

“Storyline: Meditate”

Deuteronomy 32 and Joshua 1

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First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

Dr. Jim Davis

About ten days ago a sad thing happened to me. My computer crashed. Well to tell you the truth, it didn't actually crash. It just wouldn't open any programs. And since that probably sounds strange, I'd better explain.

To start off with, the day it happened I'd been pretty busy. Fred Thrower, our former associate had officially finishes his work with us the previous Sunday and I was making my way through my first week as your new solo pastor.

(And I need to pause right here just a minute and say thanks to all of you who have taken time to speak to me or send me a note and encourage me or tell me you'll be praying for me during these busy days. I've truly been supported well by many of you in this congregation and I'm grateful. I'm sure your prayers and God's answers have been holding me up. But ten days ago I wasn't so sure!)

Anyway the day it happened just before I left church I changed the user account password on my laptop computer. Now for those of you who don't speak "Windows," the user account password is what the computer requests as soon as you open the lid.

It's a security measure. It's designed to protect you in case your laptop's lost or stolen. Changing it from time to time the experts say is good common sense. And I hadn't changed mine in a while, so at the end of my "to do" list that day I did one more thing. I changed my password.

The process isn't hard. And I'd done it before, so I moved through the steps, tested the new password, closed my laptop and went home for dinner. Then after dinner I went back to my laptop. I was going to send out some emails. I opened it. It asked for the password. I typed in the new one and onto the screen flashed this message. "You have entered an invalid password. Try again."

Well I didn't want to try again. But I figured my finger had hit the wrong key. It happens sometimes. So I tried again. Same result. Now I was worried. I tried a third time. I went slowly. I was careful. I made certain that every character in the password was correct. Still nothing!

Now I was frustrated. I tried the password over and over again and by now I was fuming. Like a lot of you, my life's on that computer. And yes, I did have a backup hard drive. It had all my files on it. But I couldn't even use it unless I could Windows to open.

I decided I only had one option. It was time to follow the yellow brick road and call the Wizards at Microsoft who makes Windows. I spoke to a very nice young woman named Michelle who told me that because of government regulations on privacy I couldn't receive help for my issue over the phone.

That did it. Now I was definitely in grief. I'd been through three of the stages so far; denial, anger, and bargaining. Now I was up to depression and apparently it showed in my voice because when I said to Michelle, "Isn't there any way you can help me?" She said, "Well I'm allowed to tell you that you might find help for your issue from the manufacturer or from an authorized repair center like Best Buy." At last I had a ray of hope, a small one but a ray of hope.

I want all of you to know, if you don't already that Best Buy here in Humble opens at 9am. I was there at 9:01! I walked up to the "Geek squad" counter. That's what they call the computer repair people at Best Buy. I met a tech, told him my problem. And immediately he spoke words of comfort. He said "I'm not sure I've ever heard of that."

"Can you help" I said. And again, words of great comfort, "I don't know, but there's one thing I could try." The wizard went behind the curtain. He walked through a side door into another room and came back out carrying a CD. He explained to me that putting the CD in my laptop would erase my dysfunctional password. "That's the good news," he said.

But then he went on, "the risk" he said "is that by erasing the password you might not be able to access your files! So what do you want to do?" he asked. I suppose my face told him. I needed a minute to make that kind of life and death decision. He looked at me with compassion and said "I'll give you a little time to think about it." Then he turned to another customer at the counter.

A lot of stray thoughts started running through my mind. What would I do if I lost my files? Was the reward worth the risk? Was there no other option?

Finally I got down to the last stage of grief; acceptance and when the guy came back, I said, "Alright, go ahead."

He took my computer and started to run the CD and all of sudden another stray occurred to me. “Have no anxiety about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God will keep your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.”

Now I suppose as your pastor you probably wouldn’t expect that kind of thought to surprise me. But it did! And the reason is because it was completely out of context. I wasn’t in church. I was in Best Buy. And I wasn’t there as a pastor, I was just there as a person.

Still, God has the most amazing way of wanting to show up in my life at the oddest times. Maybe that’s true for you too. And often when God shows up in my life He’ll let me know He’s there with me by flashing a verse of Scripture through my mind.

