**Daily Devotions**

**October 2023**

*10-01*

“He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.”

— Genesis 3:6

Main Idea: The name of our God is synonymous with deliverance—and will be forever.

Just as Moses’s name denotes where he came from, the divine name, or the name of God, tells us something about God’s origin. “I am who I am” signifies a timelessness unique to God. It suggests that God always was and always has been and always will be. It lets Moses know that his connection to God extends from a long, established ancestral line all the way to him, and hints that that same connection will be passed on for many generations past Moses.

“I am who I am” also has a transcendent quality to it. It confirms for us that God cannot be explained by just one identifying characteristic. God’s essence is unlike literally anything else—comparisons, metaphors and descriptors can’t do it justice.

Finally, the divine name comes in the context of a call for Moses to deliver God’s people. So really, the divine name is, inherently, a promise: that God will be God, now and forever. And because God is God, now and forever, God will deliver God’s people, now and forever.

God is timeless and God is transcendent, which means that God will work this deliverance in a myriad of ways. In this combination of stories, we see God delivering Israel through chosen people and outsiders; through family and strangers, through working people and nobility; through babies, children and adults; through deceit and through honesty. In fact, we even see multiple layers of deliverance in these texts over generations. (Shiphrah, Puah and the daughter of Pharaoh are arguably as important as Moses in the book of Exodus, because they deliver the deliverer. God works through them in order to work through Moses.)

When Jesus says to the Sadducees in Mark Chapter 12 that God is a God of the living, this is what the Spirit wants us to hear today: that our God, who has delivered so many of our ancestors in faith, continues to deliver us, too. And God has added another divine name into the mix in this deliverance: the name of Jesus.

*10-02*

“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. ”

— Exodus 7:14

Main Idea: The Power of God's Grace Amidst Human Stubbornness

The story of the plagues in Egypt is a vivid account of God's power and Pharaoh's stubbornness. In Exodus 7:14-8:15, we see the first three plagues—turning the Nile into blood, the plague of frogs, and the plague of gnats. These events serve as divine signs, not merely as punishments but as revelations of God's sovereignty.

God acts decisively to liberate the Israelites—always! The plagues are not just random acts of wrath but carefully orchestrated events aimed at revealing God's power and grace. They serve as a wake-up call, not just for Pharaoh but for everyone involved, demonstrating that God is the one true God who acts for the liberation of the people.

Pharaoh's hardened heart is a stark reminder of human stubbornness in the face of divine grace. Despite witnessing the undeniable power of God, he refuses to let the Israelites go. This stubbornness can be seen in today's world as well. Whether it's ignoring the reality of climate change or refusing to acknowledge systemic injustices, human stubbornness persists. But God's grace is more potent than human will. It breaks through our stubbornness, offering liberation and hope.

Consider the ongoing struggles for social justice—activists and advocates often feel like they're up against insurmountable odds, much like Moses must have felt. Yet, it's in these moments that God's grace shines the brightest, empowering us to act justly and love mercy.

*10-03*

“And the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God!” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said.”

— Exodus 8:19

Main Idea: The Cost of Ignoring Divine Warnings

In this passage, we encounter the next set of plagues: gnats, flies, and the death of livestock. Each plague intensifies, yet Pharaoh remains unyielding. The narrative underscores the consequences of ignoring divine warnings and the lengths to which God will go to liberate oppressed people.

God's actions here are not arbitrary; they are a call to repentance and liberation. The plagues serve as a divine signal, urging Pharaoh to release the Israelites. The escalation in the severity of the plagues reveals God's increasing urgency for liberation and justice. Yet, Pharaoh's heart remains hardened, a testament to the human capacity to ignore even the most glaring signs.

In our modern context, we often witness similar scenarios. Whether it's the escalating consequences of climate change or the growing divide between the rich and the poor, these are our "plagues," urging us to act. Ignoring these signs comes at a cost, not just to us but to future generations. However, God's grace is relentless and continues to offer us opportunities for change and renewal.

The story serves as a cautionary tale but also as a message of hope. Despite Pharaoh's stubbornness, God's plan for liberation is unstoppable. It's a reminder that while we may face obstacles and setbacks, God's grace is always present, offering us the strength to persevere and the hope for a better future.

*10-04*

“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh, and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go, so that they may worship me.”

— Exodus 9:1

Main Idea: The Transformative Power of God's Judgment and Grace

In Exodus 9:1-12, we witness the continuation of the plagues: the death of livestock, boils on people and animals, and hail. Each plague is a manifestation of divine judgment, yet also an expression of God's grace aimed at transformation.

God's judgment in these plagues is not merely punitive; it's transformative. The livestock's death, the boils, and the hail are all aimed at breaking down the structures of oppression that Pharaoh has built. They serve as a call for change, a plea for justice, and a pathway for liberation.

In our own lives, we sometimes experience hardships that feel like plagues. Whether it's a personal crisis, a societal issue, or a natural disaster, these challenges can be overwhelming. However, it's crucial to see them not just as obstacles but as opportunities for transformation. God's grace works even in the harshest conditions, nudging us toward change and growth.

The story also serves as a reminder that God's grace is not a one-time event but a continuous process. Despite the increasing severity of the plagues, God's grace remains, offering Pharaoh and his people multiple opportunities for repentance and transformation. It's a testament to the enduring and transformative power of God's love, which seeks not to condemn but to liberate.

