

The Weekly Word

April 10-16, 2017

As we walk this week between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, I pray that the wonder of God's salvation plan touches your life. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, April 10: Galatians 5- Free to love and free to serve...

Paul has been strongly coming after the Galatians that they should not seek circumcision... Why? Because when a person is circumcised they are binding themselves to follow the whole Law and if we are seeking God through the Law then we are not seeking Him through faith!

If we are operating through faith then we are free... Freedom in Christ is a beautiful and wonderful gift from God. Sometimes, however, people misunderstand our freedom, thinking we are free to sin and God will just forgive us. While He will always forgive confessed sin, our freedom is freedom to love and freedom to serve. We are no longer bound by the enemy and we are no longer bound to sin. We have been set free to love and serve. *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love (13).*

The chapter closes with a beautiful expression of our freedom... living into the fruit of the Spirit. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (22-23).* We are free to live this way... Oh that I would live into my freedom.

How different our world would be if all Christ-followers lived this way...

Oh, Lord, help me to indulge true freedom... to lavish love on others, to live with joy overflowing through me, to live at peace with You and others no matter the circumstances. It is for freedom that I have been set free. May I live fully free. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, April 11: Galatians 6- Be a good-doer...

Paul continues his challenge for us, as Christ followers, to live our faith, to act differently, act more kindly and lovingly than people who do not follow Jesus and who are not filled by God's Spirit.

My heart latched onto Paul's one-sentence call of duty. *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (10).*

Doing good to all people... that's what God asks of us. I pondered the elements of that sentence.

Doing Good: being kind, loving, holding my tongue, helping people, putting self aside to care for others. Yesterday's description of the fruit of a converted life ... *love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (5:22-23)* filled my thoughts as I tried to picture doing good. It is a tall order but one God has graced us to fulfill.

To All people: this is staggering. I am to do good to people I like and people I don't like. I am to do good to people I know and strangers who cross my path. I am to do good to people who look like me and people who are very different from me.

This is an incredible call to Christ followers...

And it is all the more challenging in our present world of discord, derision and division. We, the Church of Jesus, should be leading the way to smoothing the present discord by loving others, all others.

It is easiest for me to consider other people, but the nudge of my heart is to take a hard look at my own life. Am I a 'good doer'? Do I rank and order those I care for and those I do not? When I see a need do I try to fill it, or simply pass by?

These are tough questions because I am such a mixed bag...

Oh, God, help me to be a good doer! Help me to do so, so that Your light within me will shine brightly and point people to You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, April 12: 1Samuel 1- God breaks into 'our' world...

I found myself wondering this morning why a number of very important accounts of the Bible begin with barren parents? Zechariah and Elizabeth, Abraham and Sarah, and now Hannah & Elkanah.

I noticed that each of the sons played pivotal role in salvation history –John the Baptist, the Patriarch Isaac and Samuel the prophet. Also, each account highlights the providential work of God ending barrenness and providing the Son. God, in essence, brings something out of nothing and blesses His people through His miraculous action.

As I pondered these events, it occurred to me that each shows how God can and does break into our world.

Looking at what I just wrote I was stopped in my tracks. I called it **our world**?! Isn't that how we think of life and the earth... as 'our world.' As I roll that thought around in my head, we do kind of think of the world as ours... as if we own it. We treat it as a 'thing' we possess. Sometimes we take good care of it, but often times not.

- All the pollution that is destroying our air and water; clear cutting timber which ruins soil, allowing for extreme erosion, etc.

Sometimes we think we are helping our earth but it turns out we are not helping at all:

- For years the National Park Service put out all naturally occurring fires. This was their best wisdom, but it turned out to create more problems than it prevented.

We live as if we 'own our world' but in truth it is God's world not ours. We are stewards and God is the 'owner.' Although God has set up this world to run by certain natural laws, God can override those rules when He chooses, like opening barren wombs. Consider Abraham and Sarah who were well past the time when human reproductive cycles have ended. We don't know the particulars of Elkanah and Hannah but it is clear that she was barren for quite a while and in response to prayer God opened her womb. Her son would become a major personality in the life of Israel.

As I wind down this morning, the Lord is reminding me I live in His world. It is not mine. I am His steward, managing things for Him. So I need to ask myself, 'Am I living in ways that please Him? Am I watching over His world with diligence that honors Him?'

Lord, may I honor Your world today... and always. Enjoying it. Marveling in it. Caring for it as You would care for Your creation. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen

This morning was an interesting journey sparked by the story of Hannah! Oh, the joys of walking with the Lord...

