

Monday March 10, 2025

Proverbs 3:5&6

“Trust in the Lord...”

Mark Harmon played Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs on NCIS for 18 years. Gibbs was known for his many rules. Some of my favorites are number four--if you have a secret, it is best to keep it to yourself, number eight--Never take anything for granted, and number 40—If it seems someone is out to get you, they are. Jesus understood number 40 well. While he was out in the wilderness being tempted by Satan. Jesus knew that the temptations being offered to him were not the way. It is not always easy for us to discern the best choices or ways forward on our own. It's important for us to determine where we are going to place our trust in our everyday lives. As much as I love Agent Gibbs' rules, I need more.

When I was a little girl, my grandmother used to wake up very early in the morning to drink her coffee. I think she helped fuel my morning ritual. She would make me a warm cup of milk, with a lot of chocolate, and a small amount of coffee. I was drinking café mochas before I knew what they were. My grandmother used to share her rules of life with me in those early morning hours. One of the things she said all the time was, “Trust in the Lord, don't trust in your own understanding, trust in God, and he will make your paths straight.” Years later, when I heard someone share this verse, I thought they were quoting my grandmother. I didn't know I was listening to scripture in those early morning hours.

The verse from proverbs was a guide for my grandmother just as Gibbs' rules were guides for him. There is a practice, called rule of life, that traces to the 4th Century monastic period and is often attributed to St. Benedict. The Rule of Life for the Monks helped them have a way of sharing life together in the Monastery. Rules of Life can also be ways of living that strengthen our daily walk with God. Some of my rules are: sitting in quiet at least ten minutes a day, regular prayer, spending time with a spiritual director, spending time in nature, and engaging in friendships with those who commit to hold me accountable in my life. Even with a rule of life, we will lose our way from time to time, but the good news is God is always ready to receive us back with open arms.

For your reflection:

1. Is it easy or hard for you to place your trust in God? What scriptures, songs, or hymns remind you of the importance of this?
2. If you were to create for yourself a rule of life, what are some of the commitments that you would list?
3. Is there someone you can share a conversation about Rules of life with this week?

Prayer:

Holy God,

When people disappoint us and institutions fail us, help us to remember that we can always trust in you. Order our lives O God, that we might be more in step with the way that leads to life, not just for us, but for ALL.

Amen

Tuesday March 11, 2025

Ephesians 6:13-17

“Therefore, put on the full armor of God...”

One of the things I learned early on when I moved to Merritt Island is that the mosquitos are ravenous. I had a bottle of bug spray, I knew I had it, but I could not figure out where it was. I should have just bought another one, but instead I thought I could hold out till I found it. That was not the best decision I have ever made. As you can imagine, I was covered with bites within the first couple of weeks. Now, I have bottles stationed everywhere I might need them because I know if I do not “put on the full armor of bug spray,” the mosquitos are going to get me.

Our spiritual lives are no different. We must prepare ourselves by, “putting on the armor of God.” During this Lenten season, each of us will struggle with life, with people, with our commitments. There is no way to escape the struggles of life, but dressing ourselves in the morning, helps us to stand in the strength of the love of God. I have a lap blanket/quilt that was made for me, I’m sure it was. It was for sale at a silent auction I attended. No one purchased it, but the woman who made it saw me running my fingers over it. After the even concluded, she gave me the quilt. I tried to pay for it, but she wouldn’t let me. I sit with it in the mornings when I pray. It reminds me of the goodness of God’s creation.

I wish our preparation were as easy as spraying down to prevent a mosquito bite. We have to put in the time with God, to be sure that we are living in God’s word, allowing ourselves to be formed and shaped by the love of God, and allowing our imagination to be alight with the Kingdom of God realities. I remember listening to a sermon preached by one of the greats. Afterwards, I asked him how long it took him to write it. His answer was, “a lifetime.” Sometimes we prepare our whole lives for one moment. Suit up in the ways that bring you strength.

For your reflection:

1. Search the scriptures for a verse that brings you strength. Challenge yourself to memorize this verse.
2. What is a song that inspires you in your walk with God. Listen to it on repeat today.
3. Reflect on people in your life or in history that reflect for your marks of discipleship. In what ways do they demonstrate for you evidence of the armor of God?

Prayer:

God of us all,

As we continue on our journey throughout these forty days of Lent, strengthen us in our walk. Help us to grow more and more into your likeness. Remind us that we were created for community with you and all the others we share this earth with.

Amen

Wednesday March 12, 2025

Luke 6:12

“And all night he prayed to God...”