*10-05*

“The Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that hail may fall on the whole land of Egypt, on humans and animals and all the plants of the field in the land of Egypt.””

— Exodus 9:22

Main Idea: The Inevitability of Divine Justice in the Face of Persistent Injustice

More plagues! Plagues of hail, locusts, and darkness! Understand though that each plague serves as a divine intervention against the oppressive regime of Pharaoh. Despite the increasing calamities, Pharaoh's heart remains hardened, leading to further suffering for both the Egyptians and the Israelites.

The plagues are not merely acts of divine retribution but are manifestations of divine justice. They serve as a call to Pharaoh and his administration to cease their oppressive actions and set the Israelites free. Yet, the more God intervenes, the more Pharaoh resists, showcasing the depths of human obstinacy in the face of divine justice.

Isn’t it true that we often encounter situations where justice seems delayed or denied? Whether it's the struggle for racial equality, gender justice, or environmental sustainability, the path is often fraught with obstacles. However, this passage reminds us that divine justice is inevitable. While human systems may fail us, God's justice will not.

This story also serves as a beacon of hope. Despite the bleak circumstances and Pharaoh's stubbornness, God's plan for justice and liberation remains steadfast. It's a powerful reminder that even when we face seemingly insurmountable challenges, God's justice is working behind the scenes, urging us toward a more equitable and compassionate world.

*10-06*

“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt.” ”

— Exodus 10:21

Main Idea: The Culmination of Divine Intervention and the Dawn of Liberation

In these passages, we witness the final and most devastating plagues: darkness and the death of the firstborn. These events serve as the climax of God's intervention to liberate the Israelites. The darkness that engulfs Egypt symbolizes the spiritual and moral darkness that has taken hold due to Pharaoh's actions. The death of the firstborn serves as the ultimate sign that leads to the Israelites' liberation.

These plagues are not just punitive measures but are the culmination of God's long-standing efforts to bring justice and freedom to his people. They serve as a final call to Pharaoh and his people to recognize the futility of their oppressive ways and to set the Israelites free.

Today, we find ourselves at crossroads where significant changes are still needed. Whether it's a personal transformation or a societal shift, these moments serve as our "darkness" and "firstborn" experiences. They are wake-up calls that prompt us to reevaluate our actions and make necessary changes.

The story also serves as a testament to the relentless nature of God's grace. Even in the face of the most devastating events, God's ultimate aim is liberation and renewal. It's a powerful reminder that no matter how dire the circumstances may seem, God's grace is always at work. Whether dark or light comes—God will be there.

*10-07*

“The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children.”

— Exodus 12:37

Main Idea: The Exodus: A Pivotal Moment in the Journey Toward Liberation

Here we witness the long-awaited moment of the Israelites' departure from Egypt. After 430 years, the Israelites are finally set free, marking a pivotal moment in their history and faith journey.

Historically, the Exodus is one of the most significant events in the Hebrew Bible. It serves as a foundational narrative for the Israelites, shaping their identity as a people chosen and liberated by God. The number "430 years" is symbolic, representing a long period of suffering and waiting. The unleavened bread they carry signifies the urgency of their departure, as there was no time for the dough to rise.

The Exodus is not just a historical event but a theological milestone. It serves as a testament to God's faithfulness and the fulfillment of his promise to liberate his people. The event is so monumental that it becomes a recurring theme in later biblical texts and liturgies, symbolizing God's power to liberate and renew.

In our own lives, we may have "Exodus moments"—times when we experience significant changes or liberations, whether personal or communal. These moments, like the Exodus, are not just historical events but spiritual landmarks that shape our understanding of God's grace and justice.

The story serves as a powerful reminder that liberation is a process, often taking longer than we'd like. However, God's timing is perfect, and when the moment for liberation comes, it is both profound and transformative. It's a testament to the enduring power of God's grace, which liberates us from the bonds of oppression and leads us toward a future filled with hope.

*10-08*

“Moses convened all Israel, and said to them: Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently.”

— Deuteronomy 5:1

Main Idea: God calls us to embody—to immerse ourselves in—loving God and loving one another.

What is most interesting about this passage from Chapter 12 of Mark is that Jesus is subverting the scribe’s question as much as he is answering it. In giving two commandments when the scribe asks only for one, Jesus is making the argument that nothing about God can be boiled down to an easy checkbox or line item. Nothing about God involves clean lines or cutoffs. Living a life of faith must demonstrate the love between us and God and the love between us and other people, all the time and all at once.

That’s where the 10 Commandments come in. Moses describes these commandments to his followers as a covenant that God made with all of them. While many variations of covenant existed in the Ancient Near East, the implication Moses makes here is that this is an unbreakable, unshakeable, and binding promise between God and God’s people that God’s people will live their life according to their faith, and that God will bless them for generations.

You’ll notice that the first, framing commandment emphasizes the connection between God and God’s people. The second and third can technically stand on their own, but they could also be interpreted as sub-points of the first. Commandments Four through Ten outline the connection between God’s people, telling us what to do (and what not to do) with regard to each other. God charged God’s very self with putting into words the most foundational and distinctive tenets of a faithful life—Yahweh’s Big Mac Special Sauce recipe, if you will—and the only things that are truly on God’s list are to love God with all of your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself. Everything else falls into the realm of details.

