February 14

Happy Valentine’s Day, everyone!

This week we will explore the seventh book of the Bible, which is the book of Judges. However, we’ll start that tomorrow because, well, I just couldn’t find a way to make a study on Judges compatible with Valentine’s Day. So, instead, we’ll go with the apostle Paul today, and his famous discourse on love from his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13 verses four through seven. I hope you share this with someone you love. Here you go:

“Love is patient,”

This means that love is tolerant; it waits quietly when you’re ready to go forward and the other person isn’t. Love is poised; it puts the other person first and above the self, and does so with grace, respect, and dignity. Love always forebears.

“Love is kind.”

Love expresses affection. Not just physical affection, but emotional affection. It is courteous, considerate, and always seeks the best interests of the other person.

“It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. “

Love is not jealous of the achievements of the other person. Instead, it affirms them and celebrates with them. Love is not a braggart but is humble and gracious. Love does not come from a puffed up, prideful self. It is never aloof or dismissive but instead is warm and sympathetic.

It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking,

Love never demeans the other person, but instead lifts them up, elevates them, and honors them. Love faces outward, not inward. It seeks to give, and to give generously. It does not seek to take.

“It is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs.”

Love replaces anger with understanding, respect, and empathy. Love listens before it speaks. Love does not keep a record of past transgressions so that it casts a shadow on the relationship, and on the heart.

“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth”

Love can never flourish in a soil of evil or malevolence. But it blossoms in a garden of truth, sincerity, and gentle honesty. Love is intimate, never distant.
“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Love can endure and overcome life’s hardships. Love believes in the other person, and in the relationship. Love is full of the joy of hope and the expectation of tomorrow. Love perseveres and endures.

“Love never fails.”

Love is jubilant. Love celebrates. Love is triumphant.

Above everything else, love is victorious.

IHS,

Pastor Lou

February 15

Grace and peace to you this day.

OK, now we will start with the book of Judges.

The title refers to the first twelve rulers of the nation of Israel after they entered the Promised Land. God intended to be their king, unlike the surrounding nations who had a human king, so he appointed “judges” to rule over the nation. It was one of the ways God intended that the nation of Israel distinguish itself from the world and announce Him to the world. Judges were not legal judges as we understand them today but were more like political and military leaders.

Unfortunately, the Israelites’ sin and idolatry overshadowed God’s intended plan. The story of Judges is a story of a repeated cycle of sin, crying out to the Lord, and God’s grace and mercy in repeatedly restoring Israel. For the remainder of the week, we’ll select three vignettes and see what God is teaching us. The first is the story of Deborah, Barak, and a woman named Jael.

Here’s the set up: Deborah was the fourth judge of Israel. Here main general was a man named Barak. Deborah wanted Barak to pursue and kill the Canaanites, but Barak said he would only do so if Deborah went with him. She agreed to go, but only with the understanding that “a woman” would get credit for the victory.

They pursue the Canaanite army and destroy it, but the Canaanite general, Sisera, escapes and goes to hide in Jael's tent. Here’s what happens next:
“Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, ‘Come, my lord, come right in. Don’t be afraid.’ So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket. ‘I’m thirsty,’ he said. ‘Please give me some water. She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up. ‘Stand in the doorway of the tent,’ he told her. ‘If someone comes by and asks you, ‘Is anyone in there?’ say ‘No.’ But Jael, Heber’s wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died” (4:18-21).

Yikes. Sisera should have slept with one eye open.

What are we to make of this today? I think the first lesson is this: God chooses leaders according to His standards, not ours. Women were rarely, if ever, leaders of anything during these times, yet God chose Deborah and led her to victory as well.

And, I think the second lesson for today is this: sometimes God’s plans often take what we see as unexpected twists. Deborah told Barak that the victory would go to “a woman.” No doubt Barak, and everyone else, thought Deborah was referring to herself. And yet, the victory went to an unknown nomad woman who had been driving tent pegs into the hard desert earth her whole life. As my wife Judy is fond of saying, God wastes nothing.

Tomorrow: Ehud and Eglon.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

February 16
Greetings, DGCC Family.

