

Man VS. Wild

Shepherd's Grace Church

June 22, 2014

²⁴“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master;²⁵ it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! ²⁶“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. ³²“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. ³⁴“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶and one's foes will be members of one's own household. ³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. (Matt. 10: 24-39) (Also Read Gen. 21: 8-21)

How quickly we forget! When things go well for us it is easy to quickly forget what we were feeling when things were going badly! How quickly we forget! When things are going badly for us, how quickly we forget what we were feeling when things were going well. How quickly we forget.! This is especially true for kids isn't it? I'm sure you've noticed it...perhaps even here in church. When we gather and one of the little ones is cranky and crying a little, or perhaps a lot because they have been pulled on, and woken up and put in a basket and carried around and had everyone get in their face to tell them how cute they are they finally have just had enough! They let go and they let out a big scream! They cry like they have seen the end of the world!...then someone gives them a piece of doughnut if they are old enough or a pacifier and the soothing feeling of something in their mouth; something sweet tasting or just familiar causes them to become instantly calm! How quickly we forget!

When that same child is calm and serene in the fellowship hall, enjoying the attention of people wandering in and out...being talked to and fussed over and generally loved, when the child has a piece of doughnut or a pacifier and is feeling calm and satisfied and safe the child acts happy and genuinely enjoys life! Then the doughnut is taken away or the pacifier is put away and the child is taken into the sanctuary where there are strange noises and someone standing at the front of the room talking, seemingly going on and on...waving arms and flapping hands and making so many noises with his mouth...finally the child just loses it! They were happy and content just a few minutes and a few feet ago and now they can't remember all the good they were feeling! All they can feel is the seemingly

endless trauma of that which they are sure they do not and never will like! Immediately they move from calm to crying! How quickly we forget!

The same is true for adults isn't it? I'm not saying a doughnut will solve all our situations or be the solution to all our problems but we seem to move as people from emotion to emotion just like little children. We struggle with issues of health...a broken arm or a simple surgery where we have to go through a period of recovery and we struggle to do the therapy or with the fact that our friends can go swimming and enjoy the summer the way we want to but are unable to. We are miserable and feel sorry for ourselves and think how unfair life is! Then when we are at our lowest, a good friend shows up with a meal that has been prepared...all our favorites complete with fellowship of good company and we forget everything that has seemed to go wrong! How quickly we forget!

As adults we also find ourselves in happy situations sometimes. We are able to pay all the bills. We are able to save some for the vacation we have been planning and we go on the trip, have a wonderful time and come back to the world generally satisfied with our life and all that is happening in it! Then, without warning or notice, someone backs into our car and does terrible damage to it. All we can focus on is the disaster that has just happened. We quickly forget the sense of calm and peace we perceived just a moment before the accident. We fail to recognize that no one was injured in the accident and that the property damaged can eventually be repaired. All we can think of is the accident and how unfair it is! How quickly we forget!

Of course, what I am talking about are basic human emotions. We feel what we feel in the moment because that is who we are as people! From the time we are infants we are taught what it feels like to be safe and secure and as long as we feel that way, we are satisfied. When something threatens our safety, we become fearful and we quickly forget the security we just felt in exchange for feelings of anxiety and heightened awareness that things are not what they should be. We immediately set aside the feelings of calm and exchange that for feelings of what we need to do to protect ourselves from what we perceive is a threat.

Fear is a basic instinct of survival. We experience fear so that we can have a heightened sense of awareness. Our senses are on high alert and we experience everything more keenly! When we are in fear, our eyes dart from place to place, quickly examining our surroundings, alerting us to potential dangers. Our sense of touch is more keen. We feel edges that are rough or smooth and we notice the change in texture. We notice what is sharp and that which is dull. Our sense of smell is heightened. Fragrances that would often go unnoticed are now pungent and pervasive! Even our sense of taste is altered. Foods taste differently because of the adrenaline that enters our mouth and keeps every part of us on high alert! Fear is an invasive emotion that necessarily invites us to stay alive and protect those whom we care about!

