In other words in Judea which was largely Jewish.

While this is true, we also remember He did have interaction with the Gentiles. He healed on behalf of Roman centurions. The reading of His interaction with a Gentile woman is instructive if we allow ourselves to break out of the monotone Jesus often portrayed to us when the Word is read. When she asks of Him, He replies that it's not correct to give to the Gentiles what's meant for the Jews, which the woman replies that "even dogs get the crumbs from the table." To read Jesus as being harsh and even mean to the woman isn't fitting with His otherwise character. Perhaps this is more playful banter between the two, with Jesus giving a nod to this Gentile woman brave enough to approach Him, this Jewish man.

So salvation was first offered to the Jews even in the book of Acts. Then Peter received the revelation that the message was to go to the Gentiles as well, and he promoted this within the leadership of the Jerusalem church. The gospel then spread to Jew and Gentile alike, with Paul being the chief apostle to the Gentiles.

A simple history revelation/clarification.

Before heading into the passage on idolatry, Paul segues into it mentioning righteousness and faith. Earlier in the introduction Paul mentions the "obedience that comes through faith". He is making it clear that faith and obedience, or right deeds, go hand in hand. Faith is necessary to know what is righteous, or what to obey. Righteousness, or obedience is a necessary attribute if we have genuine faith in Christ. They are inseparable.

The revelation of the gospel he talks about runs different for Jew and Gentile. The Jews already knew there is one God, but they misunderstood the Messiah. Jesus reveals the truth of the Messiah. The Gentiles needed to be brought aboard that there is only one God, and to be drawn away from their worship of a host of gods and into the worship of the one true God in Christ.

This weaves nicely into Paul's discussion on idolatry.

First he leads with the "wrath of God". This isn't our Old Testament sense of wrath. Yes, God is displeased, even angry at our sin, but the time of raining fire on the heads of the wicked seem to have passed. Instead, "wrath" is more the promise of judgement on the last day. There will be a reckoning for our work in the world, and the one who sets the standard for what that should look like, Jesus, will also be the judge.

Even those who don't know Christ necessarily, have a guide to seek Him of sorts. In the spirit of cause and effect, the nature and glory of creation itself directs us that there is a Creator. This Creator by necessity has to be grander and greater than the creation itself. So we understand that of some form there is a being above all there is that set all there is into motion.

If we are instructed by creation, we know that creation has an order to it. It is predictable. Seasons can be reliably anticipated. Animals have instincts and patterns. The cycles of the moon, that the sun rises and sets are consistent. Tides of the ocean are predictable. Nature has order, indicating that the One who created it also has a clear and keen sense of order.

Therefore the pinnacle of creation, humanity, also has an order to it as well. There is right and wrong attitudes and actions. There are right and wrong ways of relating to one another. Right relating and acting with one another should lead to the best possible trajectory and outcome for humanity if we all follow it together.

So if all of this is true, then there is no excuse to not seek the Creator for the purpose of living the most correct and right life. Particularly in this part of the world at this time, to seek one would hope would ultimately lead to God revealed in Christ.

Unfortunately humanity has run away with itself, shunning a search for the living God and instead settling for their own versions of it. Man-made images, idols, that represent what humans want "right" and "wrong" to look like have replaced desire for the truth of God. As a result of this idolatry, all kinds of bad behavior erupts, and this is where Paul goes into his long vice list. As he does, we can't forget that the main source of this he cites as idolatry. In other words, having our focus on something other than God as our priority.

One of the great travesties of this chapter with regards to interpretation and passing on the wisdom inherent in it has been the wildly heavily weighted attention on verses 26 and 27. We'll get to that, but let's look beyond those two verses for a moment.

The vices listed after are many. They are also incredibly widespread in our culture. The focus solely on homosexuality misses a much larger point, and lets off the hook a much larger population. It's safer to focus on 26 and 27 because the vast majority of people are not homosexual. They are heterosexual. Demonizing the minority is a very easy and convenient way to not have to look in the mirror at our own issues that are part of a much larger portion of the population.

How much do we lament in our current cultural and political climate that pervasiveness of greed, jealousy, deceitfulness, outrightly malicious words and actions, the toxin of gossip, lack of love, absence of mercy, arrogance, unfaithfulness,

merciless spirits, and missing so many points of truth because of an unwillingness to entertain anything that cuts against one's own sensibilities and understanding? All of this is considered wickedness by Paul and while we may note the presence of these things we don't do a whole lot of action calling it out and putting meaty accountability to it.

