

Sermon: Lead Me Lord - Opening Scripture Psalm 25: 1-10

As we walk with the Lord, how do we discern his guidance? Today with so many factors swirling around us, I hope we can settle our hearts with these words of confidence. We start with Psalm 25.

Psalm 25 gives four ways

1, we ask God! v. 1 *I lift up my soul, I trust in You O my God.* v.4 *show me your ways, teach me your paths,* v.5 *guide me in your truth and teach me for you are God and my Savior and my hope is in you all day long.*

2. We claim God's character: V. 6 *Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love – remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways.* Remember me according to your love for you are good. Even in Moses' response to God's leading the Israelites through the sea, he credits it all to God's character: *Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you – majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? You stretched out your right hand and the earth swallowed them. In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling...The Lord will reign forever and ever.*(Exod. 13:11-13.)

3. We acknowledge our total dependence on the Lord: v. 9 *You promise to guide the humble in what is right and I choose to follow you, Lord. IAs it says in Prov. 3 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and He will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and shun evil.* We know we cannot make wise choices on our own. We know we cannot determine wise outcomes on our own. So we choose NOT to lean on our own understanding, but acknowledge God in all our ways.

However, as familiar as all these verses and precepts are, they are not the natural way we think NOR the way our culture has taught us. Self-reliance, human solution-making is the go-to approach in America. So this is counter-cultural. No question. Not easy. But it is the godly, right response the Lord wants from His people. In many parts of the world where another religion is dominant, Christians are called Jesus followers—This means we are actually committed to follow Christ. We are committed to staying close to Him: Abide in me, Jesus said. The Passion translation renders John 15:4-8 this way::

So you must remain in life-union with me,^[d] for I remain in life-union with you. For as a branch severed from the vine will not bear fruit, so your life will be fruitless unless you live your life intimately joined to mine. ⁵ “I am the sprouting vine and you're my branches.^[e] As you live in union with me as your source, fruitfulness will stream from within you—but when you live separated from me you are powerless. ⁶ If a person is separated from me, he is discarded; such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire to be burned. ⁷ But if you live in life-union with me and if my words^[f] live powerfully^[g] within you—then you can ask whatever you desire and it will be done. ⁸ When your lives bear abundant fruit, you demonstrate that you are my mature disciples who glorify my Father! [Passion Translation](#)

So #3 is our part of the equation. God promises to lead. His character is good and loving and nurturing. But He expects our obedience and choice to live with Jesus as Lord. Lord of all. Lord of my thoughts and deeds and hopes and direction. Lord of the universe and the church. The Lord of history who has a plan in which we have a part. And we can understand our part when His words abide in us. We study the scriptures. We memorize the scriptures, we ask questions of the scriptures and seek to understand their message for our lives and our churches and this time in history. As the Passion Translation says: *if my words^[f] live powerfully^[g] within you. Live powerfully* could be translated are dynamic, alive, coming to mind by the Spirit.

4. And that relates to #4 – **We go to the Scriptures to hear a word from God.** Often, the Spirit brings Bible stories to mind that will keep us on His path. I want to share a story from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament that have been formative in our leading from God this winter. First, the story of God’s leading the Israelites out of Egypt before they crossed the Red Sea.

Leading by zigs and zags

I appreciated from one pastor’s sermon: “Following God is a matter of zigs and zags. It is not a matter of going directly from point A to point B.” He notes several lessons in the early days when Israel left Egypt:

First, the coffin.. We read in verse 19 that as they went up out of Egypt, "Moses took the bones of Joseph with them." That is because four hundred years earlier when he died, Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. Joseph had said to them on his deathbed "God's going to come to our people. This is not our home. God's going to take us out of Egypt. He's going to take us back to the land of promise. He's going to put us where our ancestors are. And when he takes you, don't leave me here in Egypt. Swear to me that you will take my bones with you." I want to be buried in Canaan with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." So,. And as they left Egypt, they carried the coffin of Joseph, and as they head out southward toward the Red Sea the coffin leads the way. This became God’s visible reminder of their ultimate destination. I can just hear some little kid. He turns to his mother and says, "Why are those men carrying that box?"

"Well, honey, it's not a box. It's a coffin."

"What's a coffin?"

"Well, it has the bones of a dead man in it."