Mother Teresa shared that prayer is “putting oneself in the hands of God.” In our minds we know there is no better place to be than in the hands of God, but we can be very stubborn in our will. Last week I visited one of our members in the hospital. Before I could get two words out, he grabbed my hand and started praying for me. I wanted to stop him and say, “hey I am here for you,” but somehow, I knew this would be a waste of my breath. So, I received the gift of his prayer over me. My spirit was stilled, and I felt held in perfect love.

Jesus spent good time in prayer and he often times goes to a marked place like a mountain, a garden, or the wilderness. His prayer was not a quick one. He had a big decision to make, so he lingered in prayer. We can pray anywhere, but there are times when we benefit from a more intentional moment with God. I was brought to tears a couple Sundays ago when one of our members was crouched low at the kneeling rail in prayer. That space was a refuge for her.

I was invited by Patti, our preschool director, to teach the kids about Ash Wednesday. I spoke to them about the ashes. I told them if they saw someone with ashes to say, “I will pray for you.” We practiced on Miss Shiela who had ashes on and they all said, “I’ll pray for you.” When I was leaving chapel, one of the little one’s said to Gracie, “I’ll pray for you Gracie.” It means something to know others are praying for you, It means something to know you are being prayed for.

For your reflection:

1. Is there an important decision that you have been putting off that you might need to circle in prayer?
2. Is there someone you need to pray over that you haven’t seen for a while, or you are worried about? Spend some time scanning people in your life through your mind’s eye and see who the Spirit draws to the surface.
3. Is there someone that you trust that you can ask to pray for you?

Prayer:

Spirit of the Living God,

Fall afresh on us. You are the God who has worked throughout the course of human history. You are our anchor, our shelter, and our guide. We give thanks for all the ways you show up over and over again for us. Work within our lives to knit us closer in our being to you. Still us in our worries, strengthen us in our commitments, bind us in our community, and bless us with a powerful sense of your presence throughout these forty days.

Amen

Thursday March 13, 2025

Proverbs 18:10

“The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.”

One of the ministries of my heart is supporting educational movements around the world. Years ago, I was a part of a group of young people that were gathered at the United Nations for a conference. It was an amazing opportunity. There were people from Africa, Korea, China, Nicaragua, all over. We were put into groups to think through how we would address certain global issues like HIV AIDS, climate change, Global Health, Water Scarcity, and others. I wanted to work on HIV AIDS, but I was put in the group that worked on education. One of the members was from Congo. I had not been to Africa yet, but it was already marked on my heart as a place to visit. The guy from the Congo had a very clear disdain for Americans and was not as excited to be with me in a group as I was with him.

I learned a lot during that conference. I learned about the lives and experiences of people on the other end of the world from me. I also learned that education was not as accessible in other places as it is here. Much later in my life, I was able to attend seminary at Duke Divinity School, where the classrooms all but spin on a dime with all the technology. I have visited seminaries all over the world. One in Liberia was located on a decimated piece of property where Charles Taylor poisoned the water supply, kicked the electrical grid offline, and destroyed the buildings. They carried on with their learning in buildings that would have been condemned in our country because they had no other option.

Our prayers are very different when we are in a place of deep need in our lives. My prayers for the world have been greatly impacted by my exposure to people in places with food insecurity, water shortages, and limited access to education. God is our fortress. God is the place we are to go to with our deepest needs. Yet, what I have learned throughout my years of ministry is that we are not always in touch with our great need of God. So often, we rely on our own strength and because of this we are not always as aware of the full power of God available to us. We are not alone, God is with us.

For your reflection:

1. How do the words from proverbs about God being our fortress impact you in your prayer life? What words of prayer does this image provoke for you?
2. Consider people in your life and around the world, who do you pray God’s protection over?
3. What is an area of your life that you need to release more fully to God?

O God, our fortress, and our strength,
You hold us with such love and protection. Even when we live thinking we can solve our own problems and take care of ourselves, you wait with us through every encounter in our lives. Thank you for your steadfast love. Help us to release to you more and more of the areas of our lives, so that we might truly know strength of your commitment to us.

Amen

Friday March 14, 2025

2 Corinthians 5:17

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come.”

There is a cute video going around right now with a little girl attempting to buckle her seat belt. When her Dad asks if she needs some help, she responds, “No, no thank you, you worry about yourself.” This is a minimized version of what the season of Lent is all about. We aren’t literally supposed to be worrying about no one else, but we are supposed to be recognizing that God still has some work to do within each of us. We are meant to be leaning into that work. It’s not a time for us to be fixing others. It’s a time for us to be worrying about ourselves and the places we need to grow.

