

Welcome

Did you ever read or hear about an ornamental crystal ball starting a house fire in Wisconsin? Apparently, the sunlight was streaming through the house window and hit the uncovered crystal ball which then emitted a stronger ray resulting in a couch catching fire. No wonder the Delton Fire Department in Wisconsin put out a warning the following March “to keep items like ‘crystals, mirrors, glass ornaments and even bottles’ out of direct sunlight and away from flammable things. ‘These items can act just like a magnifying glass and focus sunlight so that the energy, which would normally be spread out over a wide area, is delivered to a much smaller point.’”

I walked around my home after this to make sure I didn’t have any crystals, mirrors, glass ornaments or bottles sitting in the direct sun which could potentially cause a fire. Here I thought I only had candles or open flames to worry about.

Reflective light can be helpful if it’s used properly. A mirror can help brighten a room if it’s in the right place. Crystals can reflect a ray of colorful light if properly placed as well.

There is a small town in Norway which is nestled between two mountains. Because of this, it sits in a shadow for half of the year from October to March. In 2013, the town set up three large mirrors on top of the mountain to reflect light from the sun down to the town square during these darker months.

That’s pretty crazy how strong reflective light can be!

If you have ever stayed in a basement, even if there’s windows, it’s still pretty dark. Our home basement we called the catacombs was pretty dark even with six decent size windows. We had to strategically place lights and reflective objects to make the rooms brighter and not so sad looking. It was helpful to have light reflect and brighten our home. There are certain times of the year that the sunlight would shine perfectly through the windows in the morning and evening making the rooms bright, warm, and welcoming. I enjoyed sitting by the window during that time of day.

Today we’re exploring how God’s love reaches the world -- through us. Like a mirror, we’re called to reflect God’s love to the world around us. We don’t always do that, so we’ll explore what keeps us from reflecting God’s love to our world. And we’ll see how Jesus shows us what a faithful reflection of God’s love looks like. Are we people of God who reflect God’s love, grace, and hope to other people around us? We’ll also see how the church, the gathered believers of Jesus, must reflect his image to people, the community we are part of, and the world around us.

On that note, I want to invite you to sing with us. Nathan is going to lead us in songs of God's people. Let's stand, if you are able to and sing together!

Message

Today is the second Sunday of Lent, which is a six-week journey we take with Jesus to the Cross. It's a season we set aside each year for reflection, a time to ask ourselves if we're living in faith, both as individuals and as a church family.

Our series this year is called Broken Promises. Each week, we're exploring one of the covenants God made with the people in the Hebrew Bible. We'll see how - and why - the people failed to keep those covenants. That's our passageway to our own reflection.

We're also going to see how Jesus kept each of these covenants in his own life and ministry. This is a reminder for us that we're not on this journey alone. We're always following our leader, Jesus. It's his faithfulness that enables our life of faith. It is in our faithfulness to come to the Light, Jesus, that reveals we have the safety and security to explore our own failings. Jesus' love and faithfulness create space for us to be honest about our own sin so that we can confess it and turn to him. Last week, we began with how God's vision encompasses every human person. This week, we will explore how God intends for us to reflect God's love to every human person.

I'm kind of nervous whenever people interact with me. I'm an introvert. I am also an Enneagram 5, which means I enjoy being alone and interacting with others can be draining to me. There are some days at work where I am so stressed and kind of frustrated. One day when I had a lot of work and a bunch of deadlines. It's one of those days you keep getting interrupted. I was just trying to focus on the task at hand without breaking down. I felt so stressed and kind of angry. Here comes another interruption from another department. The person tells me I bring calmness to their day because I radiate or reflect a peaceful and kind spirit. I didn't feel that way at that moment and I was surprised that my demeanor was still pleasant. It was nice to be told that I didn't reflect anything angry or negative.

It is kind of crazy to think that we actually reflect, radiate, or emanate a feeling or energy. We talk about vibes and senses. Do we vibe with someone? What does our senses say about the vibe or energy we feel from a person, group, or environment?

If someone is really mean or hurtful, I'm not going back to that place unless I really, absolutely have to. Native Americans have an Indian Health Service lady who is always mean. You try to avoid them like the plague. It's a sad fact that even shows up comically in a scene on the tv show, Reservation Dogs.

What type of energy or feeling do you think you reflect? Why do you think that would be important?

Turn with us to Genesis 12:1-4a

The beginning of Genesis starts with a panoramic picture of God at work and what is God's vision for the world. Last week, Pastor JR, discussed the beginning of Genesis and asked, "Do I trust God's vision for our flourishing?" Sadly, humanity does not and sin becomes "rejecting God's vision for the human community." From the beginning God's love is reflected in how God created humanity. In that picture, humanity fails to reflect God's love by the act of disobeying God. God time and time again redeems distorted humanity in hopes that they would reflect the light of God to the world.

We get to Genesis 12 and the perspective closes in and is placed on one family. We meet Abram as he is called by God to leave the safety of his homeland and travel to a new place he's never been before. God tells Abram, "go" to a place that he has yet to see, he will be blessed by God and he will be a blessing to others as well. Abram at the young age of 75, along with his family, left home becoming an alien. God uses this immigrant or sojourner to serve as a witness of God's blessing. God looks through the subject Abram and draws attention to what Abram will do for others around him. Not only that, God promises Abram's and his wife Sarai, a childless family, that they will create a great nation.

Let's read together: "The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.' So Abram departed as the Lord had instructed, and Lot went with him."