Fear is a helpful emotion in survival situations but it can be a hurtful emotion when it is allowed to control our actions in situations where we should not be afraid. In the television show, "Man VS Wild," the star places himself in countless situations where he is challenged by the harshest conditions we can imagine. He is chased by wild animals, caught in roaring rivers and attempts to survive in the harshest

of climates! He portrays himself as frightened in order to maintain the interest of the viewers. He feigns fear for the sake of television ratings. He knows he is in no danger as he faces these wild adventures. He knows there is a camera man 50 feet from him and that there is a whole production crew just behind the camera! He is never in any real danger at any time but he feeds on the fear of the audience to keep his program on the air.

It is amazing how people feed on fear. It is amazing how quickly we will allow ourselves to be manipulated because of this emotion of fear. In cases like this, the fear we feel serves no purpose. It does not allow us to survive but instead sentences us to potential death. God gives us fear to protect us and keep us alive. When we are afraid of things that should not be fearful, we find ourselves faced with systems on overdrive that sometimes force us into actions that are inappropriate! In a state of heightened awareness we make decisions that are not in our best interests or in the interests of our family. As a result, we find ourselves wasting resources and damaging relationships needlessly.

You know how this kind of fear functions. A family takes on a financial obligation knowing it will place their budget in difficulty for a time. They can see a future where the decision they make will be able to benefit them all. They agree to make the necessary sacrifices for the short term so they can do what they believe is in the family's best interest in the long term. As days and weeks go by, emergency expenses emerge. These unexpected expenses cause the family to have to juggle other bills and soon they find themselves having to make choices about what is most important to them. They become fearful that they will lose their house or car and they begin to disagree about decisions that are being made. They can no longer see the future filled with possibilities. They are mired in the muck of their present and they begin to place blame. Most of us have been in these situations and we know the struggles the family is going through. Most of us who have persevered in these situations know that if the family can just hang on for a little while, the future they foresaw will find them. Most of us know that the fear they feel is unfounded but they do not know!

Today, God wants them...God wants us to know! For this reason, God shares the very real story of Isaac and Ishmael. It is a story that most people can relate to and it is a story of fear! We know the context of the story. In Genesis 12 God calls Abram (Later Abraham) and makes a promise. Abram likes the promise but does not trust the one who makes it. When he first finds himself in difficulty, out of fear he plans to sacrifice his relationship with his wife Sarai (Later Sarah) by forcing her to degrade herself with Pharaoh in order to save his life. God intercedes and teaches Abram that God is trustworthy. There is no need to fear as long as he follows God. Lesson learned right? Wrong! The next time Abram finds himself in difficulty, out of fear he attempts to control the situation himself. Again he forces his wife to degrade herself exactly as before!

It turns out that Abram learned nothing about God's trustworthiness and continued to act as if he could somehow manipulate the situation of fear he found himself in. He made bad decisions because his senses falsely told him that he had to take charge of the situation himself. He could not imagine the future that was promised to him because he did not trust the One who made the offer! In short, Abram let fear control his life! He was old, his wife was barren and well beyond child bearing age and he could

not imagine how God could keep God's promise! He wanted what was promised but his fear kept him from trusting the Promise maker!

Sarah was no better. She knew the promise God made to her husband. When God made that promise she was already nearly 80 years old. She knew she was well beyond her own ability to bear a child but she went with Abraham any way! She allowed herself to be put in a situation where her integrity and even her life were in jeopardy. She knew and she went along because she too wanted the promise! She wanted it so badly she manipulated it out of her own fear. She told Abraham to conceive a child with her slave and claim the child as heir. Out of fear...out of her fear and mistrust, she tried to manipulate the situation because her senses told her that she had to be in control!

Sarah's fear produced the results she thought she wanted. Her husband now had an heir who could become the great nation God promised but then God talked to her. He said the heir was to come from her relationship with Abraham and not through another. She laughed! She could not imagine how God could fulfill that promise when for years she had been unable to conceive. Out of her mistrust, she laughed at God!

When God fulfilled God's promise, however Sarah's fear was focused on another source. Suddenly, the promise had been kept and she had what she always wanted! As she looked around however, there was a threat to what she had. Her family might have to share inheritance and the promise with the son of a slave! She saw how Ishmael looked at her and out of fear she perceived contempt! She sensed Hagar's desire to be treated as a wife and not a slave and she mistakenly moved to protect her family out of a misplaced fear!

