FINDING FAVOR WITH GOD
Genesis 6:5-14

Let's pray – Father God, creator of heaven of earth, would you come close to us today and illuminate the dark places of our hearts and lives so that we can find healing and hope in your presence. We ask that your Holy Spirit would touch us where we need your touch the most. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

INTRODUCTION -

As the daughter of missionary parents, I grew up going to church every Sunday. I have gone to church almost every Sunday since. If we take 52 Sundays or sermons in a typical year and multiply that by my age, well, that means I have heard many, many, many sermons. Perhaps you have too.

I have heard powerful sermons, and I've heard boring sermons. I have heard captivating sermons, and I've heard confusing sermons. I've heard sermons that have changed my life, and I've heard a few doozies too. But in all the sermons I have heard over the course of my life, there are 2 that stand out to me as unique from all the rest. They shared a similar quality.

The first one I heard was in a country church in upstate New York. A friend of mine had a hobby of dressing up as a clown and doing balloon animals for parties and things like that. A church a ways away was having a special children's event and they booked my friend to come and be part of the program for the children that Sunday morning.

After the clowning around with the children was all done, we stayed afterwards to just be part of the grown-ups' worship service. I don't remember the topic of the message. I just remember the man who delivered it. Not because of anything particularly witty or remarkable he said, but because there was a very real and gentle sense of God's presence as he spoke.

My friend and I spent a fair amount of the car ride home talking about how we sensed God's presence in such a gentle and peaceful but clear way in the service that day. That experience has always stayed with me.

A few years after that, when I was in seminary, I did an internship at a small Chinese church in Southern California. As is typical in a Chinese church in the US, there was one service in Chinese for the grown-ups and a separate service in English for the young adults and youth. We typically had about 20 young people at the English service on a given Sunday morning, so it was not a large congregation by any stretch of the imagination.

One Sunday we had scheduled a guest preacher. He was a very gentle and unassuming man. And I have never forgotten him or his message. He preached from Psalm 133 that opens with these words.

1 How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!

The Psalm goes on to say:

2 It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.
3 It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the Lord bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

In brief, the preacher spoke of the blessing, beauty and life-giving power that comes when there is unity among God's people. He explained how this Psalm uses 2 poetic images to illustrate what unity is like.

First, the unity of God's people is like precious oil poured over Aaron's head, running down his beard and onto the collar of his robes.

In ancient Israel, anointing oil was used to consecrate someone or something for God's service. Pouring the precious oil over Aaron's head showed that he and his clothes were literally being set apart from common, everyday use, for God's special purposes.

The anointing was also a symbol of authority. It showed Aaron was marked as God's chosen leader. No-one could just volunteer for the role. They had to be called and authorized by God.

And with this anointing came divine empowerment. That means God's Holy Spirit would provide Aaron with the special capability he needed to carry out his priestly role.

The lavish pouring out of this oil in anointing God's chosen high priest, also represented the blessing and presence of God's Holy Spirit. As people could see the oil being poured out and flowing freely down Aaron's head and beard and robe they were to understand that God's blessing and life would be poured out on them.

So, the Psalmist is telling us that when God's people live together in unity (without doing things like in fighting or back biting or gossiping), then God generously pours out his blessings, his spirit and his life upon us. They flow down, covering us and

refreshing us like the precious oil that was used to anoint Aaron's head and beard and robes.

The second image in Psalm 133 is like the first. The Dew of Hermon falling on Mount Zion.

Mount Hermon is the highest peak in the area where this Psalm was written. It is located to the far north of Israel. In the winter it is usually covered in snow, which melts in the spring and early summer. As the hot weather comes, the warm Mediterranean air condenses over the snowcapped mountains producing heavy fog and dew that water the surrounding dry lands. The abundant moisture that comes from Mt Hermon gives life to drier surrounding areas.

This is a powerful metaphor about the life-giving nature of unity in a community. In the same way that dew of Mt Hermon provides water that sustains life in a dry region, so too unity among God's people, brings spiritual life and blessing in the community.

Water isn't just "nice" to have. It is essential for life. If we don't have it, we die. The same thing can be said about unity in a community. If we don't have unity, if we don't play as a team, if we don't have each other's back, we fall apart at the seams. That's why Jesus said, "A house divided against itself will not stand" (Matthew 12:25). Even in the Church, if we fail to achieve unity, we die.

However, if we choose to live in harmony with each other the community not only survives, but it thrives and can be revitalized.