Yesterday we read about Sisera, Jael, and the tent peg. Today, in another exciting episode of “Judges,” we will learn the story of Ehud and the left-handed dagger. Here’s the back story:

Ehud was the second Judge of Israel. His story starts like this:

“Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and because they did this evil the Lord gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel. Getting the Ammonites and Amalekites to join him, Eglon came and attacked Israel, and they took possession of the City of Palms [a/k/a Jericho]. The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years. Again the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and he gave them a deliverer —Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjamite” (Judges 3:12-15).

Before we get to the business about the dagger, notice a couple of things here: the word “again” is used twice. And not in a good way. “Again the Israelites did evil, “and “again
the Israelites cried out to the Lord.” In His grace, however, again the Lord “gave them a deliverer.” In this case, it would be our man Ehud.

Already, you can see that Ehud and Eglon are on a collision course. The Moabites were an evil, pagan people, and their king, Ehud, was all that and then some. Ehud goes to see Eglon under the pretext of having a secret message. Here’s what happens next:

“Ehud then approached him while he was sitting alone in the upper room of his palace and said, “I have a message from God for you.” As the king rose from his seat, Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king’s belly. Even the handle sank in after the blade, and his bowels discharged. Ehud did not pull the sword out, and the fat closed in over it. Then Ehud went out to the porch; he shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them” (3:20-23).

All I can say is, Eeeewwwwww. King Eglon was a LARGE man. The sword went in so far that his stomach engulfed even the handle. We won’t even get in to “discharged bowels.” This is a strange story indeed. What are we to make of it? Here’s what I think.

Ehud, like many of the tribe of Benjamin, was left-handed. Being left-handed in those days was considered to be a serious handicap. It was a social impediment when it came to marriage and was also a barrier to advancing in the military or in society. And yet the Lord, having given Israel over to the Moabites, chose a seriously handicapped man not only to be the Israelites’ judge, but to deliver them from the wicked Eglon.

As we saw yesterday, the lesson here is that God does not judge us by human standards. Again, God wastes nothing. He is not deterred by what we perceive as handicaps or social stigma. In fact, He uses them to His advantage.

Tomorrow: Maraschino cherries.

IHS,

Pastor Lou

February 17
Greetings to you in the name of Jesus the Messiah.

One of the saddest verses in all of Scripture, as well as one of the most important verses in the book of Judges, is this: “In those days, Israel had no king. Everyone did as they saw fit” (17:6).

“Everyone did as they saw fit.” What’s old is new. What was true in the time of the Judges, over three thousand years ago, is true today.

When you were a child growing up, did your parents ever get so exasperated that they said something like, “Fine, do whatever you want?” My mom kept a jar of maraschino cherries in the back of the fridge. I have no idea why. That same jar was in there for years, or so it seemed. One day, I decided to “sneak” one and see what it tasted like. It was delicious. So I had another. The second was even more delicious. Problem is, my mom caught me. After the usual questions, “What do you think you’re doing?” and “Don’t you know I’m keeping those for a special occasion?” and “What do you think your father will say when he comes home?”, she said, “Fine. Eat the whole jar. Do whatever you want. See if I care.”

And so, I did. Consumed an entire jar of maraschino cherries in about ten minutes. Juice and all. It was one of the best ten minutes of my nine years on the planet. It was then followed by about twenty of the worst minutes of my nine years on the planet, as I proceeded to decorate the one and only Bury family bathroom sink in a not so lovely shade of regurgitated maraschino red. Similarly, such is often the consequences of turning God aside and instead “doing as we see fit.”

The difference is, unlike my mother’s false apathy, God, in fact, does care. Deeply. In fact, so deeply that He sent His Son to set it all straight. To urge us to turn from doing as we see fit and instead, follow Him and do as He sees fit.

Next week, a woman named Ruth.

IHS,

Pastor Lou

February 18
Happy Friday, everyone!

Instead of a musical devotional for today, I thought I would send along a humorous devotional sent along to me by one of our members. Hope it brings a smile to your day.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TK2_ezOBa2A

IHS,

Pastor Lou