***Shiloh United Methodist Church***

Romans 8:28, 35, 37-39 Rev. Tyler Amundson January 31, 2021

***God Walks With Us***

***God Works Through Us***

***God Forces Evil and Suffering to Serve Us***

***God Ultimately Delivers Us***

Romans 8:28, 35, 37-39 (CEB)

**28** We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.

**35** Who will separate us from Christ's love? Will we be separated by trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

**37** But in all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us. **38** I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers **39** or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.

We have spent the last month asking big questions about who God is and what action God has in the world. Why does God let bad things happen? Why doesn't God answer my prayers? Why can’t I seem to find God’s will for my life?

As you have engaged this series and taken time to reflect you may have noticed that we have challenged some of the basic assumptions of faith. That God is not all powerful and is also not responsible for all the terrible things on our earth. That prayer is not always answered, and that God’s plan is perhaps not all written in a master playbook. We have talked a lot about what God is not, and just a little about what God is. Today, however as we wrap up this series I would like to touch on what God is.

***God Walks With Us***

God is with us in each moment of our lives, in the way of parent as described by Jesus.

***God Works Through Us***

God does give us inspiration and work with us to share love, peace and justice in our everyday lives.

***God Forces Evil and Suffering to Serve Us***

God may not prevent bad things or be responsible for them, but God does work through hard things to help us use them serve us, God and creation, for Good.

***God Ultimately Delivers Us***

God is in the work of guiding us to co-create a better world and help us author a future together, in a grand story that we follow.

When my daughters were younger they both had moments when they were afraid. Whether it was a windy, thunderstorm night or the dark closet scared them. I remember my brilliant wife setting up a bed of blankets and sheets on the floor. Because most nights at first the kids would crawl in bed with us, and sleep in what I would call the connecting part of a human H. My wife, Crystal, and I would not sleep those nights. The floor bed became an alternative space for the kids to sleep near us.

For some reason just being near us made them feel safer. The darkness still existed and we didn’t stop storms for them. However, the very idea of being near us as parents made it easier to face the dark challenges.

Jesus’ description of God as a parent who is always with us is very similar. God doesn’t take away the challenges, instead the notion that God is with gives us courage to face those challenges. God is in active part in walking with us as we find our own courage to face the darkness.

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One Sunday 4 years ago, I had the opportunity to worship in a church whose description sounds like the daydream of someone who fell asleep during a boring sermon. I attended a progressive Evangelical church, with a pastor educated at United Methodist Seminary, and they met in a trampoline park. Before you get jealous of their trampolines, they don't use them during worship. I drove up to this storefront church in Chandler, Arizona got, out of my car and not 10 seconds later they were showing me around their church. What an amazing group of people excited to share message of how Jesus loves everyone exactly as they are.

Preaching at that church this particular Sunday happened to be one of my favorite Christian authors, Brian McClaren. Who took a minute to pray with me about some challenges I was facing, even though he was the primary speaker that Sunday. Brian shared this story:

It was after September 11th and Brian got what he calls a “nudge from God” that said, “Your neighbors are in danger, reach out.” Brian listened to that idea, wrote a letter, made copies and delivered them to the local Mosques in his community. The letters said, “We are a Christian Church in your community and we support you. If you need any support, of any kind, please let us know.”

Brian wanted to deliver the messages by hand, so he took a day to drive to stop by all the Mosques. Most of the mosques were locked up tight and Brian had to slip the letters in mailboxes or under heavy metal doors. As he approached one mosque he saw a TV truck, one with a big satellite dish drive out of the sliding metal gate that surrounded the building. Brian slammed on the accelerator, which was less than dramatic in his Prius, and went flying in the gate before it closed. An Imam came running toward his car screaming and waving his arms, and Brian slammed on the brakes and got out of his car.

The Imam was still waving his arms as Brian walked up to the man apologizing profusely. Brian explained he was a pastor of a local church and wanted to share a letter with the Imam, and handed the Imam the letter. The Imam took the letter, and read it. Then looked up at Brian, and down at the letter. Then wrapped his arms around Brian and hugged him.

The Imam explained that the TV truck that had just left, was there to interview him because a woman who was a part of his mosque had just been assaulted and harassed. The Imam was wondering if anyone in his neighborhood actually cared about him or his people. The Imam and Brian became close friends after this. And Brian shared that while his church wasn't sure what to do with an Imam coming to visit Brian on a regular basis, they sure did learn to love the Pakistani food their friends from the mosque would bring to them.

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In 1957, at a Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas 9 African American students were enrolled to begin the process of desegregating the schools. The students were met initially with an injunction by the governor of the state to bar them from school, but even after this was gone the cruelty being taught to some students on how to hate these brave nine was fiercer than the injunction. This was a part of a larger movement to bring an end to nearly 100 years of racialized oppression of blacks in America. A history of racism that stems back to the dehumanization of people done by those justifying the slave trade. This incredible history was not solved with this one action, but the stories that come from this time are full of examples of deeply lived out love. They are stories in a time of violence that ring true with the power of simple yet powerful actions of combatting violence with a potent form of relationship we find in the character of Jesus. Of evil and injustice being turned into God’s justice and love.

One such story goes this way:[[1]](#footnote-1)

Rev. James Lawson met with the Little Rock Nine in the living room of a community member. The nine had been instructed to be non-violent, and to “not fight back” when things were done to them in school. Rev. Lawson was concerned about this because it was clear on the teenagers faces that these instructions had dis-empowered them. What were they to do when they faced people, other teenagers who violently tried to keep them out of the school?

Rev. Lawson changed it up on them. He said, “You can fight back.” He reminded them they should not use the methods being violently used against them. Instead he recommended they use their mind. Those that are violent usually have an expected outcome of how their victim will act. Look for the moment to surprise them and to catch them off guard by fighting back with brave care-filled action. This kind of action Rev. Lawson spoke of would be very hard to do, but it at least gave the nine hope.

This group of nine students would gather with Rev. Lawson weekly for a period of time to debrief and come up with a plan for their responses to violence at school. The students during the workshopping time shared that at school some days the nine would be hit with bombs, they were hard material like a rock or a marble wrapped in foil or paper. These bombs would be thrown at the nine full force leaving bruises and hurting terribly. One-day, Melba Patilla Beals, one of the nine, was walking into her English class and a bomb went whizzing by her head hit the wall and fell to the floor.

Melba next picked up the bomb that had been thrown at her. Walked over to the desk of the boy who had thrown it at her and while holding eye contact set it on his desk. The boys around all laughed nervously at the action. The next day in English class the same boy who had thrown the bomb at Melba, met her at the door. He said, “Good morning Melba.” The boy never caused the nine trouble again and the nine removed him from a list they kept of students causing them problems.

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As we hear in our scripture today:

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**I am counting on God to deliver us, and I believe it will happen because God is one of resurrection. Jesus example of living and even more his resurrection reminds us that God can work through the deep darkness that would crucify love to bring transformation and deliver us to a kin-dom made in God’s image. In a few weeks we will begin our journey towards Easter…in this year we have faced darkness…will you join me in believing in God’s redemption as we move into a future full of God’s possibilities. To awaken people who have allowed ignorant leaders to fool us. To heal us from a disease that has taken too many of our loved ones. To rattle us to care for our creation. And who will remind us love, connection to one another is our biggest gift.**

**As we end our time together today would you join me in remembering as we pray the Lord’s prayer later today that is is meant to remind us that:**

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God is with us. Shalom and Amen

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uq1VVzyQII0 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)