Psalm 133 opens with these words:

1 How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!

The Psalm concludes with these words:

For there the Lord bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

According to these verses, when God's people are willing to set aside division, selfish pursuits, angry outbursts, gossip, backstabbing, polarization, digging in of heals, contempt, disrespect, the "it's my way or the highway attitude," and when God's people are willing instead to choose love, and kindness, preferring each other, living together in harmony, supporting each other, carrying each other's burdens, then the Lord pours out His blessing, and even life itself, on that group of people.

So, there in a nutshell is the sermon I heard preached by this gentle man in a small Chinese church in Southern Cal almost 30 years ago.

As much as his message has stayed with me, the man himself has also stayed with me all these years, because as he preached there was again something tangible and yet hard to describe. It was like my experience with the preacher in the country church in Upstate New York. In both cases, there was a gentle, peaceful, and very real sense of the presence of God, and that's why these 2 men stood out to me.

There was something about Noah that made him stand out in his day too. Let's take a look at Genesis 6:5-14 and see what that was.

6 5 The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the
earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the
time. 6 The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart
was deeply troubled. 7 So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human
race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move
along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." 8 But Noah found favor in the
eyes of the Lord.

Noah and the Flood
9 This is the account of Noah and his family.
Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked
faithfully with God. 10 Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.
11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. 12 God saw how
corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. 13 So
God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with
violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. 14 So
make yourself an ark of cypress[c] wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside
and out.

Did you notice what made Noah stand out from all the other people of the earth?

[Pause] **We're told that Noah found favor with God.**

Wait a sec. Of all the things that could have made Noah stand out, that was it?

[Pause] **Yup. That was it. Noah found favor with God.**

The world around Noah looked grim. Last week we talked about how God felt pain in his heart and was grieved over the violence, corruption, wickedness and evil he saw on earth. Human beings had used God's good gift of free will to ruin his creation. They were attacking and destroying each other. They were not honoring God or walking in his ways.

Against that backdrop, Noah stood out, for Noah found favor with God.

What does it mean to find favor with God? What exactly is God's favor?

God's favor is the outward expression of the inward reality of God's approval, delight in and love for a person. It is the visible kindness that results from God's grace to us.

Are grace and favor the same thing?

Not exactly, but grace and favor are certainly linked.

Grace is getting a gift we don't deserve like salvation. It is all the fullness of God's riches at Christ's expense. It's all the good stuff God gives us that we have done nothing to earn.

Favor is how we see the evidence of that grace expressed in tangible ways – like an open door or someone having greater influence than they could have achieved themselves, or someone experiencing God's protection and deliverance in a powerful way.

Noah was the first person for whom this expression is used in the Bible. But he wasn't the last.

The Bible gives us many examples of people who found favor with God. Many of these people were chosen by God to accomplish monumental tasks. They were protected through trials and given positions of great influence because of God's favor upon them. Here are just a few notable examples:

Some Biblical Examples of People Who Found Favor With God

- Noah (Genesis 6:8-9)
- Abraham (Genesis 18:3-5)
- Joseph (Genesis 39:21, Acts 7:9-10)
- Moses (Exodus 33:12 – 14 & 17)
- The Israelites (Exodus 33:13-17; Psalm 44:1-3)
- Gideon (Judges 6:16-18)
- Samuel (1 Samuel 2:26)
- David (1 Samuel 16:22, Acts 7:46)
- Esther (Esther 2:9,15, 17. & 4:14)
- Daniel (Daniel 1:9)
- Zacharias & Elisabeth – parents of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-6)
- Mary – the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:28-30)
- Jesus (Luke 2:52)

The Bible tells us that all these people and more, found favor with God. What did God's favor look like in their lives? Let me highlight a few examples from this list.

- **Noah:** found favor in the eyes of the Lord when the world around him was corrupt and wicked. God's favor enabled him to build an ark to preserve humanity and keep a remnant of people and animals from drowning in a massive flood.
- **Abraham:** found favor with God and became the recipient of a covenant promise that included right standing with God (faith credited to him as righteousness Gen 15:6), numerous descendant, land, a great name, protection and blessing, and a promise that through his descendants all the people of the earth would be blessed.
- **Joseph:** Experienced profound favor from both God and man. Although he was sold into slavery as a teenager and imprisoned, God blessed him and made him prosper. He was eventually promoted to become second-in-command of Egypt and through him, God was able to save many people in Egypt as well as his own family from dying in a severe famine.
- **Moses:** Found favor with God, which enabled him to speak with God "face to face" and ultimately lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to the land God had promised to give their forefather Abraham.
- **David:** Found favor with God which allowed him to experience God's presence with him in a very close and personal way throughout his life. He experienced God's protection throughout his life and became King of Israel. Despite making some serious mistakes, his repentant heart allowed him to find God's mercy and forgiveness, and he was remembered as "a man after God's own heart." (1 Samuel 13:14 & Acts 13:22)
- **The young boy Samuel**: grew in stature and favor with God and man and become a powerful prophet and the last judge of Isreal.
- **Esther:** Found favor with God and King Xerxes. As a result, she was able to save the Jewish people from destruction.
- **Mary:** We are told in the gospel of Luke that Mary was not just "favored." She was "highly favored" by God, who was with her and had chosen her to be the mother of, Jesus Christ.
- **Jesus:** The ultimate example of one who found favor with God. We read in Luke's gospel that Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and in favor with both God and man (Luke 2:52). Jesus began his public ministry reading from the scroll of Isaiah a passage that begins by stating "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor," and it ends with "and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19, Isaiah 61:1-2).

