

Sermon Notes



Series: B-sides

Sermon: If I Needed You

Acts 18:24-28

Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately. And when he wished to cross over to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. On his arrival he greatly helped those who through grace had become believers, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus.

Monday: Read Hebrews 5:11-6:12

The author of Hebrews is reminding his (most likely) Jewish audience that they had a lot of growing up to do. But then . . . who doesn't? Honesty should compel most any modern-day congregation to admit that on any number of points, they might be called spiritual infants, too. We all could be a little more "grown-up" in our faith at times. The good news? Even spiritual infants, toddlers, children, adolescents, and the occasional true spiritual adult are all bearers of God's grace. We give thanks that the largeness of God's grace means more than the smallness of our attitudes, so we keep working hard for God by caring for one another and "loving others as long as life lasts." This is the work that develops maturity in us. Who do you know that might be a "spiritual adult?" In what ways are you spiritually mature? Immature? What actions can you take to help develop the sort of maturity that the writer of Hebrews is describing?

Prayer: Holy One, help us to grow in spiritual maturity in order to know and do what is right and good. Amen.

Tuesday: Read James 1:17-27

"...Every generous act of giving...comes from above." All we do that is good comes from God. Wherever you find yourself -- or, more to the point, wherever our people find themselves -- God is at work for the health of this world that God loves so much. James is fairly practical in sharing recommendations for how to live in community with one another and God. And maybe most importantly, none of these activities James shares are restricted to Sunday. In fact, being more patient with co-workers, friends, and family members, or working hard to listen better, or advocating for the most vulnerable -- all of these things are done outside of Sunday, during our Monday-through-Saturday lives in the world. James reminds us of the tremendous importance of our daily lives and activities and actually hallows the everyday routines and responsibilities we often take for granted. What is one place in the coming week where God could use you to listen, to be more patient, to care for those in need? How might you listen to the word differently this week? How might you give thanks to God for your own generous acts?

Prayer: Loving God, let us hear your word that we may be transformed into doers of your will. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Matthew 20:16-28

Christianity, properly understood, is a religion of losers. It's hard to swallow, for not only do we not want to be a loser, we don't want to associate with them either. But here's the thing. In the Christian story it turns out that losers are not despised or rejected. In fact, losers can discover something about themselves that winners cannot ever appreciate: that they are loved and wanted simply because of who they are, and not because of what they achieve. That despite it all, raw humanity is glorious and wonderful, entirely worthy of love. This is revealed precisely at the greatest point of love. It is a revelation that love is stronger than death, that human worth is not indexed to worldly success. Often God's love is best demonstrated in our humble failings.

How might we celebrate our failures as a picture of Christ's redeeming love? In what ways might our church be last? How might the church more fully embrace those who have been chosen as losers in our society?

Prayer: Jesus, may I seek to be last in all ways. Amen.

Thursday: Read Matthew 5:17-20

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *The Cost of Discipleship*, provides a profound analysis of this section of the Sermon on the Mount. "There is a 'better righteousness' which is expected of Christians. Without it no one can enter the kingdom of heaven, for it is the indispensable condition of discipleship. The call of Christ, in fact Christ himself... is the [essential condition] of this better righteousness." Jesus is turning the world on its head here. He's reminding us that righteousness is a gift. A holy status before God is something we can't achieve on our own, so God gives it to us through grace. But it's important to note, this grace-given righteousness leads to a new kind of life. No, you can't earn your way into the kingdom by racking up brownie points with God; then again, once you get into the kingdom by grace, you can't pretend that living a moral life doesn't matter, either. The righteousness of which Jesus speaks in Matthew 5 is both gift and demand, both God's grace and our responsibility. How is God inviting us to live a "better righteousness?" In what ways are we called to fulfill the law? In what ways are we called to live beyond what that law says? How does this passage shape your view of the Gospel?

Prayer: Jesus, help us to embrace your "better righteousness" in our daily living. Amen.

Friday: Read Psalm 78:1-8

We are challenged by this Psalm not to cast aside the old, old story as irrelevant but to read it for what it is: an invitation to see ourselves in these stories and enter a living conversation in which God can open our hearts, our eyes, our ears, and our minds to a new awareness. We have been shaped by the hearing and reading of these stories of faith in deeply profound ways. So what do we do now? Who needs to hear our own stories of faith? How can we share of God's wisdom and greatness of Christ's mercy and forgiveness? What stories of faith are you sharing with future generations? What story do you need to share to ensure that all of our children know God for generations to come?

Prayer: Help me to share stories of God's faithful work with new generations. Amen.

Saturday: Read Psalm 139:23-24

We are our secrets. They are the essence of what makes us ourselves. There are dark secrets -- things we did or failed to do, fierce hungers, hurts too painful to speak of, doubts, fears. But there are also happy secrets, the secrets like treasures we hold close because we don't want to share them or can't find a way to adequately share them. Secrets for better or worse shape and form the people we become. If we are ever to be free and whole we must be free from their darkness, if we are to see each other as we fully are we must be able to share them in the light. To be fully known and embraced for who we are is the secret prayer of us all. How might you pray this prayer to God today? How might you be the answer to this prayer for someone today?

Prayer: Search me, O God, and know my heart;

test me and know my thoughts.

See if there is any wicked way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.