

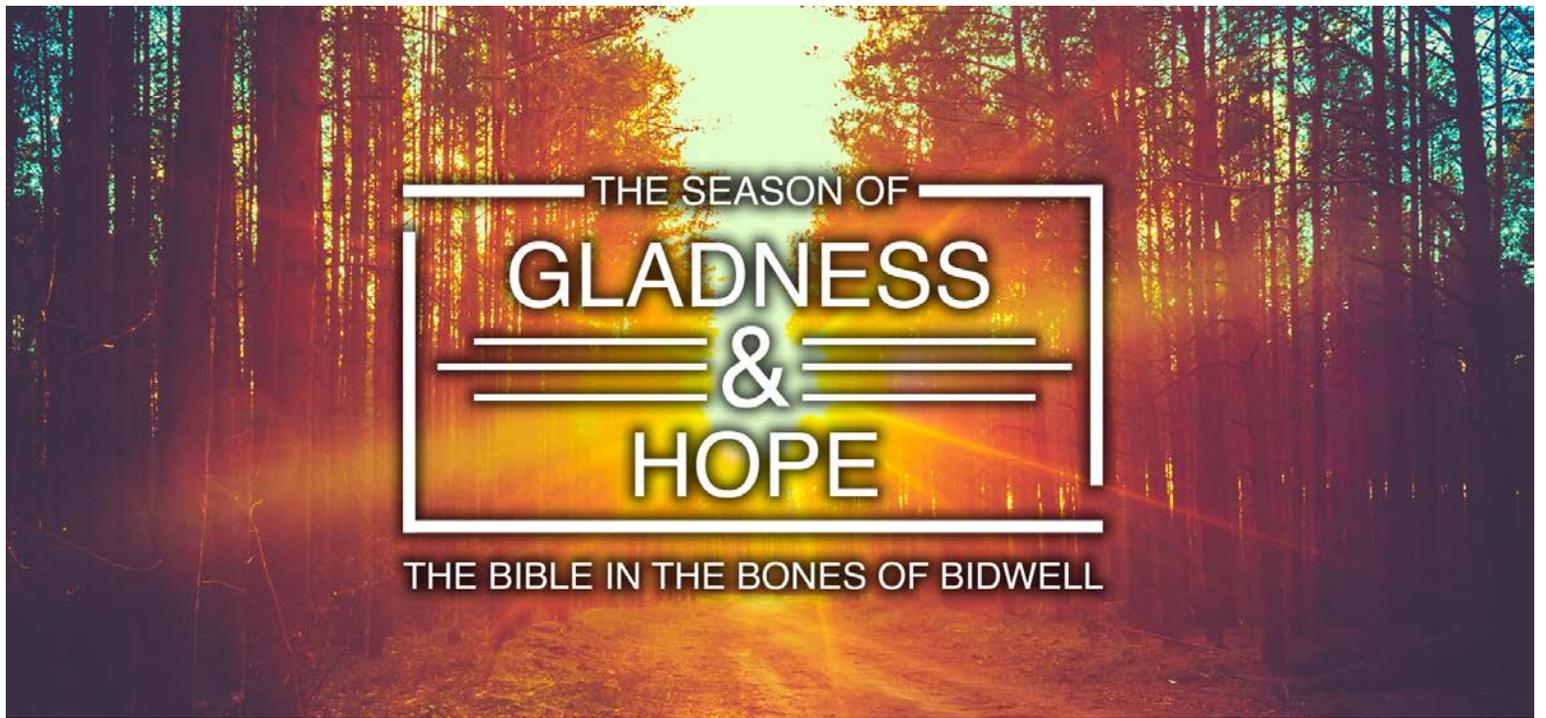
ENCOUNTERING ANCIENT RHYTHMS



CHANGING ME, CHANGING YOU

A Weekly Devotion and Spiritual Guide of
Bidwell Presbyterian Church

MAY 2, 2021



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I. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this edition of Encountering Ancient Rhythms: A Weekly Devotion and Spiritual Guide. We have prepared this for you not only for your personal use but also for your Life Group study if you're currently in one. The purpose behind this packet is to promote your learning of Scripture, its integration into your life, and to unite Bidwell behind its vision to grow Deeper in Christ. We hope it will encourage you to have regular Scripture passages to focus on each week and empower you to live daily as Christ's disciple. We invite you to work through it at your own pace and apply it as it suits your convenience and where you are on the journey.