"Oh, gross. Why are we taking it with us?"

"Well, honey, we're taking it to Canaan."

"We're not headed to Canaan."

"Yes we are. Yes we are. That coffin is going to Canaan."

So every day as they started the march, no matter where the zigs or the zags went, there was a continual reminder that God was taking them to point B. That coffin is going to Canaan. (The straightest route is a zig zag.)

So what is the equivalent of a coffin for you to help you remember your destination? What is God’s reminder of his good intention? It could be in something someone says, or a song or a Bible verse that comes. It could be a person who becomes that reminder of His plans to give you and future and a hope. For us it has been Bruce and Becky and all the work they are going through to try to find a house with us so we have a covering at this last part of our journey and their care and protection.

Second, God led with tangible evidence of His presence. Look at verse 21: "*By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light; so that they could travel.*" They would know the way. They would be able to follow their God by day or by night because he was visibly, tangibly present to them. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night never left its place in front of the people. That cloud was their God guiding them. The Scripture says that when the cloud moved, they said, "roll up the sleeping bags, roll up the tents. We're on our way." And they moved farther into the desert. Their God was guiding them by day or by night.

God was not only guiding them, but they also sensed the presence of God protecting them. The Bible says that in a few days when Pharaoh decided he wanted to chase after them anyway and bring them back, as Israel saw the chariots coming and the soldiers and they looked at the other direction and there

was a sea that they could not pass, the cloud inserted itself between the chariots of Egypt and the people of Israel. The horses could not penetrate that dense opaqueness. And then all of a sudden the sea split open and Israel walked through. And when Israel got on dry land on the other side, the cloud lifted, the horses and chariots ran into the water and the sea covered them.. They saw their God protecting them. The Scripture says that that cloud also protected them when they got out into the heat of the desert, because that cloud inverted itself and became a shade canopy against the heat of the sun. In the midst of the zigs and the zags, that pillar was the presence of their God telling them which way to go, protecting them, and also speaking to them. Look for ways that God's presence will be revealed to you and give you confidence and hope.

However, #3, don't expect God to take a straight line and get you quickly and easily from point A to point B. God led the Israelites to Canaan on a zig zag route. This was true at the very beginning of their flight out of Egypt. Look at v. 17-18 in our Text (Exod.13). *When Pharaoh finally let the people go, God did not lead them along the main road that runs through Philistine territory, even though that was the shortest route to the Promised Land. God said, "If the people are faced with a battle, they might change their minds and return to Egypt."*¹⁸ *So God led them in a roundabout way through the wilderness toward the Red Sea.*^[a] That wasn't common sense, but it was the way that would teach the people to rely solely on the Lord and would reveal the great power of God as He pushed back the waters of the Red Sea so the Israelites could cross to safety from the pursuing Egyptians and then closed the Sea again when the Egyptians entered it in pursuit. Not one Egyptian survived. This object lesson demonstrated to all the surrounding nations the character and purposes of God. A lesson that the Israelites themselves learned in their deliverance. And God did this BY taking them on a zig zag route to Canaan. One of God's right turns. So don't immediately doubt God's leading or good purposes for you if you have to turn away from what you thought was intended.

Our application of the Old and New Testament Bible stories:

As we waited through the difficult negotiation with the buyers of our wheaton house, the Lord reminded me of the little book: **Red Sea Rules**. I looked it back up on my blog: marylousreviews@blogspot.com and the first rule was: "Realize that God means for you to be where you are... God had led the Israelites to the very cul-de-sac between hostile hills, to the edge of a sea too deep to be forded and too wide to be crossed...If you find yourself in a difficult spot, remember: you are there by God's appointment, in His keeping, under His training, and for His time" Robert Morgan, *Red Sea Rules*, Nelson, Publishers, pp.6,13] Ah, yes. Rule 5 is "Stay calm and confident and give God time to work." OK. Rule 8 is Trust God to deliver you in his own unique way." This brought me back to Moses' words to the Israelites in Exod.14 "*Don't be afraid. Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today....The Lord himself will fight for you; you need only to be still.*" (v. 13-14). That brought the song Still to mind (which we will sing in response to this sermon):

"Hide me now under your wings; cover me with your mighty hand.