She asked Abraham to cast out the slave woman and her son. Abraham was devastated. His family was being torn apart but he wanted Sarah and her family! He went to the Lord and the Lord said, "Do not be afraid!" This time Abraham trusted, he listened and he obeyed not out of fear but out of trust for God's ability to keep God's promise. When Abraham cast out Hagar and her son, he did so out of trust and as a result, another church was born!

God's promise to Abraham and Hagar was that God would make of Ishmael a nation also. That nation would go on to become the Muslim nation. The church that was born was the Muslim faith and it was born not out of fear but out of faith...faith finally that God could accomplish all God said God could accomplish! The Muslim faith was born out of a promise by our God, the same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! The God of Muslim and of Judaism and of Christianity is One and the Same!

Sarah's misfounded fear forced God to make good from evil for those who would believe in Him and do His works. (Romans 12) That fear is where our gospel lesson catches up with the lesson from Genesis today! "No disciple is greater than the teacher, no servant greater than the master," Matthew says through Jesus. It is enough, he goes on to say that disciples and servants aspire to be like their teachers and masters. We as disciples and servants are not to try to manipulate circumstances and take control of situations. We are supposed to let God do that. We are supposed to allow ourselves to be placed in those situations so we can be like our teacher in them!

As Jesus teaches His disciples, the fear is coming from the Pharisees. They are concerned about where Jesus' ministry comes from. He has done mighty acts and they cannot explain how he is doing them. He is curing the sick, healing the lame, causing the blind to see and the poor, the oppressed, the downtrodden, those who have had no hope are suddenly finding hope and promise in His presence! God has been silent for 400 years and they believe they are the authority, the sole repository of the reminders of God's teachings. There can be no other leadership on matters of God and God's presence than them. They have called Jesus Beelzebul; satan!

In an attempt to belittle his ministry they have tried to use fear as a factor in discouraging those who are choosing to come to him! Jesus, talking to His disciples says that this fear factor should not be an influence in their following his teaching. Fear, he says is from the unknown. The disciples should have no cause for fear of the unknown because all that is unknown will be made known. If they do not yet understand who He is and what He has been sent to do, they should not fear because they soon will.

Faith invites us into this kind of understanding! We see the actions of God brought about through the power of the Holy Spirit and we believe in a power that can create possibilities beyond any we could imagine. In chapter 4, when the disciples had caught no fish, Jesus spoke and their nets were filled to overflowing. The disciples had been witness to the many faith producing acts performed by Jesus and they had been the beneficiaries of some! They were now expected to know what they had seen and where it had come from! Jesus acts were not the acts of Satan but of God who had sent God's son into the world, Emmanuel (God with us!)(Matt. 1: 21)

If God is with us, there is no need to fear. If God is with us there is no reason to stay quiet! The words of our Pharisees, today's detractors, those who would say we have no relevance in the world should not discourage us from sharing the good news of Jesus Christ! When it was first shared, it was not shared as a message forced on the people. It was shared as a message offered for those willing to look beyond what they knew in their lives who dared hope for something more. Abraham and Sarah heard the message. It took time for them to understand the fullness of it. It took a lifetime of God building a relationship with them. When the disciples first heard the message, it took time for them as well but as their faith grew, so did their responsibility!

This morning, we hear Jesus talking to disciples who have been given authority to go out into the world and proclaim the message. They have been given authority to cast out demons, cure illness and share God's invitation to a relationship! They have been given the opportunity to proclaim to God's chosen people God's on-going plan to make of them a great nation as God promised to Abraham and Sarah several hundred years earlier! This morning we should hear Jesus talking to us! This authority has been given to us and we have the opportunity to share God's good news with the world.

When Jesus tells us something...something like "Love God, love neighbor," as we read scripture in bed late at night we should wake up early in the morning eager to spread that message in the light of day! We should spread it as we head off for work. We should let our children know! We should tell people in the office! We should tell people at the farm implement store! We should tell people at lunch and dinner! We should tell everyone!