God's favor is not something we can earn. Like grace, it is a gift freely given.

But when God's favor finds us, we must align ourselves with God's values and we must respond appropriately if we are to continue in that favor.

What do I mean by this?

In Genesis 6:8 we read:

8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

And then we read in Genesis 6:9 that:

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.

God's grace and God's favor came first to Noah, as it does to all of us. But when God's grace and God's favor came knocking, Noah also had to respond to that grace and favor to take hold of it. And so does every single person on earth. We all have a choice to make. For example,

When God's favor came seeking the young boy Samuel and woke him up in the middle of the night, Samuel responded to God's voice, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." Obedience is implied in the listening.

Likewise, when God's favor came seeking Mary in the message of the angel Gabriel, Mary responded in submission "May it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1:28)

Submission and obedience to the voice of God is always the appropriate response that helps us to align ourselves with the grace and favor God wants to give us.

Unfortunately, not everyone responds well to the grace, and favor God extends.

God's grace came to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. For example, God lavishly provided for all their needs and told them not to eat from the forbidden tree. But they didn't listen. They disobeyed his only command. So, God's favor could not rest upon them the way it had. They were evicted from paradise and suffered dreadful consequences for their disobedience.

God's grace came to Cain when he was murderously jealous of his brother Abel God spoke to him directly – "Check your heart attitude Cain, sin is crouching at your door, waiting to overtake you. You can master it, and you must or it will master you." Cain didn't respond well to God's voice and God's grace either. He wasn't interested in obeying God. He chose to commit cold-blooded murder instead of checking the attitudes of his heart. So God's favor could not rest upon him either. Cain went out from the presence of God and his descendants continued in the path of violence and sin apart from the presence of God.

Let's pause for a moment to consider what might have happened if Noah had responded to God the way Adam, Eve and Cain had responded to God's voice and God's grace.

Ever think about what would have happened if Noah had said, "Thanks for the suggestion, God, but I've never seen water fall from the sky. I think I'll pass on building that big boat you described."

If Noah did not surrender to God's grace, none of us would be here today. Noah and his family would have died in the flood along with everyone else. That would have been the end of the human race.

God's grace and favor sought out Noah, and Noah responded well. As his great, great, Grandfather Enoch had done before him, Noah chose to walk with God. He was righteous and blameless among the people of his time. Noah stood out like a shining star in a dark night sky. We'll see later in chapter 6:22 that "Noah did everything just as God commanded him" (Gen 6:22).

The Bible says that Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. But perhaps you've noticed me switching the order of the words around and saying that God's favor found Noah.

Why have I done that? Because that is often the way it happens with God.

2 Chronicles 16:9 says:

9 For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

Did you know that God's eyes roam throughout the earth, searching for people whose hearts are fully committed to him? [Pause]

And what does God do when he finds such people? He strengthens them.

Another way to translate this verse into English would be to say, "The eyes of the Lord go to and fro in all the earth that he might show himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are perfect towards him."

It's not just that God strengthens people whose hearts are fully committed to him, it's that <u>he shows himself</u> to be strong on their behalf. [This is a hithpael verb conjugation, which means God himself is exerting His mighty power on behalf of those who have fully committed their hearts to Him.]

In other words, God actively searches the earth, looking for people on whom He can pour out his favor.

In Noah's day, the eyes of the Lord found only 1 person who would respond the right way to his grace. And God poured out his favor upon that one man, and his family, in a mighty way, so that they and a remnant of the animals might be saved in the ark while the rest of the world was destroyed in a massive flood.

That is astounding and very sad to think about. Only 1 person stood out.

What about today? Do you think there are more people whose hearts are fully committed to God than there were back in Noah's day?