Moses does something very interesting to end his proclamation of the 10 Commandments. He tells the crowds to keep these words in their hearts. To recite these words to their children. To start and end each day with these words. To keep them on their persons. To post them in their entryways. Because God’s greatest commandment (which is actually twofold) is such a big, abstract and complex idea, Moses wants to be sure that people are internalizing it. Remembering it. Finding ways to work it into the little things. When they do that, they might also start to recognize the blessings that God has promised them will spring forth from this kind of internalization.

The important thing for us to hear this morning is not just the commandments, themselves. The important thing for us to hear is the same charge that Moses gave the crowds around him: to immerse ourselves in the love of God and the love of other people. To let God’s love seep into our bones. To look for the ways that God’s grace changes our day to day. This is where we will find blessings all of these generations later.

*10-09*

“The Lord said to Moses: Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine.”

— Exodus 13:1-2

Main Idea: Sacred Rituals as Reminders of Divine Grace

Item! The Passover! Here we read of the institution of the Passover and the consecration of the firstborn. These rituals serve as lasting reminders of God's grace and liberation. The Passover meal, with its specific instructions, becomes a way for the Israelites to remember and celebrate their freedom from Egyptian bondage. Similarly, the consecration of the firstborn serves as a reminder of God's protection during the final plague.

These rituals are not mere traditions but are imbued with deep spiritual significance. They serve as tangible expressions of God's grace, helping the community to remember and internalize the divine actions that led to their liberation.

We too have various rituals and practices that serve similar purposes. Whether it's a family birthday party, a religious ceremony, or even a personal habit, these rituals help us remember significant events or truths. They act as anchors, grounding us in our faith and values.

The story also serves as a reminder that God's grace is not just a past event but an ongoing reality. The rituals are not just about remembering what God has done but also about anticipating what God will continue to do. It's a powerful testament to the enduring and dynamic nature of God's grace, which not only liberates but also sustains us.

*10-10*

“Moses said to the people, “Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, because the Lord brought you out from there by strength of hand; no leavened bread shall be eaten.”

— Exodus 13:3

Main Idea: The Importance of Remembering God's Grace in Everyday Life

In this passage, Moses instructs the Israelites to commemorate their liberation from Egypt by observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The ritual serves as a tangible reminder of God's grace and the miraculous events that led to their freedom. The unleavened bread symbolizes the haste with which they left Egypt, and the removal of leaven signifies the purging of old ways to embrace a new life of freedom.

This ritual is not just a one-time event but an annual observance, emphasizing the importance of continually remembering God's grace. It serves as a spiritual discipline, helping the Israelites—and us—to keep the memory of divine intervention alive in our hearts and minds.

In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to forget the significant moments that shape our lives and faith. We often get caught up in the hustle and bustle, overlooking the grace that sustains us. This passage serves as a timely reminder to pause and reflect on the divine grace that permeates our lives. Whether it's through prayer, meditation, or other spiritual practices, taking time to remember helps us stay grounded in our faith.

The story also underscores the transformative power of remembrance. By actively recalling God's grace, we not only honor the past but also shape our present and future. It's a testament to the dynamic nature of God's grace, which not only liberates but also empowers us to live a life of purpose and meaning.

*10-11*

“When in the future your child asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall answer, ‘By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.”

— Exodus 13:14

Main Idea: The Importance of Remembering God's Grace in Everyday Life

More instruction. Moses shows how the Israelites may commemorate their liberation from Egypt by observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The ritual serves as a tangible reminder of God's grace and the miraculous events that led to their freedom. The unleavened bread symbolizes the haste with which they left Egypt, and the removal of leaven signifies the purging of old ways to embrace a new life of freedom.

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*10-12*

“So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle.”

— Exodus 13:18

Main Idea: Guidance Through the Unknown: A Divine GPS

In this passage, we see the Israelites being led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. These divine markers serve as their GPS, guiding them through the wilderness and providing them with a sense of direction and security.

In modern science, the concept of guidance systems is well understood. Whether it's the GPS in our cars or advanced navigation systems in spacecraft, technology has provided us with tools to navigate through unknown territories. These systems rely on complex algorithms and satellite data, but their purpose is the same as the pillars of cloud and fire: to guide and provide a sense of security.

While science can explain the mechanics of navigation, it cannot account for the sense of awe and wonder that comes from being guided by something greater than ourselves. The pillars were not just physical phenomena but manifestations of divine grace, guiding the Israelites not just geographically but also spiritually.

In our own lives, we often find ourselves in unknown territories, whether it's a new job, a challenging relationship, or a difficult phase of life. While we may rely on modern tools and knowledge to navigate these challenges, it's often the intangible sense of divine guidance that provides us with the most comfort and assurance.

The story serves as a powerful reminder that, even in an age of scientific advancements, there is room for divine intervention. It's a testament to the multifaceted nature of God's grace, which not only guides but also reassures and empowers us to face the unknown with courage and faith.

*10-13*

“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.” And they did so.”

— Exodus 14:4

Main Idea: The Red Sea Crossing: A Testament to Divine Intervention and Human Cooperation

In this dramatic narrative, the Israelites find themselves trapped between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's advancing army. It's a seemingly impossible situation, yet it becomes the stage for one of the most miraculous events in biblical history. Through Moses' leadership and God's intervention, the sea parts, allowing the Israelites to cross safely, while the Egyptian army is swallowed by the returning waters.

