

Sermon Notes



Sermon: Stuck in the Middle with You

Romans 8:22-27

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Monday: Read Acts 2:1-21

The story of Pentecost is truly amazing: the gift of the Spirit comes with tongues of fire and a mighty rushing wind, drawing together people from all over the world, binding them together as the Church. It is an amazing story, but you might want to read the two other stories that serve as bookends to Pentecost. On one side you have the selection of an apostle to replace Judas, and on the other side you have a story about the early church breaking bread and attending to the teaching of the apostles and trying to take care of the poor. In other words, Pentecost takes place right between the meeting of the Nominating Committee and the election of officers on one side, and a discussion about ongoing programs of Christian education, worship, and mission. It is the early church doing the same old stuff *our church* does...the same kind of stuff the church has always done. **BUT** with the Spirit's leading, it isn't the same anymore. In one sense, we're the same old folks we've always been — the same bundle of anxieties, the same annoying habits, the same fears, the same as we ever were. Except, drawn all together in one place, the Holy Spirit filling our breath...we aren't the same anymore; *nothing's* the same. How has the Holy Spirit changed you? Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work in our congregation?

Prayer: Come Holy Spirit. Open our eyes. Breathe into us new life. Help us to see.

Tuesday: Read Acts 4:32-35

Sometimes it is difficult to believe the church can become the kind of place Luke describes for us in Acts, to believe that we might connect with one another at such a deep level, to believe that this congregation might be a community that bears witness to the love of God in all of our relationships with one another. What would happen if we really believed this possible? Not if we just said we did. Not if we say, “Sure, I believe that – it’s in the Bible.” But what if we really lived like that? What if we took it to heart? What would this congregation look like if we believed that? The truth is, resurrection does strange things to people. Some run away, amazed and terrified. Some can’t believe it’s true. Some need something more to hold on to. But perhaps more than anything else, resurrection reminds us of life’s possibilities, and therefore calls us to a different way of being. If the tomb can be empty, then maybe there is hope for new life in all sorts of places. I’m not sure if I believe the church can live up to the ideal we read in Acts. But oh, I want to believe it...I want to live as if that’s the way things really are. I want to see what can happen if we all buy into it, if we just decide to live it out. Can you imagine the possibilities?

Prayer: God of new life, help me to trust in your promises, and to live accordingly.

Wednesday: Read Exodus 17:1-7

If the stakes weren’t so high, and the consequences so important, this story would almost seem comical. The Israelites ask, “Is the Lord among us or not?” How quickly they have forgotten the bitter water turned sweet, and the manna from heaven, and the abundance of quail. How quickly they have forgotten that only a short while ago they were enslaved under the rule of Pharaoh, and that God delivered them to freedom. How can the Israelites not remember what the Lord has done? Yet...there are those moments, those terrifying moments, when the darkness takes over, when burdens become too much to bear, when hope is a distant memory. There are those painful, lonely times when trust in a merciful God is so impractical and illogical that it seems almost like a joke. The dark night of the soul, the mystics call it, when the fear and the doubt and the utter absurdity of the notion of God eclipse the light. If you’ve experienced something like this, you know exactly what I’m talking about. Maybe it was a death. A divorce. An addiction. A secret revealed. A diagnosis. Maybe it was just the culmination of so many little things stacked upon you and upon you that something finally had to give. Maybe it was just the unbearable lightness of being. What helps you to see the light when the darkness sets in? How do you manage to hold on to hope? This story and so many others remind us that it is helpful to remember, in moments like these, what God has done. Just as God gave manna to the Israelites, God gives us the bread of life in Jesus. We tell the story of Jesus, and we live into the story of Jesus, so that we might remember that, like water gushing from a rock, new life will come. And we give thanks that this little flicker of light in midst of our dark, dark night is just enough to lead us home.

Prayer: Gracious God, help me to remember and lean upon your saving work in Jesus Christ.

Thursday: Read John 2:1-11

“You’ve kept the good wine until now.” This is the hope of the gospel. You may have thought you had it good, but you haven’t seen anything yet. In Christ God has come among us, and as history unfolds we move closer and closer to God’s promised return. The wedding feast has just begun. More, and better, is on the way. So what’s next? What will we do? The party’s just beginning, so we better not sit on our hands. There is work to be done, and it is ours to do. Christ has drawn his people into his very self. He has made us his own. So it is time to celebrate. It is time to party! But the celebration is not complete until all are gathered around Christ’s table, joyously sharing a feast of bread and the best of wines that have been saved until this glorious moment. How can you be a part of sharing this celebration with others? How will you work to bring others to the party?

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, help me to share the hope and the joy I have found in you.

Friday: Read Matthew 6:24-34

Don’t worry, Jesus says. Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Change your life, says Jesus. Follow me, and don’t look back. Your college loans will still be there, your to-do list will still be there, and all the hunger and oppression and poverty will still be there, too. But stop worrying, says Jesus, and follow me. Real security and a future of hope will come for us only when we choose to tear down the walls that divide us, when we turn outward when every instinct tells us we should turn in, and when we take the boldest of all steps we could imagine to love those of whom we are most afraid. That’s the gospel – it’s only in giving ourselves away that we gain the kingdom of God, and only if we stop worrying about ourselves can we see our neighbor with compassion. Tomorrow will take care of itself. Today, let us serve the Lord. What is one concrete step you can take this week to serve Jesus — to seek the kingdom — more faithfully?

Prayer: Holy God, help me to look beyond my fears and focus instead on your kingdom.

Saturday: Read Revelation 7:9-17

In this vision of John’s in Revelation, death no longer has its grip, nor does hunger, thirst or drought. In this glimpse of heaven, there are no tears. It is simply the people of God, the saints of the church, doing what God created them to do: worship, singing and praising God without ceasing. The word worship comes from the word "worthship," or that act of rendering to God that which God's worthiness demands. And that’s the mark of a saint, really – those who recognize that God’s worthiness demands their whole selves, those who know that to worship God is to do what we were created to do. How are you giving your whole self to God? What are you holding back? How does worship help?

Prayer: Eternal God, help me to offer my whole self to you in love and service.