

3 Epiphany Year C

1/23/2022

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21

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Here is a question for you:

Are you dependable?

Or perhaps the more appropriate question is:

Would others say you are dependable?

A few years ago, I was listening to the news on the radio, and I heard the true story of a medical doctor in Baton Rouge who was on his way to perform surgery at a nearby hospital.

However, he was stuck in traffic – and it was not moving at all.

He knew a friend lived nearby so he quickly went to his friend's house and borrowed his friend's daughter's pink bicycle and proceeded to bike the remaining two miles.

Now picture this – The six-foot three-inch, 300-pound doctor in his green scrubs and pink children's bicycle complete with a pink bike helmet was quite the spectacle.

Yet he made it in time to perform the surgery before the anesthesia had worn off.

That is the kind of doctor I want!

A doctor who does not give up – A doctor who is dependable.

Psalm 19 also talks about dependability.

The faithfulness of God.

Our psalm today is one of the more popular psalms of David.

It is a popular choice for meditative readings.

And for good reason as the psalm is full of rich poetic imagery.

Many will recognize the opening line:

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork (ESV).

C. S. Lewis, the great Christian author and British literature professor wrote:

I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.

And it is clear in Lewis's writings that this psalm was his favorite.

While the beginning of the Psalm speaks of how God's creation declares the glory of God...

the end of Psalm 19 is a deep proclamation of trust in God:

O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.

Strength signifies God's immutable quality that invites us to trust in him because God does not change...

he is always righteous,
always holy,
and always just.

Redeemer signifies God's work of salvation from our known and unknown enemies.

The use of redeemer also points toward God's work of atonement by which he has redeemed us from the power and penalty of sin and death by his calling us to his own.

David, though, goes one step further than a declaration of strength and redeemer— he makes it personal:

O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.

God is not only strength and redeemer –
He is MY strength and MY redeemer.

So how does David get to this point of overwhelming trust in God?
How does he make such a confession of trust and in such a personal way?

Psalm 19 describes the greatness of God above his creation.

There is no one greater.

There is nothing that can happen that confuses God or causes God to change.

Whatever a person considers to be the most powerful phenomenon in all of creation is miniscule in comparison with the Creator-God.

All of creation declares God's glory and proclaims his handiwork!

It is no wonder why David can proclaim such an overwhelming statement of trust, "my strength."

The second verse of the magnificent hymn by Thomas O. Chisolm, Great is Thy Faithfulness (written in 1923) brings out this truth.

Summer and winter

And springtime and harvest;

Sun, moon, and stars

In their courses above;

Join with all nature

In manifold witness

To Thy great faithfulness,

Mercy and love.

Great is Thy faithfulness!

Great is Thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see;

All I have needed thy hand hath provided.

Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

God is more dependable than all of the natural world.

God is more dependable than the trust that we put in the sun rise tomorrow morning.

All creation points toward God's faithfulness.

Psalm 19 also says:

The law of the LORD is perfect and revives the soul.

When I was in high school, I worked at an Oriental rug store.

We sold all kinds of rugs from the Middle East, China, and North America.

There were many different styles and unique designs of the different regions.

However, a unique feature in Afghan rugs and other rugs made in Middle Eastern countries is that every detail is made to perfection... except one spot on each rug.

They would purposely make a design flaw, which is usually difficult to notice by a consumer.

Their reasoning was this –

they wanted to honor God, because only God is perfect.

In our text, the psalmist describes *the law of the LORD is perfect.*

True perfection is only reserved for God and his decrees.

This perfect law is accompanied by the phrase, “*reviving the soul.*”

The law of the LORD is perfect and revives the soul... (v. 7)

So, why does a perfect law revive the soul?

Because when a person can trust in something that has perfection there is no need to worry.

Our souls can be revived if we follow the word of the Lord because *the law of the LORD is perfect.*

The psalter describes the law of the Lord as perfect, right, pure, clean, true, righteous...

And the law of the Lord is more expensive than gold, and sweeter than honey.

The benefits of obeying God's law are a revived soul, wisdom, a joyful heart, enlightened eyes, and a life full of reward.

God's Holy Word is dependable.

The world preaches follow your heart for fulfillment and purpose.

The word of God preaches follow the laws of the Lord for fulfillment and purpose.

God's word is more dependable than anything my heart desires.

Finally, Psalm 19 speaks of forgiveness.

Forgiveness for sins that we are aware of and sins that we are not aware of...

It is in God's forgiveness that we are made whole and sound and innocent.

God's forgiveness is complete, and it is dependable.

Have you ever heard someone say, "Don't ever trust anyone?"

Many follow this line of reasoning.

Now, there is an old story of a father who took his young son out and stood him on the railing of the back porch.

He then went down, stood on the lawn, and encouraged the little fellow to jump into his arms.

“I’ll catch you,” the father said confidently.

After a lot of encouragement, the little boy finally made the leap.

When he did, the father stepped back and let the child fall to the ground.

He then picked his son up, dusted him off, and dried his tears.

“Let that be a lesson,” he said sternly. “Don’t ever trust anyone.”

As crazy as this story is – many people adhere to its message.

If we follow this same worldly philosophy (don’t ever trust anyone), it will surely impact our trust in God.

In fact, the Bible would suggest something quite different.

Christ trusted the most important message in the world –

the gospel –

to his disciples –

and that includes us!

God is dependable.

So, what about us?

Do we truly believe that God holds the very threads of creation in his hands?

Do we live as if the law of the Lord was perfect, pure, and priceless?

Do we live as if God's Holy Scripture was reliable and dependable?

Do we accept the forgiveness of God as complete and dependable?

And extend that forgiveness to others?

It is here that we find the truth of our Gospel reading from Luke 4.

Jesus went to the synagogue and read from Isaiah,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Christ fulfilled this scripture.

He is fulfilling this scripture even today.

He is bringing good news to the poor

He is releasing captives

He is recovering the sight of the blind

He is setting the oppressed free

Jesus is dependable.

Our lives are in the care of the best doctor.

Just like that doctor who did not give up because of the traffic while riding that pink bike –

our bold declaration is in our savior –

our God –

MY strength and MY redeemer.

He is more dependable than all of creation.

His word is dependable when we follow his commands.

His forgiveness is more dependable than any guilt we may have.

So, let us proclaim the good news of our savior so that the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works...

Because God is dependable –

He is faithful...

And there is no one like him.

Amen.