

Let God lead – better hold on tight!

Loving God, help us to hear You whispering words of love into our hearts this day so that we might live out the abundant life You have promised. And assist us we pray – that the words of my mouth and the mediations of all our hearts are pleasing to You – our Healer, our Liberator, our Redeemer. AMEN.

One of the things that often identifies a person's age – without needing to see them – is the music they listen to . . . at least for the generations living after the 1950. As it was really in the early 1950's that radio stations began to play different styles of music.

With the increase in technology – the world opened up allowing people to experience the music genres of rock, blues, jazz, pop and so much more. Back when this revolution was starting – some people were afraid of what it might lead to.

Well, today technology allows us to create our own play lists . . . to listen to pretty much any music that has been recorded whenever we want – on demand.

And this is where things get a bit tricky . . . for personal taste in music is just that . . . personal taste. Very, very few people enjoy all genres of music . . . or maybe that's just me.

Take my family . . . sure we listen to some of the same music – after all good music is good music – but some of the music my kids listen to . . . gives me a headache. And I know that some of the music I enjoy . . . sends them running in the opposite direction or at least putting on their headphones to cancel out the noise.

In reality, the music we connect with is the music that tells a story . . . potentially expressing how we are feeling or what we are experiencing. Putting into words or melody what is happening in our lives and sometimes even the world.

Why am I spending so much time reflecting on music today? Well, when I read the scripture reading from Genesis for today – a song popped into my head. It's a song that certainly identifies me as Gen X as I'm not sure if my kids even know it.

It's a song with a catchy tune . . . it's a song with some interesting lyrics . . . it's a song with the same title as some have given the Genesis passage. Can you guess the song?

The song is called Jacob's Ladder by Huey Lewis and the News. And while the song is from the 1980's . . . I think it still speaks to how some think about the whole God thing. Here are the lyrics from the first part of the song:

I met a fan dancer
Down in Southside Birmingham
She was running from a fat man
Selling salvation in his hand
Now he's trying to save me
When I'm doing all right
The best that I can

Just another fallen angel
Trying to get through the night

Step by step, one by one
Higher and higher
Step by step, rung by rung
Climbing Jacob's ladder

This song – which I still enjoy listening to – gets it wrong. Similar to how I believe many people get it wrong when it comes to their relationship with God.

You see, in the scripture passage . . . nowhere does it have Jacob actually trying to climb the ladder . . . to move on his own upwards towards heaven . . . to move on his own to meet God. It is more an image of God moving towards us.

You see, the ladder was a vision for Jacob and hopefully for us letting him know that God is active in our world. The ladder connected the earthly realm with the heavenly realm – or we could say the physical world with the spiritual world.

And the most important part of the vision has nothing to do with the ladder – it is what God said to Jacob:

“I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” (Genesis 28:13-16)

God is reassuring Jacob that God’s promise is still valid. In the book of Genesis, God seems to be in the business of needing to constantly remind the family that was promised to be a great nation that God follows through.

First Abraham needed to be reminded more than once. Then Isaac needed to be reminded more than once. And now Jacob needs reminding that God is the ultimate promise-keeper.

And I don’t know about you but there have been times in my life where I have needed that reminder too. Times when I’m not sure what is happening times when good things seem to be dissolving hard times when things have felt like they were collapsing around me.

It is during the hard times during the rough patches during the storms of life when I need to remember that these words given to Jacob so long ago are still valid today for me and for you. When God says:

“Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” (Genesis 28:16)

This is a promise to all of us. That God is with us that God is for us that God will lead us.

But the natural question to ask is where is God leading us? Is God leading all us in the same way on the same path to the same place?

And my answers are no, no, and yes!

You see, each of us is a beloved child of God so God wants the same for each of us in that God wants us to live fully into who we have been created to be.

Yet, since there is only one you and only one me. The paths that we take; the ways that God guides us into the abundant life might be different. For just like each of us might have different tastes in music each of us have different personalities, different passions which need to be fed in order for us to be fulfilled.

And here's the interesting point that I think Jesus is trying to make in the parable from today's gospel reading it is not for us to decide what is the 'right' way for another person it is our responsibility to listen to God and follow God's directions for our own lives.

And what are those directions – they are simple love others; cause no harm; and let God decide when it is harvest time. For in the parable, we hear these words regarding the wheat and harvest time:

'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" (Matthew 13:27-30)

Often people think that the wheat represents the 'good people' and the weeds represent the 'bad people'. But what if what if all people are the wheat?

Since the Sower – the Master – is most often identified as God with the ‘enemy’ as the one who sows weeds doesn’t it make sense that if we are all children of God then we are all wheat?

The weeds are then not so much people as they are the things that cause pain, harm, and destruction. For the enemy’s children are the things that are evil – while God’s children are the wheat.

This should be good news but there are still difficult, hard words to hear in this story. For God declares that wheat and weeds MUST grow together MUST live together up until harvest time.

If we see ourselves as the wheat and the weeds as the things the behaviours . . . the actions the systems that cause harm – we are being told that everything MUST co-exist so that we have an opportunity to grow and mature.

I don’t like the implications of this story I don’t like this reality as it would be so much easier if evil didn’t exist. But it seems the only way for us to have freedom – to choose love; to choose kindness; to choose God’s way – is to have the opportunity to make different choices to choose the wrong things.

And this is how the Creator of all leads very differently than how most of us would lead.

God leads by gently telling us that there is another way – if we are choosing the things that lead us to harm ourselves and others.

God leads by reminding us that we are not alone that we have a companion on the journey.

God leads by assuring us that at ‘harvest time’ – there will only be wheat in eternity as the weeds will be destroyed.

Perhaps that is why our model for life is Jesus. Jesus wasn’t saved from pain – he moved through it knowing he wasn’t alone while choosing to love.

Letting God lead doesn't eliminate pain and suffering from our lives. But letting God lead allows us the opportunity to experience love as fully as possible for God's embrace is available to us all and the power of the God's love is available to flow in us and through us . . . if we walk in the footsteps of the One who embodied love.

May we be people who do not try to flee from our world but fully embrace the God who is in the world offering to journey with us as we mature more and more into living the abundant life where love wins.

May we be people brave enough to let God lead!

AMEN.