Refrain: When the oceans rise and thunders roar, I will soar with You above the flood
Father, you are King over the storm; I will be still and know you are God.

Find rest, my soul, in Christ alone. Know His power in quietness and trust.

Refrain: When the oceans rise and thunders roar, I will soar with You above the flood
Father, you are King over the storm; I will be still and know you are God. (Hillsong)

After Moses told the people to be still, then he did what God told him to do next. V. 16 *Raise your staff (his rod of authority) and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea.*" As Christians, our rod of authority is the Name and Authority of Jesus Himself, the blood of the Lamb and the Word of our testimony (Rev. 12:11). So, in the middle of Wednesday night the 27th, when God brought these truths to mind, I raised my arm in faith and claimed Christ's victory in

our situation. I praised the Lord and acknowledged his Lordship and trusted Him to act for his glory. And then I went back to sleep. The whole next day went by with still no word. And the next... Finally word came late Friday that they had signed the contract and the sale was on! God had made a way through the sea.

The New Testament story is the familiar story of the storm on the sea of Galilee. The gospel writer Mark describes it in ch. 6

Immediately after the feeding of the 5,000, is, ^{45J} Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and head across the lake to Bethsaida, while he sent the people home. ⁴⁶ After telling everyone good-bye, he went up into the hills by himself to pray.

⁴⁷ Late that night, the disciples were in their boat in the middle of the lake, and Jesus was alone on land. ⁴⁸ He saw that they were in serious trouble, rowing hard and struggling against the wind and waves. About three o'clock in the morning^[a] Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. when they saw him walking on the water, they cried out in terror, thinking he was a ghost.

⁵⁰ They were all terrified when they saw him.

But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage! I am here!^[b]"

⁵¹ Then he climbed into the boat, and the wind stopped.

And they crossed the lake in safety.

The disciples had been part of the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 and they were now in the boat on the lake at Jesus's direction, heading in a new direction.

As the story came to mind, I thought – that's our situation, Lord. We have seen God's hand in many ways in our move to Florida and we are headed to Orlando because we feel the Lord told us to get in the boat and head in that new direction. But on this journey we came into a turbulent storm. All was not smooth sailing. Through the selling and buying both houses we were in contact with 3 different lawyers and 4 different realtors as we tried to settle the money issues with selling our house and the money issues with buying our Orlando house.! When Bruce saw the Florida lawyer on March 25 and explained what we were trying to do to buy the house as two couples through my trust plus money Bruce and Becky would add to buy into the sale, the lawyer said, "I have been in the law business for over 50 years, and this is the most complicated case I have ever encountered! *Mark 6:48 the disciples were straining at the oars because the wind was against them.* A turbulent storm with strong winds and waves high enough to swamp the boat. It took days of questions, issues, research and paperwork to sort this out. Then, another part of the storm was the future of Sam and Evan and where they would locate and what future was ahead for them. Confusion and a storm was swirling around them and the future of the church – not just around us while we were in Orlando.

Then came all the issues around the covid-19 virus. It's global implications have rocked people in many countries and have reached to our house church and our people as well. The hope is the end of the storm story in Mark 6:

When Jesus came to the disciples in the boat, spoke his peace to them and entered the boat, the storm subsided, the wind died down and the disciples and Jesus were able to get safely to the other side.

Dealing with the unexpected

Christ's stilling of the storm was the promise and picture I hold onto as we and so many of you continue to navigate the unexpected squalls on our journey – with school closing, future plans now uncertain etc. We know that Jesus is with us and will quiet the storm and get us safely to the other side – for us to our new life in Orlando, for you to points you will discover – some already known, some unknown. But God allows us to experience the storm on our pathway so we will trust God more completely.

That happens throughout life, doesn't it, beloved? God never deserts us in these times. He proves Himself trust-worthy as we become totally dependent on Him and His good purposes. God can and will get each of us safely to the destination He has for us – through the zigs and zags, and unexpected events. Just we trust Him. In the midst, his presence never leaves us; He provides miracles that show the watching world His unfailing love, His mighty power, His peace and His provision. His Spirit can anchor our faith and keep us on His path. With that confidence we can each step out in faith and press on – on God's agenda for His glory. And keep in touch with each other through prayer and social media as we go along! Praise God we can still journey together with Him!. Amen.

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