This story is not just about divine intervention but also about human cooperation. Moses, despite his initial reluctance to lead, listens to God and takes decisive action. The Israelites, despite their fear and doubt, follow Moses. It's a powerful example of what can happen when divine guidance comes—in any form.

Everybody faces situations that seem insurmountable. Whether it's a personal crisis, a societal issue, or even a global pandemic, these are our Red Sea moments. And just like the Israelites, we have a choice: to give in to fear or to take that step of faith, trusting that we are not alone.

The story serves as a potent reminder that miracles can and do happen! It's a testament to the transformative power of God's grace, which not only liberates but also empowers us to face challenges with courage and faith.

*10-14*

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.”

— Exodus 20:2-3

Main Idea: The Ten Commandments: A Framework for Graceful Living

In this passage, we encounter the Ten Commandments, a set of moral and ethical guidelines given by God to the Israelites. Far from being mere rules or restrictions, these commandments serve as a framework for living a life that is aligned with divine grace and love.

The commandments begin with the acknowledgment of God as the liberator of the Israelites from Egypt, setting the tone for the rest of the guidelines. This is not a list of dos and don'ts from a distant deity but guidance from a God who has already shown immense, infinite grace for the sake of the world.

In our contemporary world, we often think of rules and guidelines as limiting. However, the Ten Commandments invite us to see them as liberating—just as the Hebrews did. Rules can free us from the chaos that comes from living without moral boundaries and guide us toward a life that reflects divine love and justice.

The story also serves as a reminder that God's grace is not a license for lawlessness but an invitation to live responsibly and compassionately. It's a testament to the holistic nature of God's grace, which not only liberates but also educates and elevates our moral and ethical lives.

*10-15*

“But Ruth said, ‘Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.’”

— Ruth 1:16

Main Idea: The steadfast love of God works in two ways.

In the 2022 sci-fi film Everything Everywhere All At Once, the main character, Evelyn Quan Wang, has the ability to jump between universes. Each one is differentiated by a certain series of decisions she made in her life. For example, she is a professional singer in one universe. In another, she is a martial arts master. In yet another universe, she leaves her home against her father’s wishes when she is very young to be with her true love. And in another, she decides to call off the relationship and stay with her family, instead. Even some smaller decisions shape the trajectory of each of these universes, leaving Evelyn with an almost infinite expansion of realities to and from which she can transition when the need arises.

As viewers, we expect her to choose to stay in one of the more glamorous universes where the pressures of her everyday life can’t get to her. After all, when the movie opens, she is on the brink of divorce, she is caring for her sick father who makes her feel inadequate all of the time and she has a strained relationship with her young adult daughter. You would think that, if she could escape any or all of that, she would. But the love she feels for her daughter is so powerful that, even after seeing so many other lives she could be leading, Evelyn chooses to stay exactly where she is. She can’t imagine spending any amount of time without her daughter, whatever the nature or status of their connection. The love that Evelyn experienced in knowing her daughter literally transformed her and gave her the framework for every other piece of her existence.

That’s the kind of love that our text shows us between Naomi and Ruth. An enduring love. A love so deep that it drives decisions without us even thinking. In this story, Ruth had every reason to leave Naomi after her husband died. For one thing, she was a Moabite—not the same people as her husband’s people—and you might think she would want to grieve and rebuild among the people who had raised her. For another, we assume that Ruth was still young enough to remarry and secure her social status as well as her financial well-being. Lingering for any amount of time with her late husband’s family could hurt her chances of both. And perhaps most important of all, Naomi was explicitly giving Ruth permission to leave.

Ruth found herself with a choice to make between multiple universes. Multiple realities. She chose Naomi, and she promised to keep choosing Naomi. Through thick and thin, in life and in death.

Our promise today is twofold: first, that this brand of love—steadfast love or hesed, in Hebrew—is a kind of love that God inspires in every one of us. In God, we have a divine example of love that models for us how to live faithful lives, transformed. Think of the classic, beloved Sunday School song: “We love, because God first loved us.” We are so moved by God that we are inspired to love like God. But second, the inverse is also true! God is so moved by us that God chooses this universe—this reality—for dwelling and working and listening and delighting and acting. God chooses us. Wherever we go, wherever we lodge, whomever our people, as we live and as we die. God is inspired by us. God is beholden to us. And God wouldn’t have it any other way.

*10-16*

“So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.”

— Ruth 1:22

Main Idea: Ruth and Naomi: The Ultimate BFFs

So, here's the tea: Ruth and Naomi are basically “friendship goals”. After losing their husbands, they're faced with a tough decision—go their separate ways or stick together. Ruth, being the ride-or-die friend that she is, chooses to stay with Naomi. She's like, "Where you go, I go. Your people, my people. Your God, my God."

Talk about loyalty, right?

Now, they head back to Bethlehem, but the welcome wagon isn't exactly out. People are gossiping, Naomi's feeling down, and they're both broke. But do they let that get them down? Nope! They stick together, come what may.

This story is a whole mood for anyone who's ever had a true friend. It's not just about the good times; it's about standing by each other when the chips are down. It's about choosing each other, again and again, no matter what life throws your way.

In a world where friendships can be as fickle as a TikTok trend, Ruth and Naomi show us what it means to be steadfast. They remind us that true friendship is a form of grace—a gift that keeps on giving, even when life gets messy.

So, the next time you're scrolling through your socials, remember: likes and follows are cool, but a friend like Ruth? That's priceless.

*10-17*

“Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband’s side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.”

