

## Saturday: Read Psalm 8

Here the Psalmist says we are created just “a little lower than God,” but our world is filled with evidence to the contrary: Babies left in dumpsters. Children fighting wars. Young girls forced into prostitution. Veterans sleeping under bridges. Beyond what we see with our eyes, and beyond what we read in the news, there are voices in our own lives that tell us the Psalmist couldn’t be more wrong. We know we shouldn’t listen to them, but we do...the voices that say your legs aren’t long enough, or your teeth aren’t straight enough, or your skin is too wrinkly, or your clothes are out of style, or your body is too big or too small, or too old or too young...you are NOT GOOD ENOUGH. And all too often, the voice that speaks these words sounds just like our own. Yet the Psalmist says, you are “a little lower than God, crowned with God’s honor and glory.” Which voice will you listen to? Which voice has more authority? Which voice is true? We are broken people, living in a broken world — this is true. But more than that, we are God’s children, created in God’s image, loved without limit, and made whole through God’s grace. This is the truth, and Jesus tells us the truth will set us free.

*Prayer: Remind me, gracious Lord, that I am loved, and I am yours.*

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## Sermon Notes



**Series: B-sides**

**Sermon: For What It’s Worth**

### Judges 3:12-30

“The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord strengthened King Eglon of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord. In alliance with the Ammonites and the Amalekites, he went and defeated Israel; and they took possession of the city of palms. So the Israelites served King Eglon of Moab for eighteen years.

But when the Israelites cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The Israelites sent tribute by him to King Eglon of Moab. Ehud made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length; and he fastened it on his right thigh under his clothes. Then he presented the tribute to King Eglon of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. When Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent the people who carried the tribute on their way. But he himself turned back at the sculptured stones near Gilgal, and said, ‘I have a secret message for you, O king.’ So the king said, ‘Silence!’ and all his attendants went out from his presence. Ehud came to him, while he was sitting alone in his cool roof-chamber, and said, ‘I have a message from God for you.’ So he rose from his seat. Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into Eglon’s belly; the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the dirt came out. Then Ehud went out into the vestibule, and closed the doors of the roof-chamber on him, and locked them.

After he had gone, the servants came. When they saw that the doors of the roof-chamber were locked, they thought, ‘He must be relieving himself in the cool chamber.’ So they waited until they were embarrassed. When he still did not open the doors of the roof-chamber, they took the key and opened them. There was their lord lying dead on the floor.

Ehud escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the sculptured stones, and escaped to Seirah. When he arrived, he sounded the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites went down with him from the hill country, having him at their head. He said to them, ‘Follow after me; for the Lord has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand.’ So they went down after him, and seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites, and allowed no one to cross over. At that time they killed about ten thousand of the Moabites, all strong, able-bodied men; no one escaped. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.”

**Monday: Read John 1:6-8, 19-28**

“I am not the messiah” says John. I am not a prophet. I am not Elijah. I am none of the things you think I am. I’m simply the voice, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. The voice that tells us where and what to look for. The voice that confounds our expectations...for we all have some expectations about who Jesus is supposed to be. But there’s a difference between that kind of hope, and the kind of faith we see in John the Baptist. Faith, by definition, is a radical trust in what God is doing, even when God’s mode of operation is far from clear. John, alone in the wilderness, only sure about what the messiah is not, goes on testifying to the light, trusting in the certainty of what God has sent him to do. John demonstrates that, in the words of Meister Eckhart, God is found in the soul not by adding anything, but by subtracting. And so that voice keeps calling: calling us onward, calling us out from wherever it is that we’re stuck — stuck in our ways, stuck in our selves, stuck in our relationships. Wherever we are stuck, John’s voice keeps calling: “Make straight the way of the Lord.” And so we strain forward, tilting toward the coming light, trusting that God in Jesus will shatter our expectations, and fill us full of life. Through your journey with Christ, how have your expectations changed? How have you been surprised? Have you experienced those surprises as a blessing? How so?

