

Sermon

Ride Against the Tide

Pastor Lisa Giacomazza

Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

February 13, 2021

Our Psalm today, the very first Psalm, in a book filled with how we are to live and relate to God, starts with a picture. An extremely important, simple picture, of how God wants us to live. It's not 10 tablets, it's not a list of rules and regulations, it's not a do's and don'ts...you probably passed at least 25-30 of them on the way here this morning. For me, I passed literally hundreds...and each one, each unique beautiful one has something to teach us about life...each one has a story to tell us. Some are tall and grand, others are short and stout like me – but all are perfectly made doing exactly what God has made them to do...provide shelter for animals, food for us, food for birds, shade from the sun and shelter from the rain. They drink water from the ground so it doesn't become too wet unable to grow food. They can create barriers to prevent landslides, borders and can even influence weather...a tree. Yes, just a tree. Our psalmist says..."Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked or take the path that sinners tread...they are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper."

Do not follow the advice of the wicked...you know, when I was young, I would study intimately pictures of very pretty girls in magazines and do my make up over and over again so I could try and look like them. I would mimic their clothing style and try to be current and contemporary. I wore leggings and baggy shirts with belts like Madonna – I wanted to be hip like her – cool. That's when I

started cutting my hair short – it started with Dorothy Hamil and evolved into something a little more edgy. I spent a lot of time thinking about my appearance as did most of my contemporaries. And none of us felt good about it. Because what we didn't understand is that the pictures that we wanted to look like were lies – no one, not even the girl in the magazine, really looks like that – it is achieved with film correction, lighting and professional make up artists. But it led me to feel unworthy – and plain old not good enough. There are even times today when I slip back into that thinking. I was clearly idol worshiping – all the wrong things...and I was like chaff that the wind drives away. I had no confidence, I had no real belief in myself, no real love for myself. And certainly did not turn to God in praise and thanksgiving for the healthy body that he had given me.

As simple and straight forward as Psalm 1 is, it is a perfect prerequisite for understanding the entire book of Psalms...it reflects the highs and lows of life and how we through God respond to that. Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked...today's world we are bombarded with information...everywhere, all the time. Is it from a reliable source? I don't know...how do we know? We have been desensitized immensely by live television – we see in real time people's lives devastated by tornadoes, hurricanes, fires, tsunamis....if you search on your phone right now you can watch people's homes and their lives be blown or washed away. And how about community violence? A school shooting in Buffalo...these threats take their toll – it shakes the foundation of our lives. And if we look to these sources for truth, for guidance, for acceptance, for inspiration – we may be left empty much of the time. It is an onslaught day in and day out...but our psalm prepares us for that.

What our psalmist is telling us is that adhering to God's law is more than understanding the rules and obeying them – it is a daily immersion, purposefully grounded in our connection and relationship with God. It has roots, it has branches, it has times of bloom and times of brokenness, but it is always planted, like that tree, in strong healthy soil that nourishes us while the wind blows us around, while the rain pelts us, our roots are continually fed and rebloom is forever possible.

But we are also reminded there are always two paths. And we can be easily led down that path of idolatry – that world of each one for himself or herself. From the book, Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans are More Confident, Assertive and Entitled – and More Miserable – than Ever Before by Jean Twenge, “Narcissism and misery have increased in the Generation Me by 30 percent over the past 25 years.” When we come together as a people, rooted in this faith of ours, it allows us to be happy, grounded and present with God – a Creator who cares deeply for the created and wants us to be happy. But establishing that root of our tree – that deep connection – takes consistent spiritual effort...attending worship on a regular basis is a great start. Reading scripture, meditating upon those messages, prayer, and service – these are ways we keep our selves nourished.

Our Gospel from Luke is The Great Sermon on the Plain...people are gathered to hear this charismatic Jesus – the one they have heard about – the one who brings healing to those who are ill...so many in the crowd are weak and ill...and yet, Jesus's teaching on this day is not for those gathered – not for society in general – but today, he is preaching to the disciples. Providing them with his expectations – their code of ethics and values. And in the very same way, it is

speaking to us, we who follow Christ. Blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who weep, people who are hated, excluded, defamed...not exactly a live by the law and you'll receive great blessings is it. Can we look upon those who live in poverty or perhaps you yourself do now or have in your lifetime – do they look blessed? Do they feel blessed? And woe to you who are rich, woe to you who are full now, woe to you when all speak well of you...so all that time I spent on worrying about my appearance – woe to that me.

This great sermon sets out for the Christian an ethic of Christian discipleship that is contrary to the way of the world. All the things we see on Social Media, on TV – it is filling our minds and our hearts with ideas and ideals that are contrary to the teachings of Christ. It's a distraction away from our nurturing soil – our roots planted in the ground. It makes our branches weak, dry and brittle. As a tree that loses its leaves – we lose our confidence, our strength to carry on. We become anxious and nervous and feel unworthy and unlovable at times. To take this message today seriously, to believe the beatitudes spoken is to go against the grain of the world, to ride against the tide. What's really important isn't how we look, or how many possessions we have or money in the bank – what's important is that we spend enough quality time with the Word, our scriptures – in meditation and prayer – in praise and worship – A great crowd of Jesus' disciples and a great multitude of people came to hear him. Power came out from him. The power of God among the peoples of God. What they heard and what they saw is what is and will always be heard and seen when God's word is truly unleashed and God's work is truly done – the strengthening of our mighty collective tree, together in community with one another and with God

– an unstoppable force in our own lives and in the life of our ministry. So come with me and let's ride against the tide.

Amen