

Sermon - 08-08-21
Ps 130; 2 Sam 18:5-9, 15, 31-33;
Eph 4:25-5:2; Jn 6:35, 41-51
Refuge and Healing in a World of Distraction

There is so much distraction in our time of history. We are bombarded by messages on every side. In media, at work, even in our leisure time activities we are urged to buy the best equipment, to be seen in the best places, to wear the best clothes. You have to get out where there is no cell-phone signal and no internet connection in order to escape the stream of messages flooding in. A traditional prayer from India puts it this way:

*Like an ant on a stick both ends of which are burning,
I go to and fro without knowing what to do, and in great despair.
Like the inescapable shadow that follows me
the dead weight of sin haunts me.
Graciously look upon me.
Thy love is my refuge. Amen. UMH #535*

I heard a testimony recently. A woman named Edith was not interested in religion or the things of God at all. One Sunday, she was walking in the neighborhood around her apartment. She wandered into a church and there she heard a message that got her attention. Jesus was teaching the crowds. The church leaders grumbled, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” (Lu 15:2) Jesus immediately told the story of the shepherd leaving the ninety-nine sheep and going to find the one that was lost.

The preacher used the King James Version of this passage from Luke’s Gospel that morning. The preacher read, “Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

What Edith heard, “This man receiveth sinners and Edith with them.” Edith sat up straight in her seat. She soon realized her mistake in hearing the Bible reading. But the thought that Jesus welcomed sinners – and that included Edith – stayed with her. She went home, and that afternoon began to read the Gospels. It wasn’t long until she put her faith in Jesus and began to follow Him. (ODB July 31st, 2021)

It is not usual in our world for individuals to reflect upon the tragic outcomes of our sin. We spend considerable energy defending ourselves by shifting blame, accusing and even lying to make ourselves appear innocent rather than guilty. Our world is full of temptations and pitfalls. A true conscience mourns the sin in our lives – and we mourn the sinful ways of this fallen world of ours. Learn to pray the prayer of Daniel for his people:

¹⁷”Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. ¹⁸Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. ¹⁹O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.” (Dan 9:17-19)

Amen.

Have you ever had a stretch when troubles seem to multiply in your life until you feel completely distracted? Unable to concentrate, we are like the ant described in the prayer a moment ago, running back and forth on a branch that is burning at both ends. These times come to us all.

Look at the predicament of King David, whose son Absalom plotted to seize the throne and overthrow his father, the king. It is political betrayal. But, more than that, Absalom’s plot betrays his father’s love. This story from the Book of Samuel is a picture of temptation. It is a story of sin running amok. King David was forced to leave the city for fear of assassination. Absalom schemed and planned, but he was finally trapped and killed as an enemy of the state. What a

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sad outcome for a father and son. The work of the fallen heart produces weeping and mourning. Thank goodness that in our time we can run to Jesus. He is the shelter – the stronghold – the refuge from the overwhelming forces of the world – even our own sins and the sins of those we love.

Think about how we share Jesus together. We partake of the Bread of Life. Jesus teaches that the manna that appeared in the Sinai Desert was a picture of all God's abundant provision, His healing, His saving grace. That bread that kept the Israelites alive. They finally died. But, when we believe in Jesus Messiah, the Bread of Life, we are transformed from the inside out to become like Him. He was sacrificed on a Roman cross for sins He did not commit. And when He rose from death the third day, He opened the way to God's presence for all who eat the Bread of Life, believing in Him. Jesus became flesh and blood in order to do a mighty work for you and me – the ones God loves. Justice and mercy converge at the cross of Christ. Jesus welcomes sinners and He eats with us – He is in fact the Bread that gives eternal life – forgiveness – help in times of trouble – protection from the perils of the world.

I always smile on the inside when at coffee hour or fellowship folks share about what is going on in their lives – in the family – perhaps politics – or the news of the day. We say, “I attend this church, but in real life, I do thus and so” – or I worship here but, “what I'm really about is such and such.” I smile when I remember that God Almighty is the ground of being. The Creator God fills the universe. All being – all life comes from the breath of God. Your anchor and the meaning of your existence is to stand before the Creator God in awe and wonder and love. The rest is window-dressing – distraction from the main thing. Within the refuge and healing of God in Christ – this is where we live – here is our true home. Amen.