The following reflections are prepared by Pastors Henry Hansen, Shannon Coon, and Ray Medina. The Scriptures are derived from a resource¹ we're using for our purposes that interrelate if you read them closely. Also, they provide substantive amounts of verses to integrate into your habit of reading and devotion. May they and this guide enrich your spiritual life and promote your walk with Christ.

Faithfully Yours,

Henry Hansen
Senior Pastor

II. GOD'S STORY

Read this week: Psalm 22:25-31, John 15:1-8, Acts 8:26-40, 1 John 4:7-21

When we read the four passages for today what stands out is how we proclaim the goodness and love of God by the way we live our lives. Psalm 22 speaks of worship, kneeling before God, remembering what He has done, and telling His story. Living a life of worship is one way we proclaim and demonstrate God's great love. In Acts 8 we see an individual, Philip, living a life open to the call of God and then responding to that call when God speaks. Philip is ready and prepared to share God's salvation and power, one on one when the opportunity is given to him.

John 15: says "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." Bearing fruit, the fruit of the faithful life of a disciple is another way that we proclaim God's love and show that we are followers of Christ. When we don't bear fruit we are pruned from the vine. This passage is very closely linked to the focal passage of the week found in I John 4:7-21. These verses zero in on the fruit of love, demonstrating God's love for us in the way that we love one another is evidence of our relationship with a loving God. In verse 8 we read "whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." When we do not love, we do not bear fruit as John speaks of in his gospel. In his letter, he flatly states we can't truly know God if we are not demonstrating His love.

How do you proclaim and demonstrate God's love and grace in your life? How can it be seen by others? What can you do to enhance your expression of love and gratitude for what God has done in your life?

III. WEEKLY SCRIPTURES WITH INSIGHT AND COMMENTARY

Psalm 22:25-31

(Recommend further reading; Psalm 22:1-24)

This Psalm speaks to the power of praise in the life of a believer. If you look at this Scripture from beginning to end, it details the apparent misery of the Psalmist. At one point he describes himself as a worm (verse 6). We've all had this experience. We've felt lower-than-low; despised and scorned and abandoned. This is the plight of the Psalmist. And the first words of Psalm 22, let us remember, were referenced by Jesus, himself, in his final moments on the cross: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Thus in praying the Psalm we remember that this draws us into deeper union with our now Risen Savior.

The Psalmist, starting in verse 22, turns from despair toward praise. He felt like a worm. He felt lower-than-low. But he places his suffering in the wider context of the Christian community — namely, a worshiping community. His lament turns to praise.

This is a powerful weapon in a believer's arsenal — in your arsenal. Praise is a vital catalyst for positive thinking, maintaining a posture of hope, and living one's life as a praise-offering toward Jesus. You may feel like a worm. You may feel despised and shamed, but you can counteract this emotion and state of being by declaring the power and majesty and goodness of God. Further, it's a discipline the Psalmist habitually practices throughout the book — lament is followed by praise. He never forgets whose company he's in.

Personal Reflection: When emotion rushes in like wild horses running onto a field from a stable, stop and praise God. Reference even many of the words and language that the Psalmist employs in these verses, such as "dominion belongs to the Lord and He rules over the nations" (verse 28). Let praise govern your day. In fact, consider that your entire day as a moment-by-moment declaration of praise. Let your moments be a worship experience in the powerful presence of God.

For Extra: See Jonah 4:7. How is the worm in this passage being portrayed? Look at the verse in light of the greater story of Jonah.

John 15: 1-8

(Recommended reading, John 1: 7-17)

This passage was preached at the service of my ordination in March 2004. It was very meaningful for me and resonated deeply with my understanding of the Christian faith, as well as my philosophy of ministry. Pastors, leaders of the church, and even Christians themselves claim to be nothing save the person of Jesus Christ. It is our identification with him that comes from his own self-identification in his relationship to the Father, that gives us power and motivation for living life and bearing fruit.[2] Our connection to Christ, the true vine, leads us to a life of bearing fruit.

Chapter fifteen is the final of all the "I am" statements throughout John. John's Gospel, as you'll recall, is filled with proclamations Jesus made about himself. He used provocative images including that of the shepherd, the bread of life, the door, the way, the truth, the life, and the resurrection. Here he applies the colorful image of the vine to himself, and to God the Father as the vine grower. In this agricultural region, one can imagine the metaphor was compelling and useful for his hearers.

Abiding in Jesus is vital for the Christian life. Craig Barnes, the president at Princeton seminary points out that we don't need any more books written or messages delivered about how to be more effective at "doing." Rather, we need to be encouraged by Jesus' invitation toward being."³ "Being" versus "doing" is difficult for us in such motion-filled and high-paced, stimulating times. Abiding in Christ involves the necessary step of creating margin in our lives for enjoying Him. For it is in enjoying Him, abiding in God, that He is most glorified.

