

Sermon Title: *“The ‘Resh’ of the Story”*

June 28th, 2020 – 4th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Psalm 119:153-160



Theme:

What's in it for me?

Sermon Text:

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

How many of you remember last year at this time? We were busy planning for our community festival and church campout. We were getting ready to say goodbye to the Whites and welcome Craig Neumiller. The vacation season just kicked off, school let out for the summer, and people were out traveling. The economy was doing well, Washington had a very low jobless rate. Work was plentiful and in short supply. Not all things were in short supply, however. You could walk into your local Costco and score your favorite brand of Toilet Paper and even buy some chicken, pork, or beef without taking out a second mortgage. On the geopolitical landscape, there was civil war in Syria, and against ISIS.

It seems so far away now, doesn't it? While we look forward to the return of warm weather, if you were able to go back in time and tell your past self what we would go through this year, your past self wouldn't believe your present self. If you're like me, it only takes a few minutes of watching the TV News to see what it going in this country and locally to ruin your day if you let it. The restrictions that the government has imposed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the CHOP\CHAZ protesters leave many of us angered and bewildered.

When I get frustrated and stressed out, I turn to God's Word. Looking at the Lectionary options for today we had Jeremiah dealing with a false prophet attempting to countermand Jeremiah's prophecy of Judah being sent into exile. Important, but that doesn't seem very comforting. How about the epistle? There's a lot of great head knowledge from Paul's Letter to the Romans. God's law shows us our sin and makes us aware of our separation from God. It helps establish the need for a savior. Again, important, but not very comforting, at least on the surface. There is comfort, but you really have to do a deep dive to find it. How about the Gospel lesson? Jesus is promising that families will turn on each other and the church will endure heavy persecution. Very important to know and we should prepare for that, but is that what God wants us to focus on for this week? I'm not so sure Looking into God's Inerrant Word for some sort of comfort led me right back to the appointed Psalm of the day, Psalm 119,

the longest Psalm in the Bible. Don't worry, we're not going to go through the whole thing today, but I think there is a really important message for us in this section.

While Psalm 119 covers a wide variety of topics to include prophecy, it is mostly considered to be a Psalm of comfort. At this place and time, we can use all of the comfort we can get. Psalm 119 is an acrostic poem. That means that each stanza begins with a different letter, in this case the entire Hebrew alphabet. Each stanza begins with a word that begins with that letter. (Sorry, something gets lost in translation.) For this section, each verse begins with the Hebrew letter, Resh. Resh is where the Latin "R" and the Greek, "Rho" come from. It means, "Teacher," and is frequently placed on Jewish tombstones to indicate that the deceased was a Rabbi. So God is trying to teach us something. What does He want us to know?

Looking at the text, it reads as if someone is praying to God to deliver him or her from some kind of affliction or hardship. God's people, whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament are no stranger to hardship and calamity. David suffered. Jesus really suffered. The Church suffered. We still suffer. But if you look at the text, it's almost as if the voice of the person praying is a Pharisee. There is lots of truth about God. Jesus even commended the Pharisees for their teaching of the Law, but where He condemned them was for their hypocrisy. They didn't practice what they preached. Our text today sounds very much like the Pharisee at the Temple giving thanks that he's not like the sinful tax collector. Take a look at verses 157, 158, and 159. Yes, the author says many truths about God in the other stanzas. We are right to praise God and come to Him in prayer, but should we be patting ourselves on the back regarding our own piety? It is easy to come to Church and complain about the people in Capitol Hill, what are they calling now? Chaz or Chop? It's easy to complain about our government officials, whether on the State, local, or national level. And trust me, they are all well deserving of the criticism they receive, but what about us? It is very easy to look at the faithless with disgust. It's especially easy right now, because they have a tremendous amount of power and the decisions they make directly affect our ability to come here and worship. Is that what God wants us to do?

I think that God gave us this part of Psalm 119 because He wants us to use the law to look at ourselves in the mirror. We have more in common with those Pharisees than we like to admit. We may convince ourselves that we don't swerve from God's testimony, but if that's true, why do we have weekly confession and absolution? We do it because we mess up. We end up looking at ourselves with disgust, because we have more in common with those folks from Chaz than we realize. Just like them, we need a savior too. That's why God sent Jesus to fulfill the Law, because we couldn't do it. We couldn't do it then. We still can't do it. Jesus had to do it for us. Even though Jesus had every right to look upon us

with disgust, He didn't. Even though God could have looked upon the tax collector with disgust, He didn't. Instead, Jesus said, "Come and follow me."

That is the big lesson of this Psalm, and God's Word as a whole for that matter. Jesus fulfills the Law on our behalf, so instead of looking upon us with disgust, God says to us, "Welcome home, good and faithful servant."

So how should we respond to those wicked people around us that don't care for God's Law. Instead of looking at them with disgust, look at Jesus and imitate Him. Greet the woman at the well. Lift up that tax collector. Let that person holding the "BLM" sign know that his or her life matters to God. That's why Jesus came. When we roll up our sleeves and love the sinner the way Jesus loved us, instead of focusing on their sin, we might just see a turnaround. Don't whitewash sin. Sin is sin. Don't say it isn't, but sin doesn't have to define us. Let Jesus do that.

That is what Jesus is trying to teach us in Psalm 119. Come to God in Prayer and love your neighbor as He loved us. Difficult? You bet. Will everybody listen? No, but some will. Is it worth it? God seems to think so. He sent Jesus, didn't he? Now that's comforting. Love people. Live like Jesus.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

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Quotations from Scripture come from:

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