

# Marion weekly update

SERMON February 11— ‘The Want To’ John 1:29-42, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

This is the last week in our series that was inspired by the Global Exchange Conference. What we’re going to consider revolves around accountability, evangelism, and the ability to lead the world.

Some might not consider themselves leaders. Unfortunately if we call ourselves Christians we don’t have a choice. The very nature of our faith demands that we lead. This isn’t necessarily saying everyone needs to be in charge. It also isn’t saying that all leadership is about fully pushing people in a direction aggressively. The leadership we all share in is that of setting an example. We are called to be a model for the world as to what it looks like to follow Jesus and serve God fully and correctly. If our example is genuinely representing Christ, then the hope is that those around us will follow our example. If we want others to follow, there is a word for what we are doing. Leading.

This is the heart of the Great Commission. “Go into the world and make disciples of all nations.” This is what it means when we are told that we are all part of a “royal priesthood.” We have a responsibility.

To fulfill our role we have to be able to put others first. We have to get over ourselves. Too often people go into a conversation intent on their own agenda. If that’s the case there’s already a strike against. If I’m all about my agenda, I’m less likely to see and hear the other person. I’m trying to force the interaction my way. Frequently these conversations look more like steamrollers than like conversations. The more we can roll with the way an interaction unfolds and feel the situation for what it is offering the more likely we’ll be to forge genuine connection and accomplish something. Even if it wasn’t what I intended at the outset.

Getting over ourselves involves stepping aside myself and trying to see things through the eyes of another. Can I take time to put myself in their shoes? Not superficially. Genuinely hear their story and imagine what it would be like to have their experiences. There are things we may hear that grate against us. There are knee jerk internal and emotional reactions we can have depending on what we see, hear, and experience from another. What is important is to regulate ourselves because that’s the only way to respond as well as possible.

Note the term respond. Not react. React means the situation is controlling ME. Good or bad I’m at the mercy of circumstance and other people because I bounce from feeling to feeling depending on them. Respond means I am controlling myself in the situation. I’ve already made the choice that I’m not going to react. I’m going to get over myself for the sake of whatever is happening or whomever I’m with. When I worked in the group home and would counsel kids who had just had a bad incident or were anticipating a confrontation often I’d have to remind them of this. “Next time such and such happens I’m going to knock him out.” At that point the decision was being made to respond in a problematic way and usually giving excuse to react to what was expected to be a pending flood of anger. Instead why not make an active decision to NOT do that. Make the choice to walk away, talk it out with someone, something to regulate and respond in a way that doesn’t make life harder and more miserable with the consequences of a bad decision.

Sometimes it worked...sometimes it didn’t.

Consequence falls into this line of thinking and being as well. Too often people of faith want to consequence the world that doesn’t believe and give it’s own members a pass. Which goes directly against Corinthians. Corinthians flips that script. Leave the world to itself, take care of the ones who believe. That’s enough work in and of itself. This passage is certainly harsh. If someone says they believe but have a habitual sin that won’t correct, essentially shun them. Harsh.

Every now and again we might find this happen. Perhaps not on the full scale of a congregation but certainly amongst pockets within it. Typically it’s less about the habitual sin and more about being hurt by an individual and wanting to punish them. Or there’s a particular sin that’s a project for one person and they can target another. The issue with this is asking the question, which sin do we start

with? How steep of a witch hunt are we really prepared to go on to be consistent and thorough? And finally, if we ferret out everyone's sin and problem behaviors how long will it be until our pews are empty because everyone has a struggle they are facing.

But before we get too interested in pointing the finger, have we taken the time to understand the one we're aiming at? Do we know the fullness of why things are the way they are? Have we tried to relate their struggle to our own? Can I get over my own desire to judge and see through the other's eyes? What might that accomplish? What might I hear? What connection might be formed to help a fellow brother or sister through whatever the struggle may be?

When we're trying to invite someone to walk with us following Jesus, the grace that said "forgive them they know not what they do" has to reign in our hearts. The way we treat one another must reflect that same grace. Otherwise what are we inviting them into? More of the same that they experience in every other walk of life? This is the salt Jesus talks about to season the world.

This communication is so important and we're going to see how it applies directly to evangelism in a moment.