John Piper, the Reformed Christian pastor once said: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."⁴ Consider the implications of that statement. We're most productive in the eyes of God when we are satisfied in Jesus. That's powerful material and motivates us to pursue our true calling to enjoy God. It is in enjoying him that he is most glorified.

III. WEEKLY SCRIPTURES WITH INSIGHT AND COMMENTARY

Finally, it's worthy of note that there's judgment in this passage. Verse 6 tells us that "Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned." I appreciate that at my ordination service my pastor included this verse in his sermon. He pulled out a tumbleweed and cast it to the ground for dramatic effect to highlight the image Jesus offered. It is an inconvenient truth he presented. We cannot claim to be doing Christian things unless we are genuinely connected to God. Union with Christ and enjoying that intimacy is something God cares about deeply. It's something we do together as a church also. As an image for Bidwell, you might consider the image of a vine. It's non-hierarchical.⁵ It's quite a stunning image if you let it sink in. We collectively are the branches of Jesus. We are equally his branches. Apart from Jesus, we collectively can do nothing. That's a powerful thought.

Personal Reflection: On the continuum of "being" over "doing", how are you doing? Practice your enjoyment of God in moments of stillness and receiving grace. Think about how your satisfaction with Christ is what brings God the most glory. What form does that take throughout your day?

For Extra: Review the other "I am" statements by Jesus in their context.

- "I am the bread of life" (6:35).
- "I am the living bread that came down from heaven" (6:51).
- "I am the light of the world" (8:12).
- "I am the sheep's door" (10:7).
- "I am the good shepherd" (10:11).
- "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25).
- "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6).

Now, look at Exodus 3:14. Consider the significance of the statement "I am."

Acts 8:26-40

Maybe for you, the Holy Spirit is like a warm cup of coffee, a gentle vapor whose warm presence alerts you to the comforting ways of God. Or maybe the

Spirit is like your daily bread, filling your heart and mind with morsels from God's Word. If that's the case, you are in good company.

Jesus compares the Spirit to something like a comforter-teacher in John's Gospel. Yet in the book of Acts, the Spirit of God is characterized by fire, wind, and power. Being in touch with the Holy Spirit in Acts is less like a warm cup of comforting coffee and more like base jumping while chugging Red Bull. Okay, maybe that's a stretch, but you can't read Acts without recognizing the way the story reads like a wild adventure. The Apostle Philip's story is case and point. Beginning in Acts 8, we hear about severe church persecution that forced Philip to journey to Samaria, where he begins a prolific ministry of preaching and baptism. Then the angel of the Lord tells him to go down a wilderness road where he meets a high-profile Ethiopian eunuch. Philip starts jogging alongside this eunuch's chariot and, again prompted by the Spirit, winds up talking to him from the ground. Then the eunuch asks him to join him in the chariot, they chat for a bit about the Bible the Eunuch was reading, then the Eunuch stops the chariot to be baptized by Philip roadside. This is wild, right? It's not every day that I have a random, cross-cultural encounter with Bible-reading strangers while driving down the Esplanade. Then Philip was just whisked away?! I'm not sure what to make of that either, but it's a wild adventure to walk with the Spirit in Acts.

I hear Christians talk today about how hard it is to be a Christian, how fewer people are coming to church in general, and how discouraged they are by the trajectory of our culture. Sometimes I want to stop them and say, "Sure things can be discouraging sometimes, but why not consider this a call to a new adventure?" Leadership consultant Tod Bolsinger, writing about 21st-century Christian leadership, says, "(We can) re-frame this moment in history for Christians in the west as an opportunity put before us by God — for adventure, hope and discovery — all the while embracing the anxiety, fear and potential loss that comes from answering this call." What if we stopped talking about how discouraged or concerned we are and started talking about the adventure the Spirit of God wants to take us on? What if we reclaimed

III. WEEKLY SCRIPTURES WITH INSIGHT AND COMMENTARY

the Spirit of adventure that characterized the apostles in the book of Acts? I don't know the equivalent is of running alongside an Ethiopian eunuch's chariot, but I can start by listening for the call of God's Spirit throughout my day to look for ways to get out of my comfort zone, face my own anxieties, and follow the Spirit wherever the Spirit leads.

Personal Reflection: How would you characterize the Spirit of God in your life? What other images might you use besides those named in this commentary? What does it look like for you to re-frame this moment in history for the church in the West as an opportunity for adventure? How can you be attentive and listening to what the Spirit is calling you to do on a daily basis?

