

5 Smooth Stones

As you have been unable to participate in our Lenten Study, I'm bringing the study to you. As I struggled with a scripture to wrap this message around, I landed on the story of David and Goliath

In our Lenten study we talk about 5 means of grace and I've likened them to the 5 smooth stones that David picked up from the brook as he went forth to slay Goliath. These 5 are: prayer, searching the scriptures, Lord's supper, fasting, and Christian conferencing

If you are like me, we've learned to equate the term sin with our actions, our behaviors, the do's and don'ts of life.. I want to share another way of thinking about sin: Sin is about believing falsely about our self. Sin is not realizing who we are as defined by God, who and what God says we are. Throughout our lives we have been defined by others, maybe our abilities, maybe by our actions, a lot of these were when we were children, unable to do anything but download those definitions and believe them. I like to call them the "I am not's".

Through different situations and experiences, the message is I'm not good enough, not loveable, not smart enough, not pretty enough, not successful enough, not rich enough, and the list goes on and on. We accept these as truth and we carry these "truths" with us throughout our life. Bottom line: we just are not enough, period.

As we've been growing and maturing in our ongoing journey with God and at the age most of us are, we have overcome some of these definitions. I know if we look deep within our hearts and souls, we'll find some still lurking in our dark places. Mine show up regularly.

We all have a dark side, that's our humanness that God has graced us with. The problem arises when the dark side dominates our lives.

Lent is a time that we intentionally open our hearts and minds to God and ask for HELP to be the people God has created u to be.

In our scripture, David was a young, small boy. Do you ever feel weak and defenseless against the struggles that beset all of us in this life? Have these “I am not’s” felt like giants? We can learn from David; he became proficient with his slingshot in the quiet, mundane days when he spent time with the Lord in his shepherding days. He worshiped while he worked, practicing his aim and protecting his flock.

We, too, are practicing and becoming proficient at something, whether it's kindness or bitterness, faithfulness or fear. I think you get the picture.

We are going to talk about these 5 smooth stones that symbolize the means God has given us of fighting against “these giants”. 2 Corinthians 10:4 talks about these giants like this: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

First is PRAYER. The Christian faith is all about a relationship of love, trust, and vulnerability, on God’s part and on ours. Prayer is the essence of that relationship. It is the very breath of God, breathing life into us, opening us up to who God is, to who we are, and to this world that God loves. This breath of God brings life, healing, renewal, comfort, challenge, and direction. Just as breathing is necessary for life in our physical bodies, prayer is necessary for spiritual life. It is the foundation to this relationship we have been invited into.

2nd is SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES: The goal in searching the Scriptures is to increasingly share the love and grace of God with our neighbors because God’s word has become alive in us. They shared an illustration about reading the bible with the 4 scopes:

First is a Telescope, you look long ago and far away, what was going on when this text was written; 2nd was the Periscope where you look around to see what was before and then after the text; 3rd was a microscope in which you look closely at a word or concept and really drilled down on it, and the 4th was a Stethoscope where the bible reads you, where do you find yourself in the text and what is God saying to you.

3rd is The Lord's Supper: In his beautiful meditation Life of the Beloved, Henri Nouwen draws from the metaphor of the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper to describe four movements in the Christian life. He says: We are taken, blessed, broken, and given. We are gathered into community, something like a multigrain loaf of bread. God kneads us into one loaf and then blesses us, forgiving us of our sins and setting us on a path of healing and reconciliation. At the benediction, God "breaks" the loaf of our community into many pieces and sends us forth to embody Jesus in the world. As communities of faith, we become the Communion bread that God gives to the world.

4th is Fasting: Despite all the ways we normally behave as if we are in control, we are not. Life is fragile, not to be taken for granted. Fasting is the primary spiritual discipline that brings us back to our vulnerability. Fasting returns us to our deep dependence upon God. This is a discipline that can get us in touch with our hurting neighbors.

5th is Christian Conferencing which talks about the need for community meeting together in smaller more intimate groups to support and learn from one another. The three essential elements of small group that foster genuine discipleship are:

- 1- The group is gathered in the name of Jesus, as described in regards to Matthew 18:20. (where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst)
- 2- The practices of the group foster deep spiritual friendships that lead to growth in personal and corporate holiness and genuine community.

3- The group is engaged in missional ministry beyond itself.

When we find our self coming up against the giants that would distract us from our journey, speaking lies to define us in a given situation, or we read in 2 Corinthians 2 addressing the need to pull down strong holds that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, we have the 5 smooth stones that God has provided to be our protection in time of trouble. As with David, he only needed one stone. We, too, may only need one stone but it might be a different one of the 5 in any given situation. Practice all of them to be ready and confident and be able to say as David did: “for the battle is the Lord’s and He will give you into our hands!!

Amen