

July 11, 2010

Houghton Lake United Methodist Church

His Eye is on the Sparrow

Matthew 6:25-33, 10:29-31

Lay Leader Sue Lazell

When Pastor Tom called and asked me to speak today, he said he would be preaching on Abraham, and I could either continue that series or choose one of my own. Well, I am not Pastor Tom, and I wouldn't even attempt to continue his series. I could not do it justice, so I went out on my own to talk about "His Eye is on the Sparrow".

Maybe you got a little hint about where I was going with this when I told the children a moment ago the story of the momma bird and her little nest. How many of these stories did we grow up with as kids ourselves? It's funny, but sometimes with these stories, as with scripture itself, we hear it, or we read it a thousand times, and all of a sudden something new hits us, and it all comes together. Sometimes God is trying to get our attention, and if you are like me, sometimes it takes a two-by-four.

How many stories have we heard about people in the Bible who just didn't get what God was telling them, and He had to go to great lengths to get their attention? How about Jonah? God directed him to go to Nineveh, and Jonah went the opposite direction. Well, God still had the last word, because Jonah was swallowed by a huge whale, where he stayed for three days and three nights. When Jonah finally gave up doing it his way, he asked for forgiveness and the whale spit him up on shore. After that Jonah did go to Nineveh and do what God had asked him to do.

How many of us would have laughed at the thought of having a baby in our nineties like Sarah and Abraham? How many of us would obey and build a big ark in our back yard like Noah? How many of us would believe that five thousand people could be fed with a basket of five loaves and two fish? How many of us would take our son to be a sacrifice on an altar like Abraham did with Isaac?

What does it take to get our attention? Are we listening?

I have loved the Lord for as long as I can remember. I cannot imagine my life without Him in it. He has walked with me through abuse, loss of my first husband, loss of a son, my parents, friends, and family members. He has walked with me through losing my home, repairing the one that took its place, etc. etc. etc. Just because we accept the Lord into our lives, doesn't mean it's going to be smooth sailing. Sometimes, as was the case with Job, he lost everything, but he refused to blame God. His friends thought he should, but he would not. So, I am convinced that no matter what happens, we can choose how we respond to it.

It is so easy to say "woe is me" or "my life is more difficult than your life", or "what's the use, life sucks"?

I love serving the Lord. I have tried to use the gifts He has given me to bring glory to Him. I have not doubted for the past twenty-nine years that my ministry is to help others with grief. It is my passion. It is what I feel He has called me to do. But God used the proverbial two-by-four to get my attention recently, and I want to share that story with you.

I left our Good Friday service here at church, and on my way home, I was involved in an accident which "broke" my car to the extent it had to be towed. The young

couple that ran into me were so apologetic, and recognized right away that it was their fault, and they also told that to the state police officer who was dispatched to the scene. That was not as important to me as the fact that none of the three of us was seriously hurt.....cars can be fixed!

A week later, realizing that I was still aching, I called my car insurance company and found out that they would pay for me to see a doctor. I have no health insurance. I began seeing a chiropractor. Twelve days after my first accident, I was traveling downstate with our other vehicle, and hit a deer at 70 mph. I "broke" the second vehicle less than two weeks after the first. I was still doctoring my aching body a couple of weeks later, but I was very frustrated that I didn't feel better.

My husband said "Enough! I am taking you to the clinic!" I felt so bad that I could not fight his decision and promptly found myself at the clinic with the doctor saying, "I am sending you to the hospital right now. I am calling an ambulance." I said, "Please don't do that! I have no insurance and that will make a big bill. Can't I just wait and go in the morning?" To which he promptly replied, "You probably won't see morning!"

His instructions were, do not pass go, do not go through a drive thru, do not take go home to clean the bathroom, but go directly to the emergency room. I have always been relatively healthy. My only hospital visits were to have my babies. Therefore, I wasn't prepared for this. I soon learned that my sugar count was 2000, and no one knew how I could even be functioning.

A few hours later I went from the emergency room to Intensive Care. I was in the hospital for five days. I was faced with a diagnosis I knew nothing about, and suddenly I was giving myself shots of insulin and other new medications. My children were ready to put me in assisted living, and I told them to back off; this was a bump in the road, but not the end of the road. I told them I would be the poster child for diabetics.

When the two-by-four hits, you have to be ready to listen.....and I was. I have known in my head that I needed to get healthy, but never seemed to get myself in the right frame of mind, or whatever it was going to take. I now had no choice. I had to give up a 30-plus year addiction to my favorite pop. Previously, I was never without a bottle of it close by. Now, I have not had a candy bar in over two months. I know if God led me to it, He will also lead me through it. This diagnosis was not the end, it was the beginning of my new life. Food doesn't taste good to me anymore. All my favorites don't taste the way I remember them, and if the first helping doesn't taste good, why would I want another one? I know God is in all of that, because if I, on my own, had been able to stop eating these things, I would have done it a long time ago.