— Ruth 2:1

Main Idea: Boaz: A Glimmer of Hope and Grace in Hard Times

In this chapter, we meet Boaz, a relative of Naomi who owns a field where Ruth goes to glean. Boaz is not just any landowner; he's a man of integrity and kindness. When he notices Ruth, he doesn't see her as a foreigner or a burden but as someone deserving of respect and dignity.

Boaz's actions toward Ruth are a beautiful example of grace in action. He ensures her safety, provides her with food, and even instructs his workers to leave extra grain for her. In a society where widows and foreigners were often marginalized, Boaz's kindness stands out like a beacon of hope.

This story is a reminder that grace often comes to us in unexpected ways and through unexpected people. Whether it's a kind word from a stranger, a helping hand in a time of need, or a moment of unexpected generosity, these are the instances where we encounter the divine in the mundane.

In our own lives, we may not own fields or have the opportunity to provide for someone in the way Boaz did, but we all have our own "fields" of influence. It could be our workplace, our community, or even our social media platforms. And in these spaces, we have the opportunity to be agents of grace, offering kindness and hope to those who cross our paths.

*10-18*

“Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!” Naomi also said to her, “The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin.” ”

— Ruth 2:20

Main Idea: The Ripple Effect of Kindness and Grace

In this passage, Boaz's kindness toward Ruth continues to unfold. He invites her to share a meal with his workers, a gesture that goes beyond mere charity. It's an act of inclusion, of making Ruth feel like she belongs. Boaz's kindness doesn't stop there; he ensures that Ruth can glean safely and even allows her to take home a generous amount of grain.

What's striking here is the ripple effect of Boaz's actions. His kindness not only benefits Ruth but also Naomi, who is equally in need. It's a beautiful illustration of how acts of grace can have far-reaching impacts, touching the lives of those we may not even know.

In today's world, it's easy to underestimate the power of small acts of kindness. We often think we need to do something grand to make a difference. But this story reminds us that grace often starts small—a shared meal, a kind word, a simple gesture. And these small acts can set off a chain reaction of goodness that can change lives.

So, the next time you're wondering if your actions matter, remember Boaz and the ripple effect of his kindness. You never know how far your grace will travel or whose life it will touch.

*10-19*

“When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.” ”

— Ruth 3:4

Main Idea: The Courage to Seek Grace

In this passage, Naomi devises a plan for Ruth to approach Boaz, essentially proposing marriage. It's a bold move, especially considering the social norms of the time. Ruth, trusting Naomi and perhaps recognizing the grace that Boaz has already shown, agrees to the plan.

This story is a testament to the courage it often takes to seek grace. Ruth's actions are risky; she could be rejected or scorned. Yet, she takes the leap, driven by a blend of hope, trust, and necessity. And Boaz, true to his character, responds with grace and integrity, promising to do all he can to secure Ruth's future.

In our own lives, we often find ourselves at crossroads where we must muster the courage to seek grace—whether it's asking for help, seeking reconciliation, or making a significant life change. These moments can be fraught with uncertainty and fear, but they are also opportunities for profound transformation.

Boaz's response to Ruth's boldness is a reminder that grace always moves towards us. It's a dance of divine and human will, a synergy that can bring about incredible outcomes.

So, the next time you find yourself hesitating at the threshold (no pun intended!) of a significant decision, remember Ruth's courage and Boaz's grace. Sometimes, the most extraordinary miracles occur when we have the courage to seek them.

*10-20*

“Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one took off a sandal and gave it to the other; this was the manner of attesting in Israel. 8So when the next-of-kin said to Boaz, “Acquire it for yourself,” he took off his sandal.”

— Ruth 4:7

Main Idea: A New Chapter of Grace and Redemption

In this final chapter of Ruth, we witness the culmination of a journey filled with grace, as Boaz officially redeems Ruth and marries her. It's a joyous occasion, not just for Ruth and Boaz, but also for Naomi and the entire community. The elders and the people celebrate this union as a blessing from God, invoking the prosperity and legacy of Rachel and Leah, the matriarchs of Israel.

This story is a beautiful reminder that grace often leads us to new beginnings. Ruth, once a foreign widow, is now part of a loving family and a respected community. Boaz, who extended grace to Ruth, finds love and companionship. Naomi, who was once bitter and empty, now has a renewed sense of hope and joy.

We, too, may go through seasons of hardship, loss, or uncertainty. But the story of Ruth and Boaz assures us that grace has the power to turn the page, to start a new chapter filled with hope and redemption.

It's easy to get stuck in the narrative of our past failures, disappointments, or sorrows. But grace invites us to look forward, to embrace the new opportunities and blessings that await us. And often, these new beginnings are not just for us; they ripple out, bringing joy and hope to those around us, just as Ruth and Boaz's union did for Naomi and their community.

*10-21*

“The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.”

— Ruth 4:17

Main Idea: The Unseen Impact of Ordinary Lives

At first glance, this passage might seem like a simple genealogy, a list of names that may not appear particularly exciting. However, it's a profound conclusion to the story of Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi. This genealogy is a testament to the far-reaching impact of their lives, culminating in the birth of King David, one of Israel's greatest leaders.

While the text may seem mundane, it carries significant implications. It shows us that the ordinary lives of Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi had extraordinary consequences. Their story of grace, love, and redemption didn't just affect them; it shaped the history of a nation and, ultimately, the lineage of Jesus Christ.

