

SERMON 10.10.21 “Surgical Love” Janet Loman
Scriptures Psalm 90: 12-17 Hebrews 4: 12-16
Theme: God is eternal, magnificent, and omniscient; we are frail, sinful and naked before him. We are thus reliant on the power and wisdom of God-in-Christ to teach us how to live wisely and prosper.

In Psalm 90, Moses sets the weakness of humankind and the brevity of our life against the grandeur and eternity of God.

Moses and God have an intimate relationship that favors and directs Moses and his people as they wander through the wilderness.

It is their proving ground, in which God is their only hope for survival and redemption.

The Israelites prove to be a cranky and rebellious group, who often lack the vision, fortitude, and obedience required to have an enjoyable journey.

Not that it is easy to travel without a map! Nor is it easy to never have a place to call home.

In their frustration, they are disobedient to the word of God.

Their destination is The Promised Land, but the people grow tired of trying to find the correct path of obedience.

The Israelites feel abandoned, and they begin acting out; they follow other people in their traditional, pagan practices instead of the unchanging word of God.

This Psalm is Moses’ personal statement of faith and also an intercessory prayer, pleading that God will teach the Israelites not to waste time on earth; and that they have little time to gain wisdom and righteousness and thus flourish as the children of God.

Moses recognizes the frailty and sinful nature of his people; he is their prophet, leader, teacher and judge.

He understands their weaknesses, yet he loves them as God loves them.

Moses intervenes on their behalf, asking for God’s favor, all the while knowing that they lack merit for God’s mercy.

This intervention also asks that God have compassion on them, that God would turn back to his people and show favor, and grant them the rich, fulfilling life they have longed for.

He cries, "Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we
may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad as many days as you
have afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil. Let your work be
manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.
Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and prosper the work of our hands!"

All they want is a home, and stability!
They long for the Promised Land,
the land of milk and honey, where all is peace and beauty,
overflowing with goodness and prosperity.

The stories of the Bible will never be out of date.
God breathed his words into the mouths of prophets thousands of years ago, yet it is
eternally relevant;
God's word was heard orally from the beginning of recorded time
and passed down from generation to generation,
carefully preserved in the memories of the faithful –
and 1,500 years later, Jesus prayed the same age-old prayers of his people. Christians
have always found a wellspring of life in them. The psalms place us in the great communion of
all believers.

Our joys and sorrows, our trust in God,
our thirst, and even our fear and anguish,
find expression in the psalms.

No matter the era, the historical context, or circumstances,
this book remains relevant because the Bible describes the human
condition to a "T".

It is concise and simple to understand in order to instruct God's people. The lessons contained
in it eventually develop a person's conscience of right and wrong, and hone good intentions
and ethical thinking.

It purifies the soul, making us aware of flaws in our nature or judgment.

The word of God is intended for everyone,
and God knows us all intimately! We cannot hide;
all secrets are known and transparent.

As the passage in the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us,
we are naked and laid bare.

The letter goes on to say that, because we now have this knowledge before us, we are accountable for all we do and say.

These words confront us with our own weakness, pride, and self-deception. God's word performs spiritual surgery on us, re-forming us as we are convicted by reading the text.

Spiritual surgery can be uncomfortable, even painful;
but it can also be transforming,
if we truly heed and practice the words.

There is a story of a 6-year-old boy who is shopping with his mother in Walgreen's, and at the checkout spies a container of bright, colorful pencils. He decides to put one pencil in his jacket pocket while his mother is paying the cashier. On the way to the car, the child suddenly stops in the middle of the parking lot, produces the pencil from his pocket, and tells his mother what he has done. The mother remains calm. She is proud of him for admitting his mistake, and sees that he is sincerely contrite. After discussing what he must do to make it right, the mother and child return to the cashier and the boy apologizes.

Yes, he is embarrassed; but in the end the apology relieves him of guilt, and restores his smile. By the time they were in the car headed home he was his happy self again.

This was a moment in the life of a child who had made the right decision, which had made his path a bit smoother.

That one small step was actually a step up, a building block to a life of character and integrity. By owning up to his error in judgment, the child had found peace of mind.

Here is another story in contrast:

During summer vacation, when my brothers and sister and I were in elementary school, our mother would give us a bit of money and allow us to walk the few blocks to Bledsoe's Grocery store to buy a treat.

One day, I must have decided the money she had given me was not enough, and I stole a piece of bubble gum that was in a bowl on the checkout counter.

But later, as I unwrapped the gum and chewed it awhile, I was disappointed.

My first disappointment was that the sugar did not last.

My second disappointment was in myself.

Children are developing their own system of right and wrong in early childhood.

The child who had stolen the pencil and then returned it had made his amends and went on happily with his life – but in my case, the bubble gum left a flat taste in my mouth,

because I did not yet know how to make amends.

The mother, forgiving the child yet teaching him a lesson in responsibility to others, is the essence of our learning pattern as we mature. These corrections of character strengthen our community and give us the opportunity to grow and mature together.

Out of respect for ourselves we can show respect to those around us.

We can see the connection between our hope for our children,
God's hope for us,
and our trust in God as our parent.

There is less fear of punishment when we are convinced we are loved and cherished.

“Judgment” then becomes “discipline”, or “teaching moments”

that are productive and often transforming
to the one who receives the discipline.

The process works through a lifetime of subtle observations or warning signs that cause us to re-think an action and possibly change our perspective.

Many use the word “discipline” as a synonym for “punishment.”

Webster's dictionary defines “discipline” as

“Training to elicit a certain pattern of behavior or character,
or behavior that results from such training.”

There is a reason we are called disciples!

God's word searches the heart so deeply that it resembles a sharp sword that divides even what seems almost indivisible,

whether soul and spirit or joints and marrow.

**God's word teaches wisdom and encourages self-discipline
that paves the way for a satisfying life,
that creates security in God's glorious power,
and that enables us to serve God and prosper the
kingdom, thus glorifying his name.**

God speaks to us today through his son Jesus, our great high priest, who taught and inspired us as he was living on earth

as God-with-Us. The New Testament still teaches and
inspires today.

The gospel writers knew Jesus not only as their Master,
but also a personal friend; and the inspiration of Jesus compelled them to impart his
wisdom to later generations in written form. The gospels and letters, such as Hebrews, are
written in such a way that our heart, mind, and soul are refined
and gradually made whole. This is an act of pure love!
God intends for us to be a thriving people.

If the mother at Walgreen's had not loved her child, she would have ignored the teaching
moment and gone home,
allowing her little son to keep the pencil.
But this would amount to a neglectful parent.
God's great love for us never neglects or ignores our sin!
We answer to a benevolent judge who acts only out of love,
for our own good.

God's surgical love helps us see ourselves in the light of Christ's teachings, and fosters
change:

to alter our thinking, to learn the ways of Christ—
to become a new person, and to prosper,
by the grace and power of our loving, unchanging God.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!

Let us pray,

Lord of Light and Life, you designed us for love, and peace.

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Teach us, by your wisdom, to be wise; and
empower us, by your glorious power,
to impart your wisdom on earth;

Renew us each day with your unquenchable, secure love.

Prosper for us the work of our hands,
O prosper the work of our hands!
Through Christ our Lord, Amen.