

Sunday, January 24, 2021

Psalms 63:1-11 | Thessalonians 5:2-11 | John 4:5-15, 19-26

Back on Track: Daily Steps to Begin a New Year

Not Just on Sunday: Rejoice and Praise God!

We conclude our series “Back on Track” today with what we are actually supposed to do every day—rejoice and praise God. But we know that this is difficult in the best of times and here we are heading towards the end of January and the world doesn’t seem to be changing or moving forward towards normalcy anytime soon. We are reminded of what the prophet Jeremiah (15:19) wrote as a way of understanding our lives in relationship to God. He states, “If you return to me, I will restore you.” How many of us are tired, stressed, feeling a little down due to sickness, busy routines at home or work, compounded with teaching children online, or doing the regular household chores? We need to be restored to have hope and faith renewed as we grow in faith and as we seek God in our every day living. In these last weeks we have focused on what it means to get ‘back on track towards building our relationship with God- beginning our days with prayer and reflection, acting on the 5 D’s of discipleship throughout the day and what we need to prepare for a good night’s rest and sleep. Today our focus is on worshipping God- not just on Sunday.

This is a praying mantis so called because of its prominent front legs, which are bent and held together at an angle that suggests the position of prayer. One might wonder how this creature is able to stand like this appearing to pray. But this insect is a predator which can turn its head 180 degrees to scan the surroundings with its two large compound eyes and three other simple eyes located between them. They do this to protect themselves, but also to watch for their potential food. It is however their stance which they can hold for several seconds that catches our attention because it appears to pray as it seeks its food. And if even for a moment, we might consider that through its actions, we too are called to think about worshipping God and calling upon him through prayer.

The global pandemic in this last year has brought dramatic change to every day living. Stay at home orders, restrictions of travel, essential workers and businesses operating under different levels of service have blurred our existence. And in these dark grey January days it is difficult to even know when day and evening begin! People are working many long hours each day only to realize that there is always more to do. Routines with children having online learning

have caused parents to figure out screen sharing time for all who need the computer. People are not commuting as they once did and so few vehicles are running. Everyone is staying home and if it weren't for calendars and program schedules, we might not even know what day it is. But there is something we can do that clears our minds and hearts and offers to us hope.

We can praise God- that the world is still spinning, that there is new life amongst us as babies are born and call us to a new future. A future where what was normal will now be modified as needed. Just think for a moment—did you imagine that you would be worshipping God via the internet even in the early days of 2020? But we must remember that our purpose in life is to glorify God. We are called together to worship as a group of faithful people. Generations have held this belief that we are to worship God on Sunday- the Lord's Day- because this is the day that we recognize as the day of Christ's resurrection. And each Sunday we gather it is like a little Easter. But then changes were introduced as shift work became part of what is normal through medical, manufacturing and businesses alike. Yet God wrote the commandments to "remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy" So how are you taking a Sabbath day- which involves resting, relaxing and sharing with others in these days when at home? Currently we cannot gather safely in our churches but in recent years the excuse to not attend church was I can get close to God in nature. Yes, I agree but are you learning from others? Are you growing in faith because others have gone before you and shown you the way to live as Jesus taught? Or are you left behind?

Psalms 63 offers to us reasons why we should be praising God and worshipping Him every day. God's love is better than life. And by faith we know that God helps us with everything. We can meditate on God throughout the night and know that God will guide us and lift us up. And because of this we can sing for joy! We can be the light in the darkness for others. We can also be the ones who as people who belong to the day we can be ready for anything and know that God is with us. Paul writes to the people of Thessalonica (I Thess. 5:2-11) that to live for Jesus we need to be ready like a soldier preparing for training or for battle. With a breastplate of faith and love we trust Christ as Saviour. Along with a helmet to protect our thoughts and minds, we have the hope of salvation. And with these, we are prepared for whatever the world has in store for us. Faith, love and hope are three of the most important elements, that are ours in Christ. To do this, we must live for Christ and to build each other up, to encourage others to know God and to grow in faith.

A group of people are sitting around a fire when the question is asked, why do you go to a church, or be a part of a church fellowship? One of the people looks down at the charcoal

burning away. He then takes a stick and moves one of the briquettes away from the fire. It is still glowing and afire but its glow is not a brilliant orange. The man then states, look at the glow of the large group of briquettes—this is the church fellowship praising God and worshipping together. The single briquette is one individual- yes they are on fire for God but alone. The man then moves the briquette closer to the large group immediately the lone briquette starts to glow brighter and shines with more light. He concludes, as individuals we can be on fire for God, but as a part of a church family/ congregation/ fellowship we can shine brighter for Christ and we can grow together from within. And as a church family we can gather together to praise God and offer Christ our thanks for the gift of forgiveness as a community, which remembers. Right now we need to keep the fire burning within us as individuals until it is safe for us to gather again. It is difficult as we wait for this day to come, but we have faith and know that one day we will be with each other soon. And when that day comes we will rejoice and give thanks and praise to God in many different ways!

The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is a story of pushing boundaries. Jesus dares to ask a Samaritan woman for a drink in the middle of the day at a public well. Jesus knows who this woman is and why she is there alone getting water- she has been outcast because of having 5 husbands and so she cannot meet other women. Yet through the conversation Jesus offers her living water not water from the well itself, but water that sustains our spiritual life. She calls Jesus a prophet and they discuss what it means to worship God. She states that she knows that the Messiah is coming and when he comes he will proclaim all things. It is then that Jesus says, "I am he." When the disciples return, this woman leaves and goes joyfully to her neighbours to tell them that she has met the messiah. These are the very people who shun her every day. But they listen and they then go to see Jesus. They invite him to stay in the village and through listening to his teachings, they believe. The Samaritan woman talked about worship and what it means—not on the mountain or in Jerusalem, but worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth. This means that worship of God is not to be confined to a single geographical location or regulated by the temporary provisions of Old Testament law. When Jesus came, the separation between Jew and Gentile was no longer relevant, nor was the centrality of the temple in worship. With the coming of Christ, all of God's children gained equal access to God through Him. Worship is a matter of the heart focused on praising God because God is worthy of all praise.

As we get back on track- we must realize that 2021 is a year of transition into a new normal. When vaccines are made to all we will be able to move about and establish new

routines and priorities. In the meantime, we are still called to worship God- to offer God praise because he created us; and because Jesus is the one who died and rose for us. This will not change- this is the foundation of our Christian faith. What will be different is how and where we worship now and in the future. People need God and people need people in which to grow and mature in our faith. One generation usually teaches another what is acceptable and practical and what Jesus says is still true. And so as people of God we need to give God the glory he so deserves. Whether it is through words passed down through generations of people, or from the mouths of children, we are called to offer God praise. Whether it is through the words of scripture or words from the heart of a Christian, we are to offer God our praise from within. So let us give thanks and praise to God: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Let us pray.

God we praise you because you created us and want us to be in fellowship with you. May your Spirit stir in us the glory you so deserve. May Jesus be lifted up as our Risen Saviour. And God we praise you and know that you reign forever in our hearts. May your voice be heard and the joy we have in knowing you lift us up and give us hope renewed. We ask this as we continue to get back on track and build in our relationship with you. Amen