I had the opportunity to attend the Michael Jackson show at the Phillips Center in Orlando this past weekend. It was a very moving performance. One of the lines of his famous song, the man in the mirror really spoke to me, “I’m starting with the man in the mirror, I’m asking him to change his ways. And no message could have been any clearer. If you want to make the world a better place, take a look at yourself and make a change.” 2 Corinthians tells us that, “If we are in Christ, new creation has come.” Jesus brings change into our lives. Lent is a time when we draw close to Jesus as faithful disciples and in the drawing close, we will be changed ourselves.

One of my worship leaders at another church had never participated in a Lenten journey before. I remember watching her throughout the journey that year and what I noticed in her was not a person who looked perfect, but a person more full of Joy. When I asked her about her journey, she shared with me that she had never felt so close to Jesus in all her life. The attention she put towards her prayer life, her fasting, and her giving changed her in ways that were evident by the glow on her face. Sometimes our greatest witness to the world is our faithfulness to our own journey. People are always watching the spirit with which we live our lives.

For your reflection:

1. Draw to mind someone whose witness has made a difference in how you live your life.
2. How do you recognize transformation in yourself from your walk with Jesus?
3. Is there anyone you need to thank for their support along your journey?

Prayer:

God of the new creation,
Transform me into the best version of me I can be. Humble me throughout these forty days of lent, that I might be able to more faithfully walk with you on the mountain tops, in the valleys, and in the everyday moments in between. Bring about your change in me, that I might better reflect you.

Amen

Saturday March 15, 2025

Micah 6:8

“He has shown you O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”

Our actions are aligned with our inner world. The more time we spend in prayer for ourselves and the world around us, the more aware we are of God’s transformative work in the world around us. The more reflective we are about how our lives align with God’s hopes for the world, the more ready we will be when God calls us to stand in a moment. One of the many things that some of the great leaders of the world have in common is that they all rise early. They do not rise early in busy-ness. They rise early to sit in the quiet to pray and center themselves for the great challenges that are ahead of them in their day.

Rev. Dr. Samuel Wells is a theologian who has written many books, one being, *Improvisation—The Drama of Christian Ethics*. He reminds us that God is at the center of the drama not us. If we were at the center, we would all be in great trouble. We are inspired with moments of courage and truth, when we keep God at the center of all. We are only actors in God’s great drama. We have to be on the ready, like actors in an improv performance. If we track Peter in the scriptures, there is nothing that alerts us that he had what it took in his beginnings to be named the cornerstone of the faith. He was inspired through his commitment with the same Holy Spirit that inspires many of us today. We will all be called to act. Belief is meant to be put into action.

Part of my work, while I lived in SA, was to organize campus ministry on campuses. They did not have Wesley foundations like we do in the US. The school fees had increased by 10% and the students were rioting on campuses. One day security was posturing a rifle at this young student on one of the campuses. Without thinking, I stood in front of the student and chastised the guard. I had my clergy collar on. The guard stood down, the student left, and I sat for a minute overwhelmed by a rush of adrenaline. The guard sat with me and began to tell me his story of growing up as a child soldier in a war-torn country. I was covered in goose bumps, sure the Holy Spirit was at work. I could feel it. God was using me as an emissary for the very one, who was instigating the trouble. God readies us.

For your reflection:

1. How might you grow in your ability to act out what you believe?
2. What does God’s justice or hopes for the world look like in your mind’s eye?
3. What breaks your heart for the world, in the way you believe God’s heart breaks for the world today? Put that to prayer today and throughout these forty days. Listen for the ways God might call you to act.

Prayer:

Holy God,
Remind us that every good work we do is not about us, but about you. We are actors in your great Drama of transforming this world. May your Kingdom of Heaven be born all around us in this world. Use us in whatever way we can be helpful in the beautiful thing you are doing.

Amen

Sunday March 16, 2025

Spend some time in the morning preparing for worship. Re-read our gracevine newsletter, so that you have the scripture before you. Pray over people in our congregation. Consider sending a text to someone with this message: Can't wait to see you in worship today. #Lent2025 #WeAreNotAlone. Keep these questions before you as you reflect on this week's sermon.

1. What does the scripture or sermon teach you about God?
2. What does the scripture or sermon teach you about the relationship between God and Humanity?
3. What does the scripture or sermon teach you about the relationship between God, Humanity, and creation?

A poem from me to you:

God's Love

God's Love is the music
We hear playing in
the moments when
things off kilter in the
world are being
made right.

God's love is the music
We hear playing in
the moments when
we are gifted power
to stand strong
against a wrong

God's love is the music
We hear playing in
the moments when
a still small voice
reminds us of how
much we are loved.

God's love is the music
We hear playing in
The moments we are
Reminded of how
Loved all the
Others in the world
Are too

God's love is the music

Amen