For Extra: Philip's ministry — in Acts — is the first step of taking the message of the Gospel beyond the boundaries of traditional Judaism. Jesus had told his followers to be his witnesses "To Jerusalem, to all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), but that movement had yet to occur seven chapters deep. This Eunuch would have had a complicated relationship with Judaism since he was a eunuch (cf. Deuteronomy 23:1) and probably a Gentile. By following the Spirit and meeting this eunuch right where he was at, both geographically and spiritually, Philip's ministry was spreading not only to Samaria, already a huge first step in obedience to Jesus, but also to Africa.

1 John 4:7-21

In this passage, John is developing two important themes: fellowship and sonship. When we understand the sonship of Jesus, who was sent by the Father, and the depth of His atoning sacrifice, it leads us into fellowship. Fellowship is twofold, this understanding brings us into fellowship with God, but it is also designed to create fellowship with one another.

John has spent writing up to this point on correct doctrine and now he brings his message to the point of right living, and that right living is very simple — "Love one another." Knowledge and love are not meant to be mutually exclusive or competitive. Knowledge and love are complementary, even inseparable. If we

know and understand what has been done for us it will lead us into a relationship with God based on love and also move us to love one another. Verses 7-8 exhort us to love one another then give us 3 reasons why. The first is God is love. If we want to be godly, we must live according to His character. Second, love is evidence of our rebirth. Finally, love is the expression of our spiritual knowledge. God's love was revealed to us through Jesus Christ, God's son, whom God sent into the world. This is an essential doctrine, what we must know. Verse 12 equates loving one another to seeing God! The world sees God working among us in our love for one another; we experience God through those expressions of love.

John then turns his attention to the requirements of salvation; to believe in God's love expressed in Christ, confess that Jesus is the son of God, and then remain in Him through love. This is perfect love, one that confounded the world. Last week's commentary described the different words for love from the Greek language. The word used here, *agape*, is a confounding love, not really developed and understood until applied to God sending His son. This love was not understood by the Greeks and likely not truly understood by us either.

We are capable of love because he first loved us. This ability is part of being created in His image. John is clear and has said it several times in different ways. If you do not love each other, you cannot claim to love God! No way around it.

Personal Reflection: How do you view the balance of knowledge and love in your own life? When you are out of balance, which way do you lean? What can you practice more to stay in balance: more love or more knowledge?

For Extra: Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. Look closely at the description of love. If God is love, this is also a description of the character of God. Does this description alter the way you view God in your own life? How should it alter the way you see others?

2. New Interpreters Series, John.
3. Craig Barnes, The Pastor as Minor Poet.
4. John Piper, Desiring God.
5. New Interpretation Series, John.

IV. MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

1 JOHN 4:7-8

Beloved, let's love one another; for love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

These verses are a powerful reminder of how we live out our day-to-day lives as Christians. Love is how we demonstrate our faith and our knowledge about what God has done for us by sending Jesus. We can't out-love God but we can do our best to display God's love to others as a means of witness and encouragement.

V. ANCIENT RHYTHM FORMATION EXERCISE

Spend time this week habitually practicing praise. What would it look like if you viewed every day as a worship experience? How would you plan your day differently, if at all? Remember Psalm 22. The Psalmist brought all of his problems into the larger context of worship with God's people and with praise. That's an ancient rhythm of the people of God. It's one we too should consider. St. Augustine once said, "A Christian should be an alleluia from head to toe." There's so much in that simple statement to mine. Consider how all suffering should intersect with our lives as we are constantly maintaining this humble and worshipful posture.

VI. LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS (SERMON)

“In the Name of Love”

Message by Rev Tammie Veach

May 2, 2021

1 John 4:7-21

GETTING STARTED

Who in your life has most demonstrated sacrificial love? How did that shape and impact your life?

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together read 1 John 4:7-21

1. Verses 7-8 give us 3 reasons to love. Find them and discuss how this impacts our daily lives, both in what we give to others and what we receive from God.
2. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a. How do these verses shape the way we see the character of God? What do they tell us about how we ought to behave toward others?
3. How did God demonstrate His love for us according to verses 9-10?
4. Why is the statement “All you need is love” inadequate? What is the role of knowledge? Read verses 9, 10, 15, and 16 for more insight.

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

5. Look again at the description of love given in 1 Cor. 13:4-8a, chose one quality from the list that you would like to improve upon to enhance your love toward others. Think of practical steps to make that happen.

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS