

Frederick Nietzsche
A German Philosopher
In the late 1800s

Wrote a parable about a madman looking for God
And in this famous parable
Nietzsche says God is dead
We have killed him
And our churches are the tomb
And the sepulcher
Or grave of God

We have buried God in our churches

**And I think in many ways Nietzsche may be right
If you think about
We have imprisoned God within our church walls

We may not think this,
But we often live as if
The church is where God stays
Where God lives
And where religious stuff happens

So on Sundays,
We come to God
And for an hour or so
we experience religion

But too often

On our way out
We leave God here
And just go right back to the same way of life

One thing that drives me crazy,
Is when I go visit a church
And they have time and talent sheets
Or volunteer opportunities sheets in the pew

And every opportunity
Listed
Is found within the walls of the church

We are imprisoning God within our church

**I often have people tell me
Oh, when I go into that church
When I hear that pipe organ
Or see that stained glass
Or I hear the bells

Then I feel God
Then I know God is there
Then I have been to church

**And that is fine
That you like those things
That is great
I appreciate a good pipe organ
And love stained glass

But the problem is
 Soon that becomes the only place
 We see God
 Soon that is the only place
 where we know God's presence

And we have to get to the point
 Where we realize
 That God has not confined himself
 To a building

What are the possibilities
 If God is not just in the church
 Or in the echoing halls of a century old seminary
 Or in the hymn loved to sing growing up

What if God is always with us?
 What if the full manifestation of God's glory
 And God's love stays with us
 Each and every second?

**God is everywhere
 God is just as present with us
 Sitting a pew
 Singing "How great thou art"

As he is
 When we are at the checkout
 Of the supermarket

Getting angry that the person in front of us
Has 13 items
In a 12 item express lane.

**As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once wrote,
Why do we only see the start at night
They are always there

Why do we only see God in the church
Or the overtly religious
He is there always.

**I am just afraid
That too often in our world
We have made our God
Only approachable through
Ornate religious events

And often we fail to see God in the day to day
In our relationships
In at our job
In the face of a stranger
In the ordinary
Average
Everyday

**Has anybody ever heard the expression
Same old stuff
New day?

You ask somebody how they are
And they just say
Some ole' stuff
Just a different day

I don't know if that is an expression up here
But it is often used in the south
Except sometime stuff is changed to other words

But sometimes
That is how we live our lives
Just going through the motions
Watching the clock
Waiting for that meeting
That job
That day to end

Never acknowledging that maybe what we are doings
Has purpose beyond us
Maybe the interaction with that person
Had a divine quality
Maybe God is with us the whole time.

**One thing God is very good at
Is taking the everyday
The ordinary
And making it extraordinary

An everyday virgin handmade

Nothing special about her
Until God puts the savior of the world
In her belly
And makes her great

God can do the same thing
To our boring old routine
When stop locking God in the church
On Sundays
And acknowledge his presence
With us always

When we start inviting God
Into our everyday
Our Average
Our Daily routine

God gives purpose
God gives Meaning
God gives Hope
To what we are doing
To what we are experiencing

**A pastor out of Grand Rapids, Michigan
Rob Bell
Pretty famous for some his books
And his Nooma series

Shares the story that his counselor
Has a sign in his desk

That says
“the God that wastes nothing”

Rob says,
When he starts using words like
“mistake,”
Or “failure”
Or “boring”

His counselor will just reach in his desk
And pull out that sign

And what it means
Is our God doesn't waste anything
He doesn't waste our hurting or our sorrow
He uses it to shape us
To make us different
To change his world

Our God doesn't waste the everyday average minutes
Of the day
He can use those to change us
To make us different
To make his world different

But we have to realize
God is always
With us
And cares about us so much
That he cares about every minute

Of every day

**The Bible is not a story
Of people's
Of man's desire
To know God

That is not,
If you read it
The Bible is the story of God's desire
To know man
To know people

**The promise God most often gives in scripture
Is I will be with you
More often than anything else
God tells us that

And the culmination of that is God sending his son
As John chapter 1 says
To pitch a tent
To build a dwelling place
To live among his people in Jesus Christ

No wonder the angel tells Joseph
You will call Jesus
Emmanuel
God is with us

And it's not for just saints

Or pastors
Or mystics
It is for everyone.

The culmination is Jesus
But God has always been willing to do it

*As I said last week,
Our God has never changed
He has always been the same loving God
With the same high expectations for his people

So, I want to use this morning again
To look at a story of the Old Testament
That shows the love and grace
Of God
Long before we knew Jesus

I want to show the Epiphany
The revealing of God's love
In the Old Testament

**Our first lesson is the story of a guy named Jacob
And if you remember Jacob
He was a scoundrel

He deceived his brother Esau,
And stole his birthright
And then Esau
Is going to kill him

So Jacob goes on the run

And in today's first lesson

Jacob is on the run

And he is nowhere specific

Nowhere special

The verse tells us

He was in a certain place

They don't say the name

Because it probably doesn't have

It is nowhere

It is like Cleveland

**So this scoundrel

Who is on the run from God

Is in the middle of nowhere

And Jacob lies down

And he has this amazing dream

Where the Angels are going up

And down the ladder

Notice that,

This isn't a story about Jacob climbing up the ladder

It is about God coming down

It is about coming down

Right here

Right now

To the most unexpected person
In the most unexpected place

God is with us
Everywhere
Always

And Jacob wakes up from this dream
Surely God is in this place
In the middle of nowhere
God is there

God is in the desert
God is school
God is at work
God is there

And Jacob names the place
Bethel
Which means
The House of God

And says this wonderful quote
In verse 17
For surely this is the house of God
And the gate of heaven

Not the temple
Not the synagogue
Not some extravagant place

Right there

In the middle of the desert

That is the house of God

And the gate of heaven

Because that is where God is

Everywhere

Anywhere

Wherever you are

That is where God is

Everywhere we go

That is Bethel

That is the gate of heaven.

*See,

One very elementary thing that we have forgotten

As we have gotten older

Is that the church

Is not a building

We don't go to church

We are the church

The Church is God's people

Living out God's will

For all to see

The church is people

So yes,
God is always in his church
Because he is always with you

*My challenge for you
As the Church
As God's people

Is to remember
That God is everywhere
God is in your life

And invite God to be a part of the everyday
Of the average
Of the routine
So he can make it special

And challenge yourself to realize
That no matter where you are
You are walking on sacred ground

Whether at work
At school
At mall
Wherever

That is Bethel
That is the gate of heaven
Because you are there
And God is there to meet you.

God isn't just sitting in heaven waiting
For you to die
God is with you everywhere!!