When I woke up the morning of May 5th, I said that was my new birthday. I, for whatever reason, was given a second chance to get it right, and I didn't want to blow it.

Maybe I was like Jonah, and had to get it through my head that my way was not the right way to be healthy. God used the doctor to get my attention with the words, "You may not see morning." Those are pretty loud and clear! He told me to see my family doctor when I got out of the hospital, and I told him I didn't have one. He said, "Come and see me, I will be your doctor." That was my first blessing.

I want to share a story from a book called Inspiring Words from the Psalms. A man and a woman walked down a busy street in a big city. Suddenly the woman stopped and said, "I hear a bird chirping."

The man said, rather incredulously, "I don't hear it." He continued, "Anyway, how could you hear a bird chirping here in this chaos and confusion?"

The woman insisted she could hear the bird. "There, I heard it again," she said. The man continued to deny that possibility. Then the woman took a coin out of her purse and, without the man seeing her do it, dropped the coin on the sidewalk. The man immediately looked down and began searching for the coin. The woman laughed and said, "See, it all depends on what you listen for."

Listen for love, light and life in your relationships. Listen for joy, peace, and comfort. Listen for purpose. Listen for God.

All of us face adversity of one kind or another in our lives. All I can tell you is that God must have another plan...one I don't understand right now, but I know that I have unfinished business to take care of and I have been given the opportunity to finish it. I thought my life was pretty together, but I had a Christmas gift that hadn't been delivered, and a birthday present that was also long overdue. I never thought of the possibility of me dying before my husband; he was the one with all the health issues. There were suddenly many things to think about that I hadn't thought about before.

It is scary to face health issues that are unfamiliar to us. It can change our lives in ways we don't even comprehend. For some there is grief that takes over, for others it just makes them determined to do whatever it takes.

To me, this was my wake up call. I knew in my head, I needed to do something to be healthier, but didn't do anything about it. Now, I have to get healthier...my body will not allow me to keep doing what I was doing...it has told me "Enough, already!"

Some of the lessons I have learned in the past two months are: If my husband, Doug, hasn't insisted I was going to the clinic, I might not be here...How special it is to have a friend come when you call and sit with you in the emergency room...How important phone calls are to someone experiencing difficulty...How special it is to get a card in the mail that someone is thinking of you...How awesome our prayer team is and how powerful those prayers are...How special it is to have your pastor by your side in ICU praying for you, and...How awesome it is to feel the love of your friends and family as you regroup and start your new life. I think one of the most important lessons I have learned is to stop sweating the small stuff, like the book written by Richard Carlson with the title, Don't sweat the small stuff, and it's all small stuff. It really is! I used to stress over everything. Now, it just isn't worth getting all upset over.

Is God trying to get your attention? Are you listening? Are you really hearing His voice? Don't you know that God doesn't always call the prepared, but He always prepares the called! I am not sure if I have a new assignment, or if I need to be healthy to continue to do what I already feel He has called me to do. Do you believe God's promises and know that if He is watching the sparrow, He is also watching you?

Since May 4th everything I do, I do with the realization I almost was not here to experience it. I planted flowers when I didn't feel especially good, but I didn't want to miss having them. I have delivered the gifts that I had put off doing, and I thank God everyday for the opportunity to see another day, to speak with my kids, and my grandkids. I made a goal for myself to be off all the insulin and to be healthy. Every time I have seen the doctor, he has lowered the amount I am taking.

I am going to work very hard to heed that still small voice, so that when it is my time to be with Him, He can say to me that I have run the race and have finished the

course. He will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." I hope that with the time I have left, I can show all of you, and my Lord, that I am grateful for my second chance. I will do everything I can to bring glory to Him. I truly believe from my own experience that His eye is on me and each of us, as well as on the Sparrow. I know His promises are true. I am here today, living proof of that .

What's it going to take in your life to get your attention? Do you need the two-by-four? Are you listening for the bird, but instead you hear the coin? Maybe with you, as with the story, it depends on what you're listening for. God is God, today, tomorrow and always, and He does still speak to us, if we are listening.

Don't waste your time on the small stuff. I am now determined to do some things I have put off. I didn't think I had enough money to go to Florida to see my grandkids, so the house got its repairs and any money that was left, was in the bank. If I hadn't made it, I would have missed seeing my grandkids...and the money would still be sitting in the bank. This week we are going to see the grandkids before school starts. I have not seen them for a year and a half. It's time to do it. It is time to make my own "bucket list" and enjoy with gusto the time I have left. No regrets!

Life is very different now than it was two months ago. The song that describes my attitude is "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning".

Many of you have faced, or are facing, adversity today. My prayer for you is that you can face this adversity with determination, and God will lead you through it. God will take care of you! I am a different person today than I was two months ago. I love life more than I have in a very long time. I am determined, with God's help, to get healthy. So far, He hasn't let me down. He won't let you down either. God loves you and so do I!

AMEN!