October 10

Happy Monday, everyone.

Recently I had a day that went like this: I left the house in the morning to head to church but first was going to stop at my favorite breakfast restaurant (Stevens on 63rd Street in Woodridge) for a nice leisurely breakfast while reading the newspaper before starting the day. I walked to the end of the driveway to get the paper and, for some reason, it didn’t get delivered that day.

I thought to myself, “OK, I’ll skip breakfast and catch up on some phone calls as I ride to church.” So, I go to open my car door while turning to say hello to my neighbor and, after putting my hand on the door handle, discovered that some bird with an apparent sense of humor had used my door handle for its morning bathroom break. And apparently this bird had just eaten some kind of blue berries.

Back in the house I go to wash my hands. I go back out to the car, wipe off the door handle, start to pull out of the driveway and go to make my first phone call, only to discover that I had left my phone in the house. Back into the house to get my phone, back out to the car, where I sit in the driveway and say out loud, “Lord, why is nothing ever easy?”

The Christian life is many things, but easy is often not one of them. Nothing in Scripture teaches us that our walk with Jesus will be easy, and no one knew this better than Jesus Himself. This is how the Gospel writer Mark records how Jesus started His ministry:

“At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him” (1:9-13).

Jesus starts His ministry by being led by the Holy Spirit into a place where He would deal with all manner of human temptation and would be confronted by Satan personally. And, while the Father does not rescue Him from these trials, nonetheless we read that during His trials “angels attended Him.”

How about you? Are you facing difficulties or challenges in life? God never promises that you won’t. However, He does promise to be always present, always caring, and always walking with you.

IHS,
Pastor Lou
October 11

Grace and peace to you this day.

I have to confess, I am a “dog person.” I love our canine friends. Growing up we had a collie named Caesar, and he was a great companion. Later on, when our son Matt was a young boy and after his third hamster died by escaping his cage, somehow getting in our duct work and drowning in the water of the condenser pan of our air conditioner, I declared with appropriate paternal authority, “No more fur bearing animals in this house!” Shortly thereafter, Matt and Judy ambushed me one day when I got off the train from work and introduced me to an adorable Basset Hound puppy they had seen earlier that day at the pet store. And that’s how Al the Basset Hound found his “forever home” then and there as he crawled into my lap at the store, ears dragging along the floor. It was a very sad day when Al left us many years ago.

Now we have two dogs, as most of you know. They are a bit spoiled and very loved.

In the times of Jesus, however, especially among the Jews, to call someone a “dog” was a serious insult. And so it is that the Gospel writer Mark records this curious scene:

“Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” “Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.” She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone” (7:24-30).

What’s going on here? Is Jesus insulting the woman by calling her a “dog?” Far from it. The Greek word Mark uses for the word “dog” here actually refers to a puppy one would find in the house, not a scavenger in the street. Jesus is saying that His first priority is to teach the disciples, and that, in effect, she must wait her turn.

However, she is persistent, and as we saw in this last week’s sermon message, persistence has rewards. The woman works her way into the tender heart of Jesus, and as a result, the demon is driven from her daughter.

So go ahead, be persistent. Be determined. Knock on the door. Seek and find. And the gentle, loving heart of Jesus will most certainly welcome you in.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
October 12

Greetings, DGCC Family.

I will admit that when I read the Gospels, it almost always takes me surprise when Jesus appears to respond harshly to His friends the disciples. This scene in particular comes to mind from Mark’s Gospel:

“He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (8:31-33).

Yikes. Jesus calls His dear friend Peter “Satan,” or at least appears to do so. Is Jesus displaying human anger? Human frustration? Or is something else going on here?

If ever there was an example of Jesus demonstrating “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8), this is certainly chief among them. Here Jesus responds to Peter not out of human anger but out of divine righteousness. He is reminding Peter who He is. When He says “You do not have in mind the concerns of God,” He is telling Peter, and us, that He, Jesus, has in mind the concerns of God because He is the Son of God. And, He tells Peter then, and us today, that our human concerns should be secondary to God’s concerns.

And what is it that God concerns Himself with? And what does that mean for us? Once again, I come to the prophet Micah: “And what does the Lord require of you? Act justly, seek mercy, and walk humbly with your God” (6:8).

To that I say, Amen.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
October 13

Grace and peace to you today.

Jesus spoke a lot about economics. Well, He may not have used that word, but His teachings are full of instruction about money, the poor, and so on. (Editorial note: many people say that the early Christians were socialists. That is decidedly untrue, but we’ll save that for another day).

In any case, Jesus understood the complex, and often dependent nature of the relationship between humankind and wealth. Here is how the Gospel writer Mark describes an encounter between Jesus and “the rich young man:”

“As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’"

“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” (10:17-23).

At first blush, this seems rather severe. Sell everything? But notice what Scripture says: “Jesus looked at him and loved him.” He loved him enough to speak the truth. He loved him enough to recognize that it wasn’t the man’s wealth that was the obstacle, it was his dependence on his wealth for his comfort, rather than on the Lord, that was the obstacle.

We are not called to sell everything, but we are called to place our dependence first and foremost of our loving, gracious, and giving God. And then, Jesus tells us today as He told the rich man two thousand years ago, “Come, follow me.”

IHS,

Pastor Lou
October 14

Happy Friday, everyone. Here’s your music devotional for the week. It was one of the songs played at our Women’s Retreat last week. Turn up the volume and enjoy!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zARVp3420I

IHS,

Pastor Lou