An example we used in our studies is as follows: If I were to come out as gay, in most churches I would be removed almost immediately. If I had a spirit that was unrepentantly arrogant and boastful, it's possible I'd never be called on it at all, some might even cite it as a virtue, and I would very likely retain my position without issue or incident. The argument is often made that the problem is that were I gay I wouldn't likely change my behavior. However the same is just as likely if I am arrogant and boastful to my core.

Both of these are mentioned in this segment of Romans 1. If they are equal in the scripture should they not be equal in how we discern, assess, and treat them across the board? The point here isn't to push an agenda other than that of considering very humbly and gravely how we process and act on various missteps. How we do so affects people's lives and faith, and so consistency, honesty, and a humble regard for our own human sinfulness are absolutely necessary.

Now we'll turn our attention to verses 26 and 27. This bears consideration as it is about the moral question of our time, and one that threatens to divide our denomination as it has already divided others. Throughout history the church tends to have in each age an issue that becomes the "end all and be all" of litmus tests for faith. We can disagree on things like abortion, just war, politics, capital punishment and other things that literally are about whose lives deserve or don't to be taken. But there's always that one issue, far less significant than life and death that may be the significant straw that threatens to break the camel's back.

What are the disagreements on this scripture surrounding the issue of homosexuality? Reading or hearing the disagreements may not change anyone's thoughts on the sinfulness or lack thereof of this orientation. However understanding how and why interpretations differ can at least perhaps help us to see one another with more grace and less judgement. We find that the disagreements aren't rooted in something as superficial as mere personal preference. There is honest thought that goes into forming a personal worldview consistent with one's faith.

One understanding is pretty straightforward. Paul is talking about same gender sexual relations and saying this is sin and wickedness that should not be. For centuries this has been taught through this lens and understanding.

Another accounts for cultural and historical realities. There was then no equivalent term for what we say when we say "homosexual". In fact any reference to that type of relationship bears no similarity to what we mean when we talk about a committed, monogamous same gender relationship. Typically those relationships were rooted in promiscuous cultural practices and/or two people with very unequal power dynamics one oppressing or abusing another.

Another looks at these verses under the larger umbrella of idolatry that Paul frames up the entire passage with. These sins spring from pagan idolatry, and this particular behavior is linked to orgies and sexual ritual associated with the Roman gods and temples. This is no longer the case.

Another considers the verses as Paul is stating them from a very Jewish understanding of the issue rooted in Leviticus. Leviticus has additional considerations however. Reading the passage often cited we see no mention of women with women, but only prohibitions pertaining to men including not "lying with me" and "not lying with beasts." There is also prohibition against lying with various family members and married off women.

This is because all of the relationships listed have one of two factors at play. Either there is no chance of bearing a child, and this was the primary view of sex, child bearing. OR, it was a matter of property. To "lie" with a married woman or relative who is already the property of another and get her pregnant causes question over ownership of the child. Is it the man who conceived the child, or the one who has the mother carrying the child as property?

With this in mind, the additional questions that must be then asked are surrounding birth control. If Paul is citing that sexual intimacy must carry with it the possibility of conception, then to be consistent and congruent, there must be an equal negative stance towards any means by which pregnancy is intentionally invented. The story of Onan bears out this Jewish, Old Testament sensibility.

The point here is that wherever one comes down, there will be those who disagree, and not necessarily just out of personal convenience. Rather there is honest scholarship, faithfulness, and soul searching effort that has gone in to formulating a position. If we can at least see one another in this light, the disagreement may lose its judgmental or harsh edge.

Ultimately I believe we find we have more in common than we do at odds. For us to honor Christ's prayer that all believers "be one", be united, finding this grace with one another is essential. It is essential to our unity, our message, and our ability to demonstrate the overarching and incredible power that love has to overcome our differences.

Finally, Paul ends the chapter rather harshly. As we'll see later in Romans as well, Paul reminds that unrepentant wickedness carries with it the penalty of judgment and death. There is also the added caution against approving of those who do all of these wicked things. Even if I do not, I am still in the wrong in approving those who do.

In our political climate this is a needed word. Our candidates have taken to treating and speaking of one another with

outright malice and often outright lies and deceit. Without thinking, people easily get sucked into cheering their candidate on in all of these kinds of advertisements and stump speeches. The “approve of those who do these things” and so get counted among them themselves.

In Rome the culture of the gods and the cult of the emperor was strong. Particularly for Gentiles who were active in both, the temptation was surely tremendous. Today we have similar but different temptations. The temptation is to go along with the crowd of those we like, love, and support. Unfortunately these people don't always lead us in a Christ centered way. As Romans 1 winds down we are not only called to reflect upon and take hold of our words and behavior, but also to be very discerning in who we hitch our star to in support and who we allow to influence the direction of our journey.