In our own lives, it's easy to underestimate the impact of our actions, especially when they seem ordinary or mundane. But this passage reminds us that even the most seemingly insignificant choices can have lasting implications. Whether it's a kind word, a small act of generosity, or a simple decision to do what's right, these actions can ripple through time, affecting people and situations we can't even imagine.

So, the next time you find yourself questioning the value of your everyday actions, remember the story of Ruth and this seemingly boring list of names. It's a reminder that God’s grace often works quietly, in the background, shaping futures and changing lives in ways we may never see but are incredibly significant nonetheless.

*10-22*

“David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.”

— 2 Samuel 6:5

Main Idea: God is prepared to dwell with us in the not-so-established, in-between times.

These stories point to a kind of combination transition in the history of Israel. The snippet from Chapter 5 marks when David became ruler of all of Israel as opposed to just the southern portion, Judah. Chapter 6 talks of one of David’s first decisions as ruler—that is, to change the capitol region from Baale to Jerusalem, and to move the Ark of God there as a result.

One reason why this move is so important is because the Ark of God was a symbol for God’s presence among God’s people on earth. Where it was located, how it was presented and who had access to it were all incredibly central factors to the identity of Israel.

Another reason why this move is so important is a bit more specific. David intended for the Ark to instill comfort and confidence in a traumatized, long divided people—to signify a new chapter of unity for Israel. As the tribes in Chapter 5 of our text imply, Saul’s reign started going downhill in its final years. Israel suffered from violence and hyper politicization at his hands. In fact, Saul even launched an initiative to have David killed along with anyone who might be close to him or loyal to him. David figured that the presence of God in a newly-named capitol would be a tangible reminder for all of God’s people that things had changed and that life would be better.

Of course, change and betterment on such a huge scale can’t happen overnight. Perhaps the most important thing for us to remember about this story is that a permanent structure was never built for the Ark of God during David’s rule. It wasn’t relocated to any kind of palace or temple. Instead, it resided in a tent for the duration of David’s reign. The destination didn’t stop any of the joy or ceremony around the moving of the Ark. It didn’t diminish the power the Ark held, either. It simply served as an incredible visual and continues to serve as an incredible visual today: the presence of God’s very self, pitching a tent and staying there for years and years and years.

In other words, God met the people of Israel exactly where they were—in a nomadic move from ruler to ruler and from a tribal structure to a more centralized one. As the people of Israel prepared for the uncertainty and discomfort and vulnerability (and even the hope) that change can bring, God was there for them and prepared alongside them. The joy in our Psalm today stems from the fact that we have a God who doesn’t need to be established to do good work. To be loved and revered. We have a God who doesn’t need us to be established to do good work. To be loved and cherished. God will meet us wherever we are, even in this most transient of times, with the fullness of God’s presence and grace. God will pitch a tent wherever we do and see us through the messiness of change. We know that through the witness of the Hebrew Bible, but we also know that in the witness of Jesus. God dwelled among us as one of us…that is perhaps the most important and intimate tent-pitching we could ever ask for.

*10-23*

“Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament!”

— Psalm 150:1

Main Idea: The Universality of Praise

Psalm 150 serves as a grand finale to the Book of Psalms, and it's all about praise. The psalmist calls for praise in the sanctuary and in the heavens, using every instrument imaginable. It's a universal call to worship, inviting every living thing to join in the celebration.

This psalm reminds us that the act of praise is not confined to a specific place, time, or method. Whether you're in a church, at home, or in the great outdoors, the opportunity to offer praise is ever-present. It's a universal language that transcends cultural, social, and even religious boundaries.

In a world that often focuses on differences and divisions, this psalm offers a refreshing perspective. It invites us to find common ground in the act of praise, to recognize the divine spark in each other and in all of creation.

Consider the next time you find yourself in a situation where differences seem to overshadow similarities; then remember Psalm 150. Regard it as an invitation to shift your focus, to look for opportunities to offer praise, and to celebrate the beauty and diversity of life. After all, if every instrument has a place in the orchestra of praise, then surely there's room for each of us to contribute our unique voice.

*10-24*

“The king and his men marched to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, “You will not come in here, even the blind and the lame will turn you back” —thinking, “David cannot come in here.”

— 2 Sam 5:6

Main Idea: The Foundation of Leadership

In this passage, we see David capturing Jerusalem and making it his capital. It's a significant moment, marking the unification of Israel under his leadership. David's reign is characterized by military successes, political savvy, and, most importantly, a commitment to God's guidance.

David's story serves as a lesson in leadership, showing us that true authority is not just about power or control; it's about aligning oneself with higher principles. David succeeds not merely because of his military prowess but because he seeks God's guidance and acts accordingly.

In our own lives, we may not be kings or military leaders, but we all have spheres of influence—be it at work, in our families, or within our communities. And just like David, the foundation of our leadership should be built on principles that go beyond mere self-interest.

Whether you're leading a team project, making decisions for your family, or advocating for change in your community, remember David. Leadership is not just about achieving goals; it's about the kind of person you become in the process. It's about integrity, humility, and a commitment to something greater than yourself!

The next time you find yourself in a position of leadership, consider what foundations you are building upon. Are they foundations of self-interest, or are they aligned with higher principles that benefit not just you but those you lead?

*10-25*

“The ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months; and the Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his household.”