Thursday, April 13: 1Samuel 2- Sin under our noses...

Eli's story is a sad tale of a respected person who does not deal with sin under his nose. By all accounts Eli himself was a good man. But he allowed his sons to run amuck. They openly and brazenly sinned. Everyone knew their sin. Eli confronted his sons about their sin, but he was not willing to deal with them when they refused to repent and change. He turned a blind eye to the behavior of his sons, but God did not turn a blind eye. The governance and faithfulness of the people of Israel were being harmed.

The Lord may not deal with every person who turns a blind eye to sin within his or her sphere of influence like he did with Eli... but He may. It is within God's prerogative to handle each case as He sees fit. Whether God deals with our sin in this lifetime or in the moment of our final judgment, we can be certain that God will deal with our sin.

As I sit with the Lord this morning His voice is clear. I am responsible for my life and those under my influence.

First for myself. Am I examining my life and bringing to the Lord those areas of known sin? Am I sitting with the Lord and listening for His voice warning me about areas of sin that are not obvious to me?

With others in my sphere of authority and influence, am I willing to do the same for them... gently, fairly and redemptively?

Sin, and in particular obvious and open sin, is a big deal to the Lord and should be to us.

Lord, give me true moments of reflection where I can face my life, surrendering myself to You and confessing my sin and failures to You alone who can redeem, forgive and restore. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Good Friday, April 14: 1Samuel 3- Learning to know God's voice...

For Samuel to fulfill God's destiny for his life, Samuel had to grow in knowing the Lord and discerning God's voice. So the Lord began training Samuel to recognize His voice.

Samuel's story raises the question for me... Have I learned to recognize God's voice?

The Lord still speaks to His people. Preeminently the Lord has spoken through Jesus, the Word and through the Bible as the written Word of God. Knowing the Word and studying Jesus are core behaviors if I want to discern the voice of the Lord. These are the baseline for every Christ-follower.

The Lord also continues to speak to individuals through the Holy Spirit. Discerning the nudges, whispers, dreams, visions and promptings of God, the Holy Spirit, is part of a faith-filled life.

Jesus said, 'My sheep know my voice (John 10:27)... And Samuel's story reminds me to pay attention to the voice of the Lord and to commit myself to learning to discern God's voice from all the other voices –the world, the flesh and the devil –that seek to influence me during the course of everyday life.

Oh, Lord, to be faithful to You I must know Your voice, understand Your promptings and to obey as You lead. Teach me and train me. Open my ears to Your voice that I may follow You more faithfully every day of my life. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, April 15: 1Samuel 4- ...

Israel loses a battle so they grab the Ark of the Covenant (God's footstool on earth) and bring the Ark with them the next day in battle and they lose even more decisively.

The account sparked thoughts about how we sometimes treat God as a ‘magic wand’ or a ‘sugar-daddy’.

Missing from the account is any checking in with the Lord. They don’t pause after the first defeat to see if any sin has happened, as Joshua did after the first loss to Ai. They don’t go to the Lord to see if He has a plan for them, instead they just grab the Ark as if it is a magic shield and charge into battle.

I’m reminded of the Indiana Jones movie, Raiders of the Lost Ark. The Germans are looking for the Ark, believing that the Ark makes an army invincible.

That’s what Israel did. They treated God as a force or a security shield, something to be used for their benefit. In these instances, God or God’s earthy representation –i.e. the Ark –becomes a tool we use to get what we want.

It didn’t work for Israel and it won’t work for us today.

While I don’t have the ark or a relic of some kind I (and we) can subtly fall into a similar behavior. If I pray a certain prayer, God must answer as I wish. If I give xx amount of money to the church or some ministry, God will repay be 10-fold. If someone tells me that they did this or that spiritual thing and God blessed them. If I do that same practice, expecting God to bless me, I am treating God like Israel treated the Ark... a tool to be used for my benefit.

The Lord calls us into relationship. Now, a relationship suggests two-way communication and in this case, since the Lord is God, I submit to Him. I must never treat the Lord as if He submits to me!

Lord, You are my treasure and my delight. I am sorry for any times I have fallen into the trap of thinking I can control You. Forgive me for any arrogance I ever express toward You. I am sorry and humbly repent. Open my eyes to any behaviors, attitudes or tendencies I have to trivialize You. I love You, Lord, and I desire to serve and honor You all the days of my life. Through Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.