When we're thinking about walking with one another and growing, there are three questions that we have to keep in mind. If it's an area that needs corrected or a strength that can be elevated and used for God's glory all three are relevant.

Do they see it?

Do they know how?

Do they want to?

If someone doesn't see it, nothing can happen. Sometimes it's not that it isn't seen, it's just disagreed with. For example if I see something as being wrong, the other might see it as well but disagree that it's wrong. Can I get over myself enough to agree to disagree in favor of staying in fellowship together? Nevertheless, in order to embrace or change something we first have to acknowledge its existence.

Now if I see something, do I know how to change it or act on it? If the answer is "no" I need someone patient enough to help me learn how. This is also why we need to see through another's eyes. If we are the one who needs to do the helping can we understand one another enough to be effective?

Finally, even if I see it and know how, do I want to? If the answer is "no", it's dead in the water. We hope more and more that the answer is "yes".

In terms of evangelism these same questions are necessary. Do they see it? Do they see the gospel for what it truly is? Do they see it lived out in our lives?

If they do, do they know how to make those first steps into a life of faith? Am I willing to walk with them on that journey?

Finally, do they want to?

If the answer is no then why? Sometimes the answers are ones we don't want to hear. If I'm not living out my faith in the image of Christ I could be the reason. People have been hurt by the church. How do we overcome it? Can we be patiently not pushy and simply stay in relationship with people and trust that time can do what we may not be able to in an instant?

The parable of the sower directly connects to this. When the Word of God goes out there are many reasons it may not take. But sometimes it does. In all of it we offer what we have in love, kindness, and compassion. We remember that just because the "want to" may not be right now, over time it may emerge. Will we be there if it does?

The call stories of the disciples is also connected to this. In John they needed a nudge from John to approach Jesus. They'd heard about Him, now here He was. It says they went and spent time with Him. We don't know what all the conversation entailed. Whatever it was they were on board. They saw Him. John had given them instruction on the "how to". They wanted to, and they did. The same is true in other call stories. When Jesus met them fishing they didn't "see" Him at first. It took some convincing. When they were convinced they knew the "how to". Follow. As the reality of who this was before them, the "want to" was cultivated.

This is the question for all of us. Do we want to? If we do, on whose terms? Whoever we are now, we can all grow beyond ourselves to be more like Christ. This means seeing things we need to let go of. Letting the Holy Spirit and those around us find how to do it. Then let the want to take over and drive us into new ways of being and doing that make us more one with God. As we do, the hope is that we'll find more along the way to join us.

## BIBLE STUDY 1 Samuel

Chapter 7 begins dovetailed into the end of chapter 6. The resting place of the ark is in a priestly town. This is a good sign. Whereas before they weren't taking God seriously and the ark was a trinket of luck to them, now there is a reverence. That it was there 20 years signals at least some sense of longevity in a period of Israel's history. Keep in mind, they are still a unification of tribes as opposed to a fully cohesive nation. Samuel has become their leader, but certainly not their ruler.

What comes next is a sort of final stage in a cycle that we have seen over and over again through the book of Judges. Israel falls into sin, typically idolatry. They enter a period of disaster and problems amongst themselves. A deliverer shows up. They repent. There is a period of peace. Then they fall back into idolatry. And so it goes.

An important consideration is the role idolatry plays. It is a foundational problem because so many other problems spring from it. Once something other than God is put on the pedestal, it throws all else into confusion. Priorities get confused. How we view one another gets twisted. At the end of the book of Judges we see just how barbaric and out of hand things can get. Keep in mind that an idol doesn't have to be something that is recognized by everyone else as a "god". It can be a job, a sport, money, a political or celebrity figure, it can be anything at all. The moment that takes place above God something is going to get out of whack in our lives.

In this case, Israel had taken on the god Baal and the goddess Asherah. They were a couple associated with fertility. In an agricultural region you can see why this would be a popular pair. The worship of these gods fairly destroyed their worship of God and the fallout was dire. In repentance they did away with this idolatry at Samuel's command. Samuel in this chapter is both judge and prophet. He has judged Israel to be at fault, and the response is to return to worshipping God and God alone.