— 2 Sam 6:11

Main Idea: The Sacred and the Profane: Understanding the Ark of God

The Ark of the Covenant was more than just a religious artifact; it was the epicenter of Israelite faith and identity. Originating from the Sinai wilderness during the time of Moses, the Ark was believed to house the tablets of the Ten Commandments. It was carried into battles, led processions, and was central to the rituals in the Tabernacle.

The Ark's journey to Jerusalem was not just a religious procession but a political and cultural milestone. David's intent was to centralize religious, political, and administrative functions in Jerusalem, thereby unifying the fragmented tribes of Israel. The Ark's presence in the city would symbolize God's favor and legitimize David's rule.

However, the incident with Uzzah served as a jarring reminder of the Ark's sanctity. According to the Law of Moses, only Levites were permitted to handle the Ark, and even they were not allowed to touch it directly. Uzzah's action, though well-intentioned, violated these sacred laws, leading to his immediate death.

David's subsequent decision to leave the Ark at Obed-edom's house was likely influenced by a mix of fear, reverence, and a need to reassess the situation. The Ark remained there for three months, during which Obed-edom's household experienced blessings, further emphasizing the Ark's dual nature—both a source of blessing and a symbol of God's unapproachable holiness.

This historical narrative serves as a profound lesson on the complexities of interacting with the sacred (Indiana Jones movies notwithstanding). It underscores the importance of understanding and respecting religious laws and traditions, especially when they are intertwined with national identity and governance.

*10-26*

“It was told King David, “The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God.” So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; ”

— 2 Sam 6:12

Main Idea: Joy and Judgment: The Dual Nature of Sacred Moments

In this passage, we see the Ark of the Covenant finally making its way to Jerusalem. David, overcome with joy, dances before the Lord with all his might. However, this moment of religious ecstasy is not shared by everyone. Michal, David's wife, watches from a window and despises him in her heart.

David's uninhibited joy contrasts sharply with Michal's judgment. For David, bringing the Ark to Jerusalem is a moment of divine fulfillment, a cause for celebration that transcends social norms and royal decorum. His dance is an expression of gratitude and awe for God's presence.

Michal's reaction, however, serves as a cautionary note. Her disdain for David's behavior reveals a disconnect, not just between her and David, but perhaps also between her and the sacred moment that is unfolding. It's a reminder that even in moments of collective joy, individual responses can vary widely, influenced by personal biases, expectations, or misunderstandings.

In our own lives, we too experience moments that feel sacred—whether it's a milestone achievement, a spiritual experience, or a simple moment that reminds us of the divine. These are moments to be cherished, but they are also moments that can be judged or misunderstood by others.

For moments that feel sacred, remember David's dance and Michal's judgment. Both serve as reminders that sacred moments are complex, filled with potential for both joy and judgment. The key is to engage with them authentically, allowing ourselves to experience the full range of emotions they bring, while also being mindful of how others may perceive them. And, of course, trusting in God—you can always count on God.

*10-27*

“[T]he king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.””

— 2 Sam 7:2

Main Idea: Divine Plans: The Unpredictability of God's Will

In this passage, David, now settled in his palace, contemplates building a house for God. It's a noble thought, one that seems logical given his position and the stability he has brought to Israel. However, God has other plans. Through the prophet Nathan, God makes it clear that it is not David who will build a house for God, but rather God who will establish a "house"—a dynasty—for David.

David's intentions are well-meaning, but they are not aligned with God's plan. It's a humbling moment that underscores the unpredictability of divine will. God's response to David is not a rejection but a redirection, a way to align David's desires with a greater purpose.

The promise of a lasting dynasty is not just a personal assurance to David; it's a communal promise that impacts the entire nation of Israel. God's covenant with David sets the stage for the Messianic hope that would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, a descendant of David.

In our own lives, we often make plans based on our understanding of what is good or necessary. Yet, like David, we may find that God has different plans for us. These moments of divine redirection can be unsettling but are often filled with greater purpose and potential than we could have imagined.

Remember to remember David's experience—it serves as a reminder that while our plans may be well-intentioned, it's essential to remain open to the unpredictability of God's will, trusting that any redirection is part of a larger, divine plan.

*10-28*

“Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and said, “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?”

— 2 Sam 7:18

Main Idea: A Heartfelt Response, David's Prayer of Gratitude

In this passage, we witness David's heartfelt prayer in response to God's promise of establishing a lasting dynasty for him. David is overwhelmed, not just by the magnitude of the promise but by the sheer grace that accompanies it. He sits before the Lord, humbled and grateful, acknowledging his unworthiness and marveling at God's unfathomable love.

David's prayer is a model of humility and gratitude. He doesn't take God's promise as a validation of his own greatness but sees it as an act of divine grace. His words reflect a deep understanding of the covenantal relationship between God and his people—a relationship rooted in love, commitment, and mutual respect.

The prayer also serves as a reminder that our relationship with God is not transactional but transformational. David doesn't offer anything to God in return for the promise; instead, he offers his awe, his gratitude, and his faithfulness.

In our lives, we often encounter moments of grace—unexpected blessings, answered prayers, or even challenges that turn into opportunities. Like David, our response to these moments can be one of heartfelt gratitude. It's easy to take blessings for granted or to see them as rewards for our own merits. However, recognizing them as acts of divine grace can transform our perspective and deepen our relationship with God.

Again: remember to remember David's prayer! Let it inspire you to approach God with a heart full of gratitude, acknowledging the divine love that sustains and enriches our lives.

