

Message: Faith and Real Life

How did you experience God this week?

Sounds like an easy question, but for some of us, it's not. Maybe we're like the man Frank Rogers told me about last week. On Sunday, this man is friendly, outgoing, kind and helpful. He's a pleasure to be around, no matter whether you're a first-time visitor at church or a long-term member. The problem is Monday morning. The man is a manager at a local business. Several of the employees are thinking about quitting.

The reason why: this man is unpleasant, unkind, overbearing and distant. He's constantly complaining, micromanaging his employees and he saying unkind things in coarse language. He's a jerk! I don't know the man, so I can't say what causes him to act in such a hurtful, selfish way. What I can say is that he's a person with an unhealthy soul. Clearly, his will, mind and body are not in harmony. There's no reason to act one way on Sunday and another way the rest of the week. It's an indication that a soul is not centered on God.

My heart goes out to this person, his co-workers and anyone who's in that kind of situation. It's one thing to be able to come to a safe place and worship God on a Sabbath day. It's another thing to be in a place where self-interest and the chaos of our culture are predominant. Many places are more difficult these days. It's harder to be ourselves and to love others when that's seen as weakness, something to take advantage of. It's hard to find opportunities, much less see the ways God is present. To experience God in your daily life, you have to be intentional. You have to take a risk. You have to have courage.

That leads me to the second part: how did you surrender to God this week? This goes with the experience of God. Mark recorded a conversation between Jesus and his disciples as they walked on a road.

[read Mark 8:27b-29]

What was the disciple's experience of Jesus?

- Carpenter from humble origins
- Healer of unusual skill
- Teacher with authority
- Someone who had a deep spiritual life
- Person with power to do amazing things

These are the characteristics of prophets; men and women of ancient days who spoke directly to God, expecting and receiving answers. They had power and they used it. They had faith and it sustained them through calamities and the harsh things that rulers, enemies and crowds did to them. This is what the people were saying about Jesus.

What did they NOT experience with Jesus?

- Selfishness, unkindness or ingratitude
- Political or business ambition – Jesus wasn't looking to run for government office, take over the temple or reshape the economy
- Military ambition – Jesus wasn't trying to raise an army to overthrow Herod and kick the Romans out
- Any form of entitled or privileged behavior.

Why does it matter? The messiah is expected to be like one of the priest-kings of old; King David's heir. They'd been looking for that kind of deliverer. They want someone to come in and take over, making things better. Is that what we want, too? Are we looking for someone to come in, take over and make things better?

That's why Peter's statement is so amazing, "You are the Christ (the Messiah)." God's Spirit revealed something new, something special to Peter. The mysterious secret is out! Jesus is more than a prophet. He's the one sent by God to set things right. Jesus is what we've been hoping for, but he's not what we expect. They've been in the presence of the Messiah, but they missed the second part.

They haven't surrendered to God. Peter and the others are given a gift. They realize Jesus is the Messiah, but they're trying to hold on to him, making a safe place where they can gather and be inspired. They feel better when they're with Jesus.

Monday morning is coming. Jesus can't be raised up only to be thrown down. If something happens to him, the movement dies. Not only will we say it isn't so, we'll do all we can to stop that from happening. We'll set him straight! We want our safe place. We aren't willing to accept that we need to surrender to God everywhere, all the time.

"Get behind me, Satan." Jesus isn't having any part of it. He tells us straight out: we have to surrender to God. [*read Mark 8:31-35*]

When we're in God's presence, we aren't in charge. God is. Our part is to trust and believe. We're called to follow. That means surrendering to God. When we do, we'll want to change our lives. That's because we'll get a glimpse of what a full life really looks like.

Real life is when we experience and surrender to God's presence in all the moments of our life. That's where true joy and contentment come from. We're at peace. The trials and challenges of the world come, but our faith is strong and true. We aren't shaken. If anything, our relationship with Jesus grows even stronger. We experience God in more moments of our life. We continue on a spiritual path that is heavenly.

The good news: Jesus is calling everyone to that path. Sadly, some won't hear it. They turn away immediately. Others hear it and get excited until their first major life challenge comes. Then they fall away, hurt and disillusioned by the very things that are designed to help them grow and find peace and joy. Still others hear Jesus' call and follow it, but can't escape the chaos and trials of life. That's what happened to Frank Rogers' friend. He wanted a life with Jesus, but wasn't able to surrender to God during the week. His life was choked and limited.

There are some ... some who hear Jesus' call. They respond differently. They aren't sure at first, but slowly and surely, their faith sprouts. Over time, it grows stronger as they seek God's presence, surrendering their self-interest. They learn to care for God first and then others. They learn that this way of living isn't just for Sunday and there's great freedom and joy in that revelation. Their souls are healthy,

centered on God and in harmony. They live full lives, filled by God's grace for all of their days.

You choose. How is it with your soul?

Seek God and give yourself freely, willingly, every day. You'll glad when you do.

Psalm 19:9-14

Honoring the LORD is correct, lasting forever.

The LORD's judgments are true.

All of these are righteous!

They are more desirable than gold - than tons of pure gold!

They are sweeter than honey - even dripping off the honeycomb!

No doubt about it:

your servant is enlightened by them;
there is great reward in keeping them.

But can anyone know

what they've accidentally done wrong?

Clear me of any unknown sin

and save your servant from willful sins.

Don't let them rule me.

Then I'll be completely blameless;

I'll be innocent of great wrongdoing.

Let the words of my mouth

and the meditations of my heart

be pleasing to you,

LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Mark 8:27-29 (CEB)

Jesus and his disciples went into the villages near Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

They told him, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others one of the prophets."

He asked them, "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Christ."