Samuel orders a gathering at Mizpah to make for a genuine moment of ritual and repentance for Israel. Certainly "all" Israel didn't descend on Mizpah. Still, a large representation was there to proclaim a renewed commitment to God. In the presence of this congregation Samuel would step in and go to God on their behalf. He is now acting as the prophetic intermediary.

Note the three part response of Israel:

They were obedient to Samuel's direction

There was a ritual to symbolize this new direction. The pouring of water if we think about the flood is a sign of cleansing and for them repentance. Perhaps we can cast forward to our ritual of baptism. For the new believer the water is a sign of cleansing, repentance, and a new beginning.

There is confession. They simply and boldly proclaim that they have sinned.

The most important part of all of it is that they didn't just show, they didn't just observe a ritual, and they didn't just admit wrongdoing. They changed their behavior. All throughout scripture we see this sentiment. First do what is right in God's eyes, then do the other things. What God desires is a change of heart evidenced in changed action.

The gathering is large enough that the Philistines hear about it and plan to attack. Perhaps they saw a lot of targets gathered in one place. Or maybe they thought Israel was gathering to attack them. Later in the chapter we see that some of those cities that showed up in chapters 5 and 6 were once Israelite land that the Philistines captured. The bad blood between them had a history and would also have a future. So they are ready to attack and Israel is afraid.

Israel's response here is very different than it was in chapter 4. In chapter 4 they ran off to battle on their own. God was nowhere on their radar until they got trounced. Then they went after the ark assuming that even without faith God would intervene. They were wrong. In this situation they begin

with pleading with God. They go to the prophet and ask him to step in and talk to God on their behalf. Samuel then does something that may have seemed odd and nerve wracking.

Before the grand cry out to God Samuel calls for a suckling lamb to sacrifice. What?! They are waiting for the Philistines to arrive and attack and Samuel wants to offer up a sacrifice? Imagine instances where you were late for something or had a deadline and everything gets in the way. You're looking at your watch, tapping your foot, heart racing, starting to sweat. The traffic won't move. The cashier can't figure out the register. The person you're speaking with won't let you go. And all you're thinking is "I HAVE SOMETHING TO DO! I HAVE TO GO!!!" Now imagine what you're worried about is your enemies that just whipped you not long ago attacking and rather than go to God directly Samuel wants to take the time to do this.

This pause is significant and we can learn from it. The sacrifice represents them being fully reliant and committed to God. They will take the necessary time to make an offering before offering a petition. Even though the enemy is coming, they will do what is correct and trust that God will handle the business of the day whatever comes. Then Samuel goes to God and God answers.

How often do we go to God impatiently. Maybe thoughtlessly. Maybe selfishly. Maybe we haven't truly considered what the proper way is to approach God in correctness. We just want what we want here and now. In our fervor we might miss an answer that comes, or we're not ready for God to respond in the affirmative because we're not demonstrating a faith that has the right depth and maturity.

God's response was one that would have been recognizable to anyone in that region. The gods were associated with natural occurrences. Lightning strikes, that's one god. A volcano erupts, that's another. There's drought, Baal is unhappy. As the Philistines approach to attack booming thunder cracks the sky and terrifies them. Not long ago they'd had the tumors and rats plaguing them. Now they again approach Israel and from the sky comes the threat of their God. They panic and run. The Israelites chase them down and slaughter them.

A note in reading the passages. Remember that when it says the ark was in Kiriath Jearim for twenty years it doesn't indicate that this scenario at Mizpah was twenty years down the road. The twenty years is simply a note letting us know how long the ark would remain there. Mizpah occurs on the heels of the arrival of the ark in that town.

As we see this battle unfold there are several considerations to be mindful of. The situation is the reverse of what happened in chapter 4. In chapter 4 Israel lacks faith and is soundly beaten. They went in their own strength, forgetting their God. Here they remember their God and soundly defeat the Philistines. Perhaps the most important aspect is who won the victory. It wasn't Israel. It was God. God was the one that sent the Philistines running. The Israelites just capitalized on the work God had done. Understanding this is part of the frame up of what will occur in chapter 8.

The clear sign is that if they worship God and follow God as their leader they will thrive and be victorious. In other words, this is the beautiful reward of serving God as God and King. It doesn't take long before Israel loses this notion once we jump into the following chapter.