So I went with it. I said out loud to the guy who was trying to fix my computer, “Well I suppose it wouldn’t hurt to pray right now, would it?” He looked at me with an expression on his face that was somewhere between puzzled and pained and turned back to his work.

But the young black man seated on the stool next to me turned and said to me, “You know ...” He told me his own story about an answered computer prayer. And when he finished, I said half-heartedly “God is good, isn’t He?” The truth is at that moment, I was still grieving for what might be happening to my computer and my files because I could hear the hard drive churning away on the counter.

Then with a tone of voice I needed to hear the young black man said to me, “Yeah, He is good.” So I went with it. I prayed to a God who was good enough to remind me in “Best Buy” of all places of a Scripture I needed to pray back to Him. I never closed my eyes but I did tell God how much I’d really like my laptop to work again.

Suddenly the wizard from “Best Buy” said to me, “I’m done. It’s rebooting now. Let me know if it works, will you?” Once more words of true comfort. Then he turned back to the other customer. I watched. It worked. But that’s not the point.

The point is this. God wants to be a part of our lives, my life and yours too. In fact, I’m convinced God’s real goal is simply to be with us in every moment of our lives.

That was God’s goal in the garden before we were separated from Him by sin. It was God’s goal with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It was God’s goal with Moses

and Israel during the Exodus. And in this morning Scripture's lesson it shows up again at the beginning of the book of Joshua.

"I promise you what I promised Moses," God says. "Everywhere you go you'll be on land I've given you, from the Negev desert in the South, to the Lebanon mountains in the north; from the Euphrates river in the east to the Mediterranean sea in the West, and all the land of the Hittites (and I guess the land of the Hittites must include the "Best Buy" stores)."

"I will be with you" God says, "as I was with Moses." So there it is. It's a part of the Book of Joshua just as it is part of almost every significant story in the Bible. God's stated desire is to be with us, everywhere we go.

But there's a problem and the problem is we forget. We forget that God wants to be with us. We imagine we're going through life alone. And we begin to make do some foolish things. So Deuteronomy asks us "Is this the way you repay the Lord, you foolish and senseless people. Isn't he your Father (and by the way for all of you who wonder if the Father's love for us ever shows up in the Old Testament, here's one place that it does in Deuteronomy 32). Isn't he your Father who created you?"

The Father who made each of us wants more than anything else to be with us everywhere we go. But we forget. We forget that we can live in His presence, we forget in our pride and our foolishness. We forget that God wants to be with us and we need to be reminded. So in order to remind us God encourages us to enter into a practice of meditation.

"Study the Book of the Law continually. Meditate on it day and night so you may be sure to obey all that is written in it. Only then will you succeed."

J.I. Packer, one of the great Reformed theologians of our time says this.

"Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, thinking over, dwelling on, and applying to oneself the various things one knows about the works and ways and purpose and promises of God.

It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communication with God."

I doubt anybody could say it better than that. Meditation though takes time. It takes time to read. It takes more time to read slowly and reflect on what you're reading. It takes even more time to make a decision to memorize something

you've read. And it takes a lifetime of experiences like mine ten days ago to teach us the value of meditation.

But time my friends is what Lent is all about, slowing down and taking time to be with God and there is no better way to celebrate a holy Lent than to make a decision at the beginning of the forty days to meditate. So let me ask you. Would you be willing this Lent to take the time?

Would you be willing over the next forty days to choose one verse of Scripture each week and read it over to yourself each day? Would you be willing to read it slowly and repeatedly so its message can sink deep down into your mind and heart and soul?

Would you be willing to even try and remember that verse, to memorize it so the Holy Spirit can have a tool to remind you that God's is with you when you really need to be reminded of that, like I did, in Best Buy? Would you be willing to give up something more than something you eat this Lent to spend some time eating and chewing on and swallowing down into your soul God's word to you?

According to Philip Yancey a wise Rabbi once taught "that experiences of God can never be planned or achieved. 'They are spontaneous moments of grace,' the Rabbi said, 'almost accidental.'"

One of his student asked, "Rabbi, if God-realization is just accidental, why do we work so hard doing all these spiritual practices?"

And the Rabbi replied, "To be as accident-prone as possible."

My friends in Christ, experiencing the presence of God in our lives more and more is possible for any of us. If we give the Holy Spirit the materials to work with He will make it happen. Let's pray ...