*Prayer: Eternal God, open my heart and make me ready to receive your blessing.*

**Tuesday: Read Mark 8:31-38**

It’s hard to follow, isn’t it? We’d much rather go our own way. You can visit Amazon and ask for a list of all books currently in print that have to do with being a leader. You’ll be given a massive list of tens of thousands of books. If you then ask for books that have something to do with following, you’ll be given a vastly shorter list of a few hundred titles. But do you know what most of those books are about? They give advice on how to follow your dreams. And what most people dream about? Becoming a leader! Which is all to say that it’s awfully hard to follow. We think we can do just fine by ourselves, thank you very much. It’s hard to follow, because we like to be in charge. But even more, it’s hard to follow Jesus, because where Jesus leads is the cross. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me,” says Jesus. “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” What have you had to give up to follow Jesus? How is Christ’s path different from your own?

*Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, help me to follow you wherever you may lead.*

**Wednesday: Read Luke 12:49-56**

“Do you think I come to bring peace?” Jesus asks. If you would follow Jesus, you need to know that this journey leads straight to the cross. Jesus is moving closer and closer to what makes us hurt and what breaks our hearts. He will never look away from division, death, disease, and all the worst of what comes with being human. No, Jesus is heading right to the heart of it, right to the foot of the cross, that he might give comfort, blessing, presence, hope. In Jesus, God takes on our brokenness,

and labors to make us whole. And as his followers, we are called to participate in this transformation. Which means wherever there is pain, wherever hearts are breaking, wherever despair is taking over, wherever families are falling apart, wherever children are starving, wherever war is raging, wherever addiction is winning: this is where Jesus is, and this is where Jesus calls us to go. Where do you see pain in our world right now? Where do you see Jesus’ presence in that pain? How are you being called to follow Jesus in light of this?

*Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, send me to serve in your name.*

**Thursday: Read Genesis 32:22-31**

This is such a strange and wonderful story, and it operates as an antidote to our misplaced expectations. Here, God’s chosen is a con artist; Israel is a scoundrel. In our world where the slightest misstep is catastrophic, where a slip of the tongue is unforgivable, where failure seems always to be fatal, how refreshing it is to hear this story where God takes that which is broken and makes the world whole. Through Jacob’s story, we reflect on our own story, for we know what it means to stand alone in the dark. We know what it means to be overcome with a power that is greater than our own. And we know it what it means to hang on, to hold fast until the coming of the light, trying not to let go until we have been blessed. Like Jacob, we have received God’s blessing, and we have the wounds to prove it. It is a healthy reminder that our story isn’t a fairy tale — if happily ever after is what we’re after, we’re destined to be disappointed. Our story is simply one of relationship, of covenant, of living together in the presence of God. In what ways have you wrestled with God? In what ways have you been blessed in and through that struggle?

*Prayer: Holy God, may we continue to hold on to you, not letting go until we have received a blessing.*

**Friday: Read Luke 19:1-10**

Jesus doesn’t wait on Zacchaeus to invite him over for Sunday dinner; if he had, he’d still be waiting. Instead, Jesus just invites himself: “Hey you up there! Get ready. I’m coming to *your* house.” *Salvation* is coming to your house. This is a story that makes us rethink what we mean by salvation. In this story, Jesus just doesn’t talk about salvation in terms of what happens when we die; he doesn’t present a formula for getting saved (there’s no “Sinner’s Prayer” here); he doesn’t say getting saved happens only once, or twice, or three dozen times; he doesn’t even say it is up to us to make a decision. No, he tells Zacchaeus, “I am salvation; salvation has come to this house.” Paul puts it like this: “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19). Notice it is not the other way around; we cannot reconcile ourselves to God. Salvation is what God does. And God isn’t waiting around on us to get it right: in Christ, God is taking the lead, reconciling the world to himself. This story is such good news, because if salvation can show up at Zacchaeus’ house — at the chief tax collector’s house — then salvation can show up just about anywhere. How have you experienced the saving presence of Jesus? How are you called to live in response to God’s reconciling love?

*Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for choosing me, for loving me, and for saving me.*