January 3

Dear DGCC Family,

Grace and peace to you this day, and Happy New Year!

As we begin 2022, I thought we would use our “Words of Encouragement” for the year to take a walk through Scripture. So, starting with Genesis, each week we will look at a few of the prominent themes found in each book of the Bible. We will take the books in order, and because there are 66 in total, we will continue our “walk” into 2023. So, let’s begin.

As always, a good place to start is, well, at the beginning. Thus, we’ll look today at the opening three words of Scripture: “In the beginning…” (Genesis 1:1). Why are these words so important?

Consider this: have you ever stopped to think that God, in His eternal nature, is not bound by the constraints of time? He always was and always will be. The book of Deuteronomy says this: “The eternal God is your refuge…” (33:27), and the apostle Paul describes God like this in 1 Timothy: “the King eternal, immortal, invisible” (1:17).

Concepts like infinity and eternity are hard for the human mind to grasp, nonetheless, they are two characteristics of the Almighty. David Jeremiah says: “I know we can’t fully comprehend that truth, but that’s all right. A God who is small enough to be understood isn’t big enough to be worshiped.” Amen.

So, given all this, why are these opening words to God’s great love story known as Scripture so important? “In the beginning…” For me, here’s the answer: before He begins His majestic work of Creation, the eternal, timeless God has to start at some point, and so He introduces the element of time into the universe. In other words, our eternal, timeless God accommodates us with something that doesn’t exist in eternity: The beginning.

The beginning where God expresses His eternal love for us. The beginning where God expresses His eternal grace for us. And, the beginning where God commences His eternal plan for us, which is to show us the Way to eternity with Him.

And so, my prayer for you today is this: take the time to know your eternal God. Find a quiet spot, pour yourself a cup of something warm for this wintry day, and open up the book that is His great love story for you. I might suggest that you start “In the beginning.”

IHS,

Pastor Lou
Greetings to you this day.

Continuing on this Tuesday with a walk through Genesis, and in particular, the story of Creation, I’d like to take a look briefly at the Creation of humankind.

Before God creates man and woman, He spends the first five days of Creation preparing it for humanity, which will be the pinnacle of His Creation.

First, He created “light.” Then He created the sky on the second day, followed by separating the water from the land on the third day. And then He creates life: vegetation on the third day, and because life will need sunlight to grow and nighttime to rest, He creates the sun and the moon and the stars. Then He creates the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and the beasts of the field.

It is important to note that with all the forms of life God places on the earth, He creates them “each according to their kinds” (i.e., Genesis 1:12). Not so, however, with humans. This is how Genesis describes it:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

Note that God, unlike with every other form of life He creates, does not create man “each according to their kinds.” The reason why is very important: humankind is one creation. We are all the image bearers of the Almighty. This does not preclude diversity. Far from it. But what it does is unite us in our diversity. It unites us in the image of our Creator.

That’s why Jesus said, “love your neighbor.” Because we are all neighbors. So, my prayer for you today is this: that person who annoys you, the person with whom you disagree, the person who, frankly, you’d rather not be around, go ahead and try to see them differently today. Go ahead and see if you can close your eyes and see them as a different image: the image of their, and your, and my, Creator.

IHS,
Pastor Lou
Greetings, DGCC Family,

Today we will take a look at an important story in the Bible that is often overlooked: the Tower of Babel.

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language, they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”

So, the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth (Genesis 11:1-10).

This story has always intrigued me. Was God so threatened that He had to confound humanity? Was He fearful of their potential for achievement? Was He worried that with increased knowledge, mankind would no longer have need for Him?

Of course, none of those things is true, though a simplistic reading of this might lead someone to that conclusion. Here’s the truth: God was protecting us from ourselves. Have you ever taken matches away from a young child? Would you let a five-year old drive a car? Or handle a chainsaw?

In this story God displays His graciousness and saves humanity from its gross ambition and destructive pride. Once again, grace and love and forbearance carry the day.

Have you ever experienced God saving you from yourself? I have…many times. My prayer for you today is this: take a moment, think of those times when God took your hands off the matches, or the chainsaw, and abide in His loving grace.

IHS, Pastor Lou
Grace and peace to you today, DGCC.

Today I would like to conclude our very brief look at Genesis with another passage that has always intrigued me: Jacob wrestling with God. First, let me set the context.

Jacob was the son of Isaac, who was the son of Abraham. Together, they are considered the Biblical patriarchs. For lack of a better word, Jacob was a bit of a “schemer” from the get go. He cheated his brother Esau out of his inheritance. He was deceitful in dealing with his father-in-law over livestock (though his father-in-law was exactly an honest man either), and these types of shenanigans seemed to follow him. In our scene for today, Jacob is travelling home with his two wives, (Rachel and Leah, who were sisters), and this is what happens:

“That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, ‘Let me go, for it is daybreak.’ But Jacob replied, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’ The man asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘Jacob,’ he answered. Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome’ (Genesis 32:22-28).

There are many themes here, I think, but allow me to point out just a handful of them. The first is this: in our human struggles, God is willing to get down in the mud with us. All night, if necessary.

Secondly, when the time is right, God breaks us. Not to the point of destruction or despair, but to the point of submission. God causes Jacob’s hip to be “wrenched,” and thus the wrestling is over, though Jacob still holds on.

Third, not until Jacob is exhausted, covered in dirt, sore and bruised, full of sweat, and now with a dislocated hip, does God issue His blessing. And this is no mere blessing. God changes his name from “Jacob” to “Israel,” the name of the nation that God will form from his descendants in order to announce His plan of salvation.
So how about you? Do you find yourself wrestling with the Almighty? The good news is that He hangs in there with you, through all the dirt, the sweat, and the tears. And when the time is right, He will break you. Not to damage you, but to re-form and re-cast you, just like He did with Jacob, in order that He can work through you, and in you.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

January 7
Happy Friday, everyone!
Here’s your Friday musical devotional. As before, turn up the volume and enjoy!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CBNE25rtnE

IHS,
Pastor Lou