

Sermon: "How do I fit into all this?"

Lent 5, April 2nd, 2017

(Acts 2: 36-47 ; Micah 6: 3-16)

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen .

H. M. Y. have ever formulated a plan in your head, and after mumbling a few words to those involved in the project, you go ahead and implement the plan and then wonder why the plan isn't coming together very well? Has anyone here ever done that? (put hand up) ...**TY**... I felt a bit like that, regarding this Lenten Series of sermons. ... It dawned on me, as I was preparing the last message, that I hadn't communicated very well, the reason behind the series of sermons.

Last week Peter reported to the church council in Jerusalem in Acts chapter 11, how he went outside of his "comfort zone" to go into the house of a Gentile, who is considered 'unclean', to talk about his faith. In many instances, when talking to others about barriers to talking about their faith or the Bible, a common response is: "I don't know the Bible well enough." Or "I'm not sure what I believe." So I thought, Lent is a time to think about our faith, so what better time to do a series of sermons on the Bible and what we believe about God, Jesus and the church to help you in this task. The only problem being, I wasn't very clear to you, why I was doing it. So I thought today, I would do a brief review of the series, and let you know that it will be posted on the church website under the title Christianity 101 so you can review it at your leisure.

Do you remember the title of that first message way back on Feb. 19th? "Who am I?" ...**TY**... What a big question? ... "Who am I?"

Anyone remember, how God describes human beings in the creation story in Genesis? ...**TY**... (What are we created in? "image of God"; both male and female; and God describes the creation of human beings as "very good")

So, "who are you?" ... You are a person of infinite worth and value. God doesn't make "junk". ... You are also "curious". ... What did Adam and Eve eat in the garden that was a no-no? ...**TY**... (The fruit of the knowledge of the tree of good and evil). Curiosity did what to the cat? ...**TY**... (Killed it.) ... Through curiosity

though, you learn, grow, and discover. ... One of the things you discover is freedom of choice – free will. But you will also discover something else. Consequences or Brokenness. Has anyone here ever experienced brokenness in their life? ...**TY**...

Would you like to learn an alternative understanding of the "original sin"? ... It wasn't when Adam and Eve ate the apple, but when they refused to admit their mistake and take responsibility for it. ... Rather than saying, "I messed up", they started pointing fingers and played the 'blame game'. ... Do you want to know the only place you can go when you play the 'blame game'? Further into brokenness.

Now week 2 featured "Who is God?" ...**TY**... What words would you use to describe God? ...**TY**... (Creator, Redeemer, loving, kind, just, judge) ... In that opening chapter of Genesis we learn God is the creator of the universe and when you look at the beauty, mystery, wonder, and awe of creation, you can catch a glimpse of God. Don't you agree? ...**TY**... (Yea)

You also learned in the Exodus story, that God hears the cries of those who suffer and compassionately responds. *God CARES*. ... God what? ...**TY**... (Cares) Remember how God clothed Adam and Eve before they left the garden and here God is releasing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. .. As a side note, you also discover God's preferred method of working in the world, and it is generally not the parting of the water's Charlton Heston style. Remember him? ... God prefers 'the still small voice'. ... Nudging. ... As he nudged Moses to go look at a burning bush. ... Have you ever sat staring into a campfire, thinking. And through that, Moses' conscience lead him to lead the fight against slavery in Egypt. ... Remember the 10 plagues in Exodus 7-12 and the midwives who saved Moses at birth.

In "Who is God?" Part 2, you learned that God doesn't leave us on our own to figure this all out. ... What did God give Moses on Mount Sinai? ...**TY**... (The 10 Commandments) ... In a sense God was saying if you don't want to get in this mess again with slavery, oppression and economic injustice, here are a few guidelines to follow. And you might be amazed, considering the context and how

long ago this was, the more detailed description of these laws in parts of the books of Exodus and Leviticus. restoration of slaves, land, cities of sanctuary if you accidentally killed someone and the list goes on. ... God also nudged prophets to say, "hey folks, you're not following the path very well." ... Prophets were also the ones to encourage people to "remember the story". Remember how God rescued you when you were at the bottom of the latter? .. When you were slaves in Egypt? ... Well don't forget to treat the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner in your midst, the way you would've liked to have been treated by your master's when you were at the bottom of the heap.

Who did God send after the prophets? ...**TY**... (Jesus) ... So weeks 4 and 5 focused on Jesus. ... Did you notice that Jesus kind of lived the story that God already started in Egypt. Where was Jesus born? ...**TY**... (stable) ... Is that at the top of the social ladder or the bottom? ... (yeah, the bottom). ... Who'd did Jesus generally hang out with? (outcasts and sinners ... sinner was a name for anyone who was considered 'unclean'. It doesn't mean they were a murderer or a rapist, or any big sins, just 'non Jew' or were sick (leper), or in a profession, (tanner, tax collector), that was considered 'unclean'). Why did Jesus hang out with 'outcasts'? ...**TY**... Because they were the ones that needed to be reminded the most that they were not forgotten by God. They were loved and cherished. Special in God's sight. To give them hope. ... *To remind them that God CARES.* Now it doesn't mean that Jesus didn't talk to people at the top social ladder ... He talked with the scribes and Pharisees all the time, it was just his focus or outreach was with the 'outcasts'.