I suspect there are. It was a game changer for all of us when God himself came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. When Jesus lived as one of us and then died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead and ascended into heaven and then sent his Holy Spirit on those who believe in Him. It really is the presence of God's Holy Spirit in our hearts that enables us to respond better to God's grace today.

So, how's your heart looking? As God's eyes are roaming the earth even now, do they see in you a heart that is fully committed to God?

You know we can't hide anything from the Lord. Before a word is on our tongue, he knows it completely. He is familiar with all our ways. Our hearts are laid bare before him – the good, the bad, the beautiful and the ugly. God sees everything that is there.

Is your heart fully committed to him as Noah's was? Are you willing to surrender your will and your way so that you can respond to God's favor with obedience as Noah did?

Will you do everything He asks of you?

CONCLUSION

I started out today sharing my experience of hearing 2 preachers who stood out to me from all the others I've heard over the years. It doesn't mean the others were bad. In fact, some of the other preachers drastically changed the trajectory of my life.

But there was something about God's spirit being tangibly present in a quiet, peaceful and very real way that stood out to me in those 2 messages.

One of them spoke of how God's blessings, or favor, flow lavishly down upon us, when we, God's people, dwell together in unity.

Our church is standing at a crossroads today, and how we navigate will determine what happens to us in the years to come.

In the announcements today, Jeff spoke of how the Beacon street house has been put on the market. Lord willing, we will soon have a small windfall from the sale of that property.

Are we going to fight about what to do with the proceeds? Will we dig in our heels and say, "It has to be my way and it has to be what I want done with the money?" Or will we listen deeply to other perspectives and even the voice of God as we make those decisions? Will we trust our leaders to prayerfully take all voices and needs into consideration and then yield to the decisions made?

How we navigate the competing priorities will determine a lot about whether God's blessings can flow down upon us and whether God's favor can rest upon us, enabling us to be a blessing to the city of Cupertino and beyond.

But our unity or lack thereof, is not just limited to what we do internally as West Valley Pres. We are also supporting the planting of a daughter church West Valley Neighborhood Church. Some of us might have ideas for how we think they should be doing it. Maybe we think they should be doing it like us, right? Because our way of doing church is the right way to do church! Yes? NO!

God has brought Pastor Caitlin and Joel here for such a time as this. As our congregation has declined and aged over the years, God's grace has come to us with our New Church plant. But their methods and approach are going to look different than ours. They have to do things differently because doing it the way we've always done it, doesn't work for a culture and a generation that is different than ours.

Do your kids do things the way you have always done them? Probably not. Do they want your fine China and your silver as you try to downsize? Possibly, but possibly not. Why, wouldn't they want that stuff? Because they live in a time and culture that does things differently than we did.

If we are critical of the next generation either in our homes or in our church and we try to tear them down because they are doing things differently than we have done, then we are not living in unity with them. If we gossip about them behind their back because we don't have control over what they are doing, then we are not living in unity with them.

Unity doesn't mean we do everything the same way. We don't all have to play the same note to make a beautiful tune. In fact, if we are all playing the same note, we won't have much of a song to sing. Think of a musical chord. If we play a C and and E and a G, we have harmony. There are 3 different notes, but together they make a beautiful sound. We could even add in a Bb for extra effect.

There is room in God's kingdom for a church plant to try new methods. Jesus used new methods in his day, and it got him nailed to the cross. We don't want to nail our new church plant to the cross.

If with our words and our prayers and our actions we do everything we can to build them up and support them, to make room for them, to in love, prefer their needs over own as we often do for our own children, if we do that, then we are choosing to live in unity with our daughter church. I am confident that God will show himself strong on all our behalf.

It's interesting that 2 men stand out in my mind, but I can only remember1 of the messages preached. Perhaps it was for such a time as this that the Lord brought back to mind the words of that one message.

Listen again to the words of Psalm 133

1 How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!
2 It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.
3 It is as if the dew of Hermon
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For there the Lord bestows his blessing,
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How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!
For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

Let's Pray: Lord, would you speak to our hearts. Search us and show us if there is anything we are doing that grieves your heart. Give us the courage we need to face and change what is unpleasing to you so that we can live in unity both within our own congregation and also with our daughter church. As your eyes roam throughout the earth looking for those whose hearts are fully committed to you so that you might show yourself strong on their behalf, would your eyes find us. Would your favor rest upon us and upon Neighborhood Church so we might all be pleasing in your sight. May your blessings and life might flow lavishly down upon us as we seek to live in unity with one another. We ask all this for the sake of your name and your kingdom. In Jesus name, Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Numbers 6

24 "'The Lord bless you and keep you;
25 the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
26 the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.'