When Jesus whispers to us, we should climb on the roof and shout to the world that God is in control, not just of the lives we lead but the universe which God created! Love of God and love of neighbor is not just limited to the God who looks like us or the neighbor we would choose! We are called to love a God who allows for all human freedoms; even the freedom to reject God! God allows for people to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling(Phil 2: 11) even if that means they work it out through the teachings of the children of Ishmael!

What God wants the people of Ishmael to understand is that they have missed a key element in their understanding of God! As they work out their faith in the presence of our proclamation, the element they have missed will become inescapable. People of the Muslim faith believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God we worship today! They believe Jesus Christ was a great prophet who came to give the good news to the world. They believe Jesus' disciples so distorted the message that the prophet Mohamed was sent to straighten it out. They believe their salvation is determined by their doing more good in their lifetime than bad! 50.1 percent is sufficient for salvation!

They believe that when Jesus returns to earth...let me say that again! They believe that when Jesus returns to earth He will bring with him the truth! Yes, the Muslim faith believes Jesus will return. They do not believe He was crucified for our sins but that he was taken up to heaven like Elijah. When Jesus returns He will share the truth.

When we look at their faith, the essential element we recognize missing is Grace! The Muslim faith, the Hebrew faith, all other religions I am aware of believe God will look at the work we do and will allow for our good intentions. Only Christianity professes that we are all "Sinners saved by Grace!" Only Christianity recognizes that God cannot tolerate sin in any form and that reconciliation had to be made in order for relationship to be restored! To be sinless is the only source of salvation! Only Christianity understands this as part of God's nature and only Christianity recognizes the full impact of Christ's death on the cross as a means of restoring that sinless sense of Grace to our relationship with God!

This is what we are to receive in a whisper but proclaim from the housetops! That God's grace poured out for all people allows for a restored relationship that leads to eternal life in God's presence! We cannot afford as disciples of Jesus Christ to reject the presence of people of Muslim faith in our society today! We cannot afford to reject people of other colors or religions or races! We need them all because we need to share the message with all! All are loved, all are cared for, all have been made provision for not through the good lives they lead but through the Grace of God that is poured out through the Love of Jesus Christ!

Not one sparrow falls to the ground without God noticing! All the hairs on our heads are counted...for some, the counting takes a little longer than for others but all are counted! We are worth many sparrows! Now, I think Jesus was a little "tongue in cheek" here. We are in fact worth hundreds...thousands of sparrows but the point is we are all...male, female, slave, free, Jew, Greek, Gentile, black brown, yellow, red or white...we are all precious in the sight of God! When God told Abraham and Hagar that God would make a nation of Ishmael, God demonstrated that

importance...even though Isaac was the one through whom God would restore relationship, Ishmael would be cared for, nurtured, loved!

Our opportunity is to bear witness to this love! When we profess this love to others, Jesus will profess His love for us to the Father in heaven. When we deny this love, we will be denied in heaven. As disciples we must know that our responsibility is to teach what we have been taught. We can never be greater than our teacher but we can be like Him! We can offer ourselves for others and we can offer ourselves to be sure that all...ALL have a chance to hear the good news of God's love!

This will lead to conflict! Members of our family will want us to keep the good news to ourselves! Friends will ridicule and reject us for embracing others who are different. Members of other faiths will reject our teaching as untruth! Unless we take up the cross though, we are unworthy of Jesus. Our cross is not the crucifixion. Jesus did that once and for all time and His willingness was sufficient for our sin. Our cross is not to live our lives in quiet desperation. Our cross is not merely to meet the obligations we have financially for our families. Everyone must bear those responsibilities.

Our cross is love! Our cross is uncommon love! It is a love that recognizes God's love, even for a sparrow, even for us! Our cross invites us to be in our lives the love that God offers for the world! Our cross is not polished brass or gold. It is knotted and gnarly! It is not even and straight. It is wild and ferocious and it is heavy with the weight of the world. Our cross is wild and weird! It is unknown and untamed but it is ours! It is the Love of the world and it invites us to life in Jesus Christ. Those who seek this world and life here will lose life but those who are willing to look beyond only what they can see, those who are willing to trust God with their very lives will find their lives more completely than they could ever imagine! Amen!