*10-29*

“When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king, ‘What share do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, O David.’ So Israel went away to their tents.”

— 1 Kings 12:16

Main Idea: The only true power we have in a life of faith is shared power.

God never really wanted the office of king to exist among God’s chosen people. God didn’t think it should be necessary. In 1 Samuel 8, when the elders of Israel petitioned Samuel to pray to God for a king, he did so, but begrudgingly. He and God both knew a king wouldn’t be good for Israel.

For one thing, their request implied that the Israelites did not recognize their divine authority figure—God. It implied that the Israelites had forgotten their long history with God—their story of deliverance and liberation. God also knew the ways in which a king might abuse power over Israel. Other nations were ruled by kings, and were wrought with corruption, injustice and violence. God didn’t want any of this for God’s people.

God instructed Samuel to relay these concerns to the Israelites, and he did so emphatically. But the people did not listen, and continued to request a king. So, God agreed to partner with them and to be actively involved in a new kind of political landscape alongside them.

God chose Saul to serve as the first king of Israel. After Saul, David ruled. After David, Solomon; and now, we come to our text for today. Solomon’s son, Rehoboam has the throne.

Rehoboam is the epitome of what God feared would happen if Israel were to appoint a king. In this passage, he actively chooses to inflict suffering among his own people in the hopes of preserving his own authority, clearly dismissing any authority God might have in the process.

Here is the irony of Rehoboam’s decision: he never truly had any power to begin with—nothing to preserve. The true power in this story lies with Rehoboam’s subjects, who, when they realize he is not listening to them or taking their needs into consideration, leave.

So, instead of the king imposing his will on the people, we read a story this morning of a people imposing their will on their king. They want him to occupy his seat and to exercise his power as long as he is doing so for the sake of the greater good—for the thriving and success of all people. They want his power to be a shared power.

In the passage from Mark 10, James and John boldly ask Jesus if they can sit by his right and left hands in glory. It’s a startling request, and very clearly one made out of a selfish interest in guaranteeing or preserving their authority and influence. Jesus tells them just as boldly that if they were truly driven to establish power, they would be pursuing roles of service. He says that if they want to be above everyone else, they actually need to understand themselves as below everyone else.

From the beginning of our faith story, power has been shared: between God and people and between people and each other. This sharing is what ensures everybody the chance to prosper. This sharing is what clears the path for justice and equity in everyday life. Frankly, this sharing is what makes power mean anything substantive in the first place. And this power is something that we can understand in the person and life of Jesus.

Jesus doesn’t just tell James and John how service leadership works—he leads by serving alongside them. Jesus doesn’t just call James and John to a life of humility—he models it for them. Jesus embodies shared power—true power—for James and John. And he does the same thing for us.

*10-30*

“So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.”

— 1 Kings 12:19

Main Idea: The Schism: A Divided Kingdom and the Weight of History

This passage takes us to a pivotal moment in Israel's history—the division of the kingdom. King Rehoboam's harsh response to the people's request for lighter labor conditions leads to a revolt, resulting in the northern tribes breaking away to form the Kingdom of Israel, while Rehoboam retains control over the Kingdom of Judah.

The schism wasn't just a political event; it had deep religious implications. The division led to the establishment of separate places of worship, diverging religious practices, and even different interpretations of the Torah. This separation would have a lasting impact, setting the stage for centuries of conflict and spiritual divergence.

Interestingly, God's voice comes through the prophet Shemaiah, instructing Rehoboam not to go to war against the Israelites. It's a divine intervention that halts what could have been a devastating conflict, yet it also confirms the division as part of God's plan.

In our modern context, divisions—whether they are political, religious, or social—often seem insurmountable. Yet, this passage reminds us that even in moments of great schism, divine intervention can offer a path to peace or, at least, to lessened conflict. It's a lesson that history often repeats, where human actions lead to divisions, but divine wisdom offers a way forward.

Reflect on the divisions in your own life or in the world around you; remember the schism between Israel and Judah. It serves as a reminder that while human actions have consequences, divine wisdom can still guide us toward paths of reconciliation or peaceful coexistence.

*10-31*

“So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. He said to the people, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” 29He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.”

— 1 Kings 12:28

Main Idea: Idolatry and Innovation: The Perils of Convenience

In this passage, we see Jeroboam, the newly crowned king of the northern Kingdom of Israel, making a calculated decision. Fearing that his subjects might return to Rehoboam if they continue to worship in Jerusalem, he sets up alternative places of worship in Bethel and Dan, complete with golden calves.

Jeroboam's actions are pragmatic from a political standpoint but deeply flawed from a spiritual perspective. He prioritizes convenience and control over fidelity to God's commandments. The golden calves are not just idols; they are symbols of a diluted faith, tailored to suit political needs.

This story serves as a cautionary tale for us today. In an age where convenience often trumps commitment, it's easy to make compromises in our faith journey. Whether it's skipping worship for more leisure time or adopting beliefs that align with our lifestyle rather than scripture, the temptation to take shortcuts in our spiritual life is ever-present.

Jeroboam's innovation had long-term consequences, leading Israel further away from God and setting the stage for its eventual downfall. Similarly, our choices have ripple effects, impacting not just our relationship with God but also influencing those around us.

Jeroboam's golden calves (and not the ones on his legs) serve as a reminder that convenience should never come at the cost of our relationship with God, and that true faith often requires us to take the road less traveled.