

Friday, August 14

Reading: Genesis 37:22, 27 *"Reuban said, 'Shed no blood, throw him into this pit' ...that he might rescue him..." and (Judah said) "Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites"*

Thought: I do love the stories in the Bible that give us insight into the character of the people they are about. Here, I am wondering if birth order of Joseph's brothers affected their actions as recorded in the Bible. Reuban was the eldest brother. I am the oldest of my siblings, and I have always felt a need to protect my younger sisters. Reuban does the same, preventing his brothers from killing Joseph and intending to come back to rescue him. Judah was the last of Leah's sons. Other than Rachel's sons Joseph, and later Benjamin, the sons that came after Judah were born of servants, so when Joseph was born, Judah would have lost his status as the baby of the "real" family. Perhaps that fed resentment that prompted Judah when he proposed getting rid of Joseph. All these wonderings don't deepen my understanding of the scripture, but they certainly make the characters come alive. And I believe that's a good thing. What makes the Bible come alive to you? How do you interpret the actions of Joseph's brothers?

Prayer: Eternal God – thank you for the stories of your people. Help me to read them with understanding and delight.

Saturday, August 15

Reading: Psalm 105:3 *"Glory in God's holy name, let the hearts of those that seek God rejoice."*

Thought: I am by nature an enthusiastic person and this verse reflects so much of what I feel when I contemplate my God and my faith. God's name is glorious to me and in the words of Dr. Seuss, God's name "sparkles like diamonds and gumdrops and gold." When I seek God out, wherever I am or whatever I am doing, I feel my heart grow and expand, and it sings out in joy and gratitude and wonder and awe. What does your heart do when you seek God? How do you experience God's glorious name?

Prayer: Wonderful and glorious God – your very name inspires me. My whole body and soul responds to you

Sunday August 16

Reading: 1 Kings 19:10 *Then God came to him, saying "what are you doing here?". Elijah answered, "I have been zealous for God, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."*

Thought: Some things never change....it seems like people have rejected God throughout history as well as today. Church attendance continues to decline, and society seems to be moving more and more away from what we as Christians see as the truly valuable things in life. There are days when I feel just like Elijah – although I would say God's prophets have been ignored by society, that is, metaphorically put to death, rather than killed by a sword. Most of my friends and family are not church goers and sometimes I feel all alone in my values and my faith. It is good to remember this story of Elijah, for God is always there, even when we feel we are alone in our faith, and misunderstood or ignored by society. It's also good that we can take

these cares and concerns to God. Have you ever felt alone in your faith? What Bible verse do you turn to if you feel that way?

Prayer: Holy Spirit – you were sent to dwell within me. Help me to feel your presence at all times.

Monday, August 17

Reading: 1 Kings 19:11-13 *...there was a great wind...but God was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake, after the earthquake was a fire, but God was not in the fire, and after the fire a sound of sheer silence...Then there came a voice..."*

Thought: This is a famous verse, and one that comes up regularly in the lectionary and in devotional readings. It bears repeating that God often speaks in the quiet times, not just in the big, miraculous, epic, extravagant ways that are so recognizable. Sometimes we need to listen carefully for that small still voice within us that whispers the words we need to hear. We at Southwood have been asked to ask God for direction for our church, and I would ask any of you who are not part of our congregation to pray for us as well. We need to hear God's voice, and you may be one who hears. Have you ever heard that small still voice? Have you heard God say what the congregation of Southwood should focus on?

Prayer: God – you are the one who knows all. We are seeking direction for our church and humbly ask that you reveal your will and your plan for us. Give me ears to hear and a heart to understand.

Tuesday, August 18

Reading: Romans 10:9 *"because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved."*

Thought: Paul tells the Romans that salvation requires at least two things. We must confess with our mouth, representing our willingness to speak out and bear witness of our belief in Jesus as our saviour. There is power in words and especially in saying them out loud. Somehow putting our belief on the outside as well as on the inside makes it more real and true. Paul also tells us that it is not enough to just speak of our faith, for those are empty words. We must believe in our hearts. It is not enough to outwardly present ourselves as Christian, we need to hold inwardly a true belief in the power of God, the salvation from Jesus, and the Holy Spirit within us. Inside and outside, God must be there for us to be truly saved. Have you confessed with your mouth? Do you believe in your heart?

Prayer: Heavenly Father – I believe in you and worship you. I believe in the sacrifice of your Son. Search my heart and root out any doubt or fear.

Wednesday, August 19

Reading: Romans 10:10 *"For it is with your heart that believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved"*

Thought: I love things that join up and form a circle. This verse is a continuation from yesterdays and somehow the two together feel right and complete. Yesterday we read how we

must speak our belief and hold it in our heart. Today we complete the circle, for when you have the heart of a believer you are naturally attracted to do good, which makes us justified and righteous in the good sense of the word, not self-righteous. Yet somehow it is not enough to be justified. We must also acknowledge our belief in order to be saved. In a way, it's like a circle, these two verses go hand in hand and together make our spiritual life complete. Do you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth? Do you feel justified and saved?

Prayer: Jesus – I believe in your life, death, and resurrection. I am willing to share my faith, to be justified and saved.

Thursday, August 20

Reading: Matthew 14:31 *“Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”*

Thought: Here is another Bible story that seems to speak to me personally. It seems I am so often like Peter – I start out so well spiritually, practically walking on water, then something happens, and I began to sink. Doubt at any level is a lack of faith and don't we all doubt at times. We may still believe in God, but doubt God's interest in us, or our understanding of God's will or even our faith. This verse gives us hope. Jesus may have pointed out to Peter that his faith was lacking, but he didn't condemn Peter or even hold him accountable for his lack of faith. Instead, he simply pointed out a fact, and helped him. Another example of how we can and should live. When was the last time your faith faltered? Have you reached out to someone whose faith was faltering?

Prayer: Jesus – you are my salvation and my judge. Help me in my unbelief and guide me to help those whose faith has wavered.