September 19

Happy Monday, everyone.

Recently, Judy and I took a ride out to Lake Shabbona State Park, which is about an hour or so west of here and rented a small pontoon boat for a couple of hours to cruise around the lake. It was a beautiful late summer afternoon, perfect for a boat ride. Here’s a white heron we spotted hanging out on the shore looking for minnows in the shallow water:

Before we actually rented the boat, I had to review a two-page checklist of safety items, check off each item indicating that I had read them, and then sign the document indicating that I agreed to abide by them. Some of the items were like this:

- I understand I am not allowed to have a gas or charcoal grill on the boat;
- I understand that I am not to cross in front of another boat moving in the opposite direction;
- I understand that I am not to operate the boat while under the influence of drugs or alcohol;
- I understand that I am to keep all limbs, hands, and feet away from the propeller while the boat is in operation;
- I understand if that for any reason the boat takes on water, I am to call the park office immediately;
I understand that I am to refrain from any and all idiotic or stupid behavior;
Just kidding about the last one.

In any case, I think you get the idea. There were about 40 of these statements I had to check. And then I had to sign the waiver that stated that I understood that not following any of these rules could result in **SERIOUS BODILY INJURY OR DEATH**.

Yikes.

I commented to the man behind the counter that this was a pretty long list of rules and he said, “Yeah, well, it’s our job to watch out for you.”

In an odd kind of way, as he said that and as I thought about it, it reminded me of the prophet Ezekiel, whose book is the next one we will look at today. The job of the prophets was to speak on behalf of the Lord, issue warnings about their need to follow the rules, or in their case, “the Law,” and to “watch out” for God’s chosen people. This is how Ezekiel describes it:

“At the end of seven days the word of the Lord came to me: ‘Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me’” (3:16-17).

Time and again, the Lord warned his people through the prophets, including Ezekiel, that failure to follow the rules would result in **SERIOUS BODILY INJURY OR DEATH**.

But, as always, God’s ultimate message is one of hope and salvation:

“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (36:24-26).

Then, as now, the Lord seeks to renew our hearts day by day, hour by hour, and minute by minute, no matter our circumstances. Go ahead and allow Him to cleanse you, sprinkle you with clean water, and cleanse you from whatever it is that you’re having a hard time washing away. And then, rest in the assurance that you are His.

Tomorrow: The writing’s on the wall.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
September 20

Grace and peace to you this day.

Quite a number of years ago, a co-worker said to me that if you want to know where a quote comes from, start with the Bible or Shakespeare. I think she was on to something. We'll set aside Shakespeare for the moment and focus on the Bible. Here are a few quotes or sayings that originate with Scripture:

- **The “apple of my eye.”** This saying is from Deuteronomy: "In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye" (32:10). The Hebrew word used here for “apple is iyshown (pronounced ee-shone). Its literal meaning is “pupil of my eye” or, said another way, the darkest, innermost part of my eye. Thus, the Hebrew expression “apple of my eye” refers to something very special and meaningful.

- **“By the skin of your teeth.”** This is from Job: “I am nothing but skin and bones; I have escaped only by the skin of my teeth” (19:20). This, of course, refers to a very narrow or thin margin. One more:

- **“A fly in the ointment.”** This is from Ecclesiastes: "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honor” (10:1, KJV).

There are many more, but I think you get the idea.

Looking at the next book in the Bible, Daniel, we get another famous expression: “the writing’s on the wall.” Daniel is known for having survived the fiery furnace and the lion’s den, but also for interpreting the mysterious handwriting that was written by a mystical hand that appeared during a banquet given by the Babylonian King Belshazzar. This is how Daniel describes the scene:

“Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking” (5:5-6).

The words written by the hand predicted the king’s demise, but only Daniel, with his prophetic gift given by God, was able to interpret “the writing on the wall.”

When I read these sayings, I can’t help but marvel how God has used language in this way to permeate our everyday conversation with quotes from Scripture. So, have a little Bible fun today. Google “famous sayings in the Bible” and see what you can find. As I said, there are many of them, and these four that we looked at today were just “a drop in the bucket” (Isaiah 40:15).

Tomorrow: Hosea, Gomer, and a minor soap opera.

IHS, Pastor Lou
September 21

Greetings, DGCC Family.

Yesterday we looked at famous sayings that originate in Scripture. Another saying that does not originate directly from Scripture but nonetheless applies to today’s lesson is this: “The Lord moves in mysterious ways.”

Moving on from the book of Daniel, we turn to the final twelve books of the Old Testament known as “the minor prophets.” Because they were considered at one time to be a single book, we will not spend twelve days looking at them, but only today and tomorrow (there, aren’t you relieved?). In any case, these books, like the other prophets, speak on behalf of the Lord at various stages in Israel’s history and warn against Israel’s sin and foretell the Lord’s judgment.

Our story for today involves the prophet Hosea and his wife, Gomer. With a name like that, you know she’s going to be trouble, and that’s an understatement. The Lord commands Hosea to marry her knowing she will be unfaithful and uses this story as a metaphor for Israel’s unfaithfulness to Him. This is the opening scene:

“When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, ‘Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD.’ So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son” (1:2-3).

Think of it. The Lord likens the relationship between us and Him to a marriage. He desires to bring us close to Him, and to abide in His will. The same God who created two hundred billion trillion stars longs to hold us in His embrace. That’s why, despite our tendency to pull away from that embrace, He provides the answer of grace and salvation in the name of His Son, Jesus. As the book of Hosea comes to a close, seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, this is how the Lord describes it through Hosea:

“I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?” (13:14).

The message of God, then and now, is always one of grace and love, and salvation.

Tomorrow: The Old Testament comes to a close.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
September 22

Greeting you today in the name of Jesus the Messiah.

The final book of the Old Testament is the book of Malachi, written in about 430 BC. As the prophets before him, it is written as an admonition to the Jews who have returned to Jerusalem from exile to obey God’s law and follow His ways. There are 500 years between when Malachi was written and the first book of the New Testament, Matthew.

As we have seen with the Lord’s message through the prophets, there are warnings and consequences, but as the period of the Old Testament comes to a close, God’s love for His people, and His creation, shines through. Justice will prevail, and those who worship and obey the Lord will experience the joy of salvation. These are among the Lord’s final words in the Old Testament:

“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves” (4:2).

And now the people would wait. Four hundred years. God’s great love story for His people would take four centuries for its new chapter to be written. And He would choose as its first author a most unlikely person: a hated, outcast instrument of the despised Roman empire.

Next week: Enter the King.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

September 23

Happy Friday, everyone!

Recently, the men’s Bible study read the story, as told in John, of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead after he had been dead for four days. Dave Pluister sent me this song afterwards that relates to this story. I liked it so much that I thought I would share it this week. Turn up the volume and enjoy!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=se7yAkqu3Ek

IHS,
Pastor Lou