Now the bible says that Jesus went to the synagogue (or church) as was his _____ (custom). Do you remember that phrase? ...**TY**... Now a big problem with religion, and this also includes Christianity, is that religion tends to divide people into those who are "in" and those who are "out", people who are "clean" versus "unclean". But both Jesus and the prophet Micah reminds us that to be put right with God is not dependent upon serving communion the right way, or washing your hands the right way, or performing the right animal sacrifices, but rather we are put right with God when we reflect God's love and compassion in the world as Jesus did.

Jesus echo's the voice of the prophets, like Micah. ... "What shall I bring to the Lord?" ... A whole bunch of sacrifices or to do justice, to love kindness and to walk _____ (humbly with your God) ...**TY**...

Now the second week of "Who is Jesus?" had to do with his death and resurrection. Something that we will soon be celebrating at Easter. ... Jesus upset the religious leaders of his day by challenging the predominate understanding of God. ... And that had to do with 'Holiness'. You can only come before God if you obey a whole bunch of rules and regulations that make you clean, and separate from the general 'riff raff' that you meet on the street. ... 20 years ago what would happen if you wore blue jeans to church? ... Big no, no. Exactly. ... 'clean verses unclean'

Jesus replaced that with an understanding that God's dominate nature is 'compassion' not 'purity' or 'holiness'. Jesus also challenged the political leaders by challenging their understanding of authority, by riding peacefully into town on a donkey.

Jesus was crucified. .. Then what happened? ...**TY**... (He rose again.) To let you know that no matter what your darkness, you are not alone.... "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." ... Jesus words on the cross. Through the resurrection we know God had not abandoned Jesus, it is just that Jesus 'felt abandoned' by God. ... Or as Psalm 139 says, "Darkness is as light to you". ... Do you know the Footprints poem. ... God why did you leave me alone during the darkest moments of my life? Response. .. It was then that I carried you.

How have you experience God's love and care in the midst of your darkness? ...**TY**... (Prayer, music, nature). ... What about through the presence of other person who has come to sit with you in a hospital room, or advocated for you in the fight for more low income housing in Hamilton. .. Did you see the big story in Friday's Hamilton Spectator regarding a \$50 million, ten year plan to fight poverty in Hamilton. \$10 million of that was going towards fixing up 'low income' housing units. All done by people who have felt a nudge, like Moses, to make a caring difference in another's life through their presence or action.

So now what? "How do I fit into all that?" ... Have you ever felt alone? ... Have you ever needed a helping hand or a shoulder to cry on? ... Have you ever needed a purpose to give your life a sense of meaning? ... To know that you have made a positive difference in your community and the world? ... Welcome to the church.

The church was a new movement and in Acts ch. 2 we catch a sense of the enthusiasm of those involved. It was:

1) invitational. ... Inviting others to join in. ... What was the drawing factor? They heard of the 'wonderful works of God in their own language'. ... Harold Percy in a workshop entitled "How to share your faith without losing your friends" suggests that we are all called to be witnesses. A witness is simply someone who can identify where they have seen God at work in their life or why being a part of a church family is important to them. ... No big sales pitch, just a simple sharing of how God or the church has been a part of your life and what it has meant to you.

And through the telling of the story ... big story of God's love and grace in the Bible that you learned a little bit about in this series of sermons. Little story. Why being a part of a church or your faith is important to you. about 3,000 people became a part of the church that day. ... Do you know what? ... That is more people than Jesus gathered around himself in 2 or 3 years of ministry. Now I don't mean the crowds that were feed, but those who followed him. ... Wow!

.... This '**storytelling**' changed people's lives. ... They gathered to learn more of the story through the apostles. They gathered for fellowship meals with others. ... Wouldn't you agree it is nice to have a few friends in life? ... They shared their resources to help those in need and they joined together in prayer. Does that sound familiar at all? Yeah, we now call it 'the church'.

Would you like to hear my proof for the existence of God? ... The Church still exists today in spite of all its 'humanness'. ... In spite of all the arguing, fighting, disagreements that churches can get into at times, there is still a group of people that gather in Jesus name to worship 'in house' and to serve others 'out of the house' in the community and the world. Hearing the 'nudge' and extending God's care and compassion to other.

Would you like to hear my proof of the resurrection? ... Something miraculous happened. Such that this small group of people -- Peter, James, Mary, Martha - -- went out and changed the world. ... They did it in a very pluralistic society (just like today) and in a world when you better not be caught calling anyone Lord but Creaser or you might end up being the nightly entertainment in a Roman Coliseum and that generally wasn't very good for your health. ...

People that were infused with a sense of God's love and grace, fairness and forgiveness. ... So much so, that they wanted others to experience that same 'love and grace' as well.

So go ahead and stick your toe in. ... Dare to get involved. .. Dare to ask some questions and try something new. ... It could be joining a small group, sharing part of your story, getting more involved with Wesley Urban Ministry or another community organization that tries to help others.

Discover a love beyond measure that can help to heal your brokenness, an opportunity to serve and help others, and to ask someone else to come along. That sounds like a life worth living. Thanks be to God. Amen.

*Hymn

#136 MV

"When hands reach out and fingers trace"