

Pentecost Sunday School Lessons

Sermon Series: "Psalms of the Spirit"

Date: July 5th

Topic: Discernment

Open with prayer

Before reading...

How do you go about making major decisions?

Main Scripture: Psalm 37:1-11

(Reading is attached)

Opening Questions:

- What is the main point of this Psalm?
- What is so tempting about the "way of the wicked"?
- Why do we not want to be patient or meek?

Making discerned decisions:

Throughout scripture (and in our daily lives) some of the biggest mistakes and missteps occur when there is not proper discernment. Over and over again, there are Biblical stories speaking about a rush to judgment or impatiently making a major life changing decision: Abram and Hagar, Jacob and Esau, Moses leaving Egypt, David and Bathsheba, the splitting of Israel and Judah, and many more. The recurring theme reminds the reader that to make good decisions is to seek God's guidance. When things are rushed, forced, or reactionary, the Holy Spirit does not have time to move and cannot affect change within our hearts. For the people of God to follow in the ways of the Holy Spirit, actions must be carefully discerned and God's guidance sought.

Scripture commentary:

A common theme in Psalms is one of "the wicked" versus "the righteous". This takes many forms, but most often is presented in the context of "the wicked do thus..." and "the righteous do otherwise..." For the writer of Psalm 37, this tension is marked by the long term promise of God against the short term gain of daily life. In practical terms for the people of Israel and Judah, this is in the continued promise of "the land" promised to Abraham and continued through to the people. The Psalmist sees the impatience and willingness to go against God because the people think things are not happening fast enough. The temptations about impatience are numerous: anger, wrath, violence, resentment, vengeance, and envy, all seeking to "force God's hand". However, the Psalmist reminds the reader that for the things of God to come to pass, the people of God must allow the Spirit to move and work. While the Psalm is very long, verse 11 sums up the Psalmist's point: those who are humble and trust in God's prosperity will inherit the blessings of God. It is no longer a question of "wicked" or "righteous", but is a statement about trusting in God's guidance and discernment over that of human means.

- Why is it so difficult to "wait" on the promises of God?

- How is the interpretation of “wicked” different in this Psalm than what we normally attribute to the word wicked?
- According to the Psalmist, what is the abundant prosperity of God?

Reflection:

Think back about the last major life decision you made: how did you go about making it? What questions did you ask? How did you discern the path that was best for you? Did you make the best choice? Making decisions is hard work. Research shows that numerous medical conditions occur around major life moments and decisions. It is stressful and tiring. We want things to be simple and clear cut, but more often than not things are complicated and deeply nuanced. In churches we generally function in one of two ways: we either avoid making the major decisions out of fear or we only react and never discern. The Holy Spirit will lead if we take the time to discern its vision. While the full picture of God’s kingdom is never fully clear, we can follow God and learn from the Holy Spirit. Discerning the leading of God is never something to take half-heartedly. We must open up, be patient, and let God speak in new ways.

- When has making decisions been the most difficult for you?
- Have you ever participated in an intentional process to seek God’s guidance? What was the outcome?
- When have been reluctant to seek God’s guidance in decision making? Why?

Closing:

Consider this question again:

How do you go about making major decisions?

Close with prayer.

Psalm 37

¹Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers,

²for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb.

³Trust in the LORD, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.

⁴Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

⁵Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.

⁶He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

⁷Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices.

⁸Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret—it leads only to evil.

⁹For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

¹⁰Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.

¹¹But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.