Verses 13 and 14 need to be understood with some nuance. They can't be read as history. We know this because throughout the rest of Samuel's life the Philistines continued to cause problems for Israel. If we remember the story of David and Goliath the Philistines in that story up until David arrives are beating a frightened Israelite army. They also didn't necessarily have any sense of lasting peace with the Amorites. We trust that the word of God is true, so if this isn't historically accurate what is going on?

These verses are likely more of an envisioning of what the future could look like were they to continue to accept God as God and King. The envisioning is conditional. IF Israel continues with God AND King this peace is possible. If they do not then the situation could develop very differently. And as time goes on it does.

The chapter ends with once again affirming Samuel as a faithful man of God. He is both judge and prophet. Setting up shop in a small circuit amongst a cluster of towns he is centralizing the spiritual leadership of Israel. They know where to find him if they need him. He both dispenses justice, giving

ruling over various matters, he intercedes for Israel, he clearly also faithfully carries out their ritual and sacrifices. This to the point that he builds an altar at his home.

Shiloh isn't mentioned here. Perhaps Shiloh due to Eli and his sons has a bad association with it. Regardless, Samuel is doing his level best to get the spiritual center of Israel on the right track and seemingly is off to a good start with how this scene has played out between the Philistines and the Israelites. An encouragement for all of us is that if Israel can bounce back from how deeply they had fallen, so can anyone and any people. It takes humility, it takes honesty, it takes real change of heart and lift. When we make a mess of things this isn't always easy. If we are willing and trusting of God we can take the risk. We can embrace our faith, trust in God's grace, and find the strength to make the changes necessary to move in the right direction again.

## ASH WEDNESDAY MEDITATIONS

### Reflection 1: Confess

#### 1 John 1: 8-10

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

Admitting we're wrong isn't easy. When we see how the world responds to mistakes it can be downright terrifying. How can we own up to our faults in a time and place where sharing our own darkness can be turned against us? With God there is no such fear. We can go to God in honesty and truth with whatever is burdening our hearts with absolute assurance. In reality to hide our faults and pretend they don't exist is to separate ourselves from God. Stark, honest admission is what draws us nearer to God. The nearness is the result of our baring our souls, and trusting God with the outcome. We are assured that the outcome is forgiveness and closeness. What do we hold so close to ourselves that we dare not share it with the world? What do we need to openly share with God so that we can move beyond our sin to a place of transformation and freedom?

### Reflection 2: Repentance

#### Luke 3: 1-3

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

John's baptism was one of repentance. It wasn't one of salvation through the cross. It couldn't be. Jesus hadn't accomplished this work yet. Jesus took up the mantle of John's baptism. He called the people to repentance of sin to be right before God. Repentance is a necessary reality in our relationship with God. We can confess, but if there's no change what is the use? The same patterns persist, the same sin repeats, the same harm endures. Confession is the gateway to change. We share in humility with the intent to forge a new path ahead. What do we need to repent of? What do I need to repent of? Have I trusted my confession as the end with sense that there is nothing needed to follow? Dietrich Bonhoeffer called this "cheap grace". The idea that I can simply ask forgiveness and continue on in living wrongly before God. Grace isn't cheap. It was bought with the dearest of prices. Where is change needed in my mind, heart, and life? What do I need to ask God to help me transform to make confession a practical reality?

## Reflection 3: Forgiveness

### Luke 23: 33-34

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

What we all seek is forgiveness. We know we fall short. We know there are mistakes and misdeeds in our lives. Being remembered for the worst of who we’ve been is on no one’s bucket list. The God that we serve is so gracious and kind that even in the moment of death and agony, there is grace offered. In the moment where people were crucifying the Son of God, in malice and pride, Jesus asked for their forgiveness. When they didn’t have the sense or the words to do it for themselves, He did it for them. The aim of God is not punishment but salvation. The desire of God is not separation but unity and reconciliation. To embrace this for ourselves is one of the great keys to the kindness towards others that invites them into the presence of God. When we know the forgiving kindness of God through Christ there is only one response. Extend that same grace and kindness to all that we meet. In that not only do we find forgiveness, for as the Lord’s prayer says forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us, but we offer hope to those who are seeking that same redemption.

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