

The Sermon - In 10 Sentences Or Less

Perfectly Imperfect Faith 6 - Jephthah's Faith:



1. We ended our six week foray into Hebrews 11 yesterday: by asking us to define New Testament faith by way of Old Testament examples, the author has shattered any notions we might have of a pristine or idealized spiritual life.
2. If the heroes of the faith can be so blatantly unheroic, maybe that means you and I can be unheroic heroes too?
3. Yesterday we considered Jephthah, mentioned in Hebrews 11.32-34, whose story is told in Judges 10.6 - 12.7.
4. He was an outcast at an early age and leader of a band of outlaws, who then God used to rescue Gilead from the Ammonites.
5. He promised Yahweh that if He granted victory, then Jephthah would offer a human sacrifice in His honor, something the Mosaic Law decried (Judges 11.29-40; Deut. 12.31).
6. The first lesson about faith that we can learn from Jephthah's story is - sometimes, the first act of faith is healing.
7. If we wonder why God isn't using us to impact others more or why our spiritual life seems mundane, we might need to ask - what hurts am I holding onto, ignoring, or unwilling to address.
8. As we see in Jephthah when he blames all of Gilead for his family's mistreatment of him, a sure sign that you have unresolved, hindering past wounds is that they've spread and become exaggerated (Judges 11.7).
9. The second lesson about faith that we find in Jephthah is that outside cultural forces often distort our understanding of who God is; this is how he ended up offering a human sacrifice to the God of Israel.
10. We too would be wise to pay attention to how our own culture warps or skews how we understand God and His character.

Quotes to Remember

"Getting over a painful experience is much like crossing monkey bars. You have to let go at some point in order to move forward." (C.S. Lewis)

"You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do." (Anne Lamott)

"Theology is the study of God and God's ways. For all we know, dung beetles may study us and our ways and call it humanology. If so, we would probably be more touched and amused than irritated. One hopes that God feels likewise." (Frederick Buechner)

A Prayer for the Week

Praying Hebrews 11 (Rev. Richard Einerson – The United Church of Christ):

O holy One, we thank You that we stand in a long line of believers who have been faithful through the ages. You have always led Your people through trial, hardship, and their own failure, and set before them hope for today and a better tomorrow. Help and strengthen us as we seek to be as faithful as our forebears.

As Jesus taught us, give to us a faith like a mustard seed, which has small beginnings but which yields large results. Give to us a faith to move the mountains of difficulty which come to each of us. And give to us a faith which has a vision of Your new world in which peace and love characterize the relationships between neighbors, races, classes, and all nations.

God, may we walk with You through the ebb and flow of our years, and the victories and defeats to come, till You call us home to Your eternal Kingdom, amen.