

God's Relentless Pursuit
By Katie Hambrick
Fifth Sunday of Lent

Have you ever just wanted things to work the way they were supposed to? Like when your wifi goes down in the middle of a zoom meeting? Or maybe, after you finally get your credit card paid off, your car has to go in the shop again? Maybe you go through the drive through after a long day's work and you don't realize they have gotten your order wrong until you are home?

What about people? Do you ever just wish that people would behave and act the way YOU think they are supposed to? Maybe your teenage child dresses in a way that you do not like? Maybe you think your son should be raising his kids differently? Maybe your parents have not been on lock down during COVID like you would like? Or, maybe your sister followed your advice, but the outcome was not what you thought it would be?

See, I have always been slightly a control freak. I like for things to be the way I want them to be. I liked my routine. It gives me a sense of control.

On Saturdays growing up, I had two unique routines. I got to eat Lucky Charms and watch cartoons OR I went with my mother to her job. My mother is a professor, and when she was starting her career she had to teach Saturday classes. When I went with her to work, my treat for behaving well was a trip to mcdonalds. There is almost nothing I wouldn't do for a good french fry back then or not.

This particular Saturday though, my dad did not have to work. This was rare as y'all know he has a high stakes job. So he told my mom that he would watch me. And a side note that needs to be said is that whenever he tells this story, he truly thought this was going well and we were bonding.

Lucky charms story....

I think sometimes we truly just want other humans to behave the way we think they ought to behave. When the truth is that, that's just not how humans or the world works. And how miserable would it be if the world was that way? If everyone in the world thought and acted like me, it would be a very boring world. We would all love pimento cheese and spend our nights watching Fixer Upper. There would be no diversity.

But that does not make it any less frustrating when people do not "behave" in the way you think they should. When I read today's text in Jeremiah, my first reaction is God is annoyed that the Israelites are not behaving the way they should. And on the other hand, A lot of Christians like to try and read into this text about the coming of Jesus, but I am not sure that is an accurate reading. When I re-read this scripture, I realize that this is not the tale of an angry God. This is the story of a loving God. God is trying to reestablish the

covenant that was broken between God and the people of Israel.

The law was used as a way to establish a way of living with God and God's people, but the people had broken the law. People started to use the law as a method to assess who was holier than the other and to shame others, which is why the scripture for today mentions the teaching part- it wasn't about trying to teach about god, it was solely about people who were using the law as a weapon of judgement.

Then you had people who were not attempting to follow the law at all. Thus, they were not holding up their part of the covenant. Don't you think God must have been thinking, why won't you people just do what I have asked you to do? I have literally laid it all out for you in simple terms, yet here we are again? *pause*

But God doesn't do that...

Instead God says okay this isn't working, so we are going to try this again, and do it a little differently. This difference is that instead of giving you rules to follow on a stone tablet or a pillar of fire to lead you, I am going to write it on your hearts and you will know I am your God.

God is taking the external laws and turning them inward, thus aiming for internal transformation and reconciliation. God is wanting the people to be transformed from the inside out. God wants the people to look at themselves and deal with their brokenness. Because as Jesus said it is the sick who need a physician, not the healthy. The idea is that God wants all of us- the healthy parts and the broken parts- and God wants us to know that... and to know him.

pause

Glennon Doyle is a famous american author and she talks about this idea of knowing in her book Untamed. She starts by telling her reader that one day she was reading

Psalm 46:10, where it says “be still and know that I am God.” A verse she had read many times before, but it struck her differently this time. She said she started devoting 10 minutes daily to sit silently in a closet and try to know.

She said that in the beginning she was getting frustrated because she felt like she wasn't hearing anything and definitely did not know, but she kept trying. She said eventually she realized the more and more time she spent in that closet the deeper and deeper she was able to go within herself.

The more she was able to stop doing- stop talking, stop searching, stop panicking, then she was able to start knowing. She says the knowing is deep within our souls and bones. She says the knowing feels like warm liquid gold filling her veins and solidifying just enough to make her feel steady and certain. She goes on to say that knowing is God's living presence inside of her and when she recognizes God's

presence and guidance deep within herself that God celebrates with the warm liquid gold feeling that she describes.

Beloved, I think Glennon does an excellent job of explaining what Jeremiah is talking about when he reports that God is going to write the law on our hearts, and we will know who God is. Christians call this knowing the Holy Spirit, Sophia in the greek, the holy wisdom. It is the holy divine spark within each of us. It is God's presence all around us- in the extraordinary and the ordinary.

This is what gives me great comfort as a human, because it is an assurance of God's relentless pursuit of a relationship with us, but on the flip side of the coin, it is also something of great distress. Because see beloved, I have gone through phases of questioning God and my faith. I have gone through questioning who God is- I mean I was raised in a denomination where I was told I was here to only be

someone's wife and then I felt the nudge from my knowing to be a pastor- of course I went through doubt and questioning.

I am not sure any of us can truly say that we never have any doubt. That we have had a perfect life of never questioning God. Part of the reason for that is that doubting and questioning is a part of faith. It is a part of who we are to our core as humans, and Christians, without questions how would we ever mature in faith... Most of the time when Jesus was asked a question, he answered with a question. *pause*

Faith is about trust. Not having all of the answers. Faith is about listening to the knowing even when we are unsure.

Faith is trusting the divine process. Faith is being uncomfortable that we cannot always have logical answers to explain who God is or why God does the things he does. Faith is trusting the law written on our heart.

Faith is also knowing that even when you cannot feel God or get to your knowing, that God is still right there. That

God is relentlessly pursuing you. And that nothing you can say or do will change that. You can't say anything that will make God love you more or make God love you less. There is no deed that you can do that will make God love you more or make God love you less. Yes, faith requires work and pursuit from our end as well. No relationship is a one way street.

And that is the good news in this- the good news is God's endless and relentless pursuit of you. God wants a relationship with you that much. Praise the Lord that he does not give up on us. Praise the Lord for his undeserving grace and his relentless love. And praise the Lord that no matter what, he is with us...

that his love and presence is with us...

that all we have to do is be still and know, even in the doubt he is with us.

God is with us. Amen.