- Genesis 12:1-4a, New Living Translation (NLT)

The Israelites and Near Eastern people understood blessings to be personal, favorable, and reciprocal because there was first a foundational mutual and kind relationship with one another. Blessings meant more than wealth, prosperity, and success. The blessing bestowed continued through the faithful life of the person and their descendants. God intended for the light of God's blessing to shine onto Abram, and then for Abram to reflect that light to the rest of God's creation. The use of this story connects all of humanity to God's blessing. God also uses those who intend to curse Abram to deflect off Abram and to be captured back to those who may curse Abram. God's covenant with Abram and the blessings that accompany it is the basis of Hebrew history and faith.

This story of Abram was an important text to the early Christians because it tells of how God's blessing became universal. God was not limited to one person, one family, one nation, one

ethnicity or culture. We are reminded of our Christian history. This Christian history connects with people who are aliens, strangers, native-born, and foreigners. Our ancestral faith reveals migration, relocation, and exile occur whether it is the physical act of leaving one's homeland or a spiritual and inner departure to find inner freedom. Connection with God is understood in each context.

God's presence in the world is connecting the lived experiences and creating space for community as it was in the beginning and bringing forward a blessing. Dr. Kathleen O'Connor writes in her commentary of Genesis, "Always the impulse of genuine Christian faith is active generosity toward the neighbor, particularly the poor and the most vulnerable, no matter their national, ethnic, economic, or social identity." -- Kathleen O'Connor You are faithful followers when you reflect who God is-as one who extends unbiased blessings.

Our life as people of God is a continued journey with God where we must be faithful and follow.

We can also use our voice for reflection. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) published an article, *Singing about singing: using the voice as a tool for self-reflection* explains how a person's voice is part of their individuality - our voice while singing and speaking can tell of our emotional state and is reflective of our social and cultural identity. I think when we sing together it can reflect a beautiful image of God shining and working in the world. It is good when we sing together - we combine our voice to connect and express to others a loving and redeeming God.

Song

It takes time to know how the sun will reflect perfectly. It took time for me to figure out how the sun would shine through our basement windows. I would adjust the blinds throughout the day to get the best rays of the sun. I figured out each season and moved the reflective objects so that it would radiate best throughout our home. I even would move my plants around so they would benefit from the sunlight.

If you are unsure if you are reflecting goodness... know that it takes time and is a process of learning. Remember, the Israelites and Near Eastern people understood blessings meant it was personal, favorable, and reciprocal. We see that relationships take time and reflecting God's love and blessing takes time to build a personal, mutual, and kind relationship.

Turn with us to [John 3:1-17](#).

John's perspective zooms in and is placed on one guy, this Jewish leader, Nicodemus who is inquisitive about who Jesus is. John tells us Nicodemus is a well-established, knowledgeable Jewish leader who is also a Pharisee. The other Pharisees John introduces us to put a lot of stock in their lineage -- they're God's people because they can claim Abram as their ancestor. But

Jesus criticized them again and again because they weren't fulfilling God's covenant with Abram. Rather than reflecting the light of God's love to the world around them, they had become selfish and unjust. Now, here comes Nicodemus and we wonder how he will approach Jesus? Does Nicodemus come ready to reflect God's love to the world? Or is he too wrapped up in the identity he's built for himself?

We read in the New Testament:

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."

The image we see of this night encounter is Nicodemus coming out of darkness and coming to the Light, Jesus. We see that Nicodemus recognizes Jesus comes from God by using the designation "Rabbi" and acknowledging the miraculous signs Jesus has done is because God is with him.

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

Look at how differently Nicodemus responds compared to Abram. I'm thinking out loud... it's kind of difficult for me to fully trust God when I have no idea where I am going or what I need to do. You mean I have to be born again? Does that mean to have a new life and identity? Is that something Nicodemus is *really* ready to give up?

Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

-John 3:1-8 New Living Translation (NLT)

Jesus doesn't tell Nicodemus that he can't be Jewish. We don't need to let go of our ethnic identity. Dr. Walter Bruggemann helped me to understand this, "[Jesus] uses the language 'born again' or better, 'born from above' born of God, birthed by God's goodness, recreated with a new identity by God's generous mercy." -- Walter Bruggemann Jesus tells Nicodemus that being born of water and Spirit brings about a new life that is not from the mortal world. That might mean this new life, this rebirth, could cost Nicodemus his position, his power, his privilege. Becoming someone who cares about the 'we' more than the 'me' might change his life so much it feels like he was born again. What does this new life look like?

In Galatians, Paul describes this new life. He says the Holy Spirit gives us a life that “**produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.**” -- Galatians 5:22-26, (NLT)

We come to understand that we must reflect God’s love and mercy to the world because we are now born of water and Spirit. Jesus’ miraculous signs reflected proof of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is reflected when the body of Christ, the church lives out the gift of the Holy Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Our mortal ways of rejecting God’s vision for humanity harms, divides, and brings others down. When we trust God’s vision for humanity, the harmful sins are no more because it has been washed away with our heavenly birth from above. We get rid of the curses of power, privilege, entitlement, and money. And in our world, doesn’t that sound miraculous?

Our ancestral patriarchs and matriarchs remind us that God created us to reflect God’s blessings to the world. We must have a personal, mutual, and loving relationship with God. A journey with God is not one sided. To have faith like Abram consists of journeying with God and reflecting the image of God who loves the world. John tells us about Nicodemus to remind us that in order to reflect the proper image of God, we must be born of water and Spirit. Jesus sees us in all our limitations and calls us to return to God. “**God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.**” (John 3:17 NLT) This Lenten journey, we learn that to be God’s people, born of water and Spirit, we must reflect God’s non-condemning love and blessings to the world around us.

Communion + Examen

God's love is reflected to every person. One way we can reflect God's love is by gathering at the table, to receive communion of bread and drink.

What ways this week have I reflected God's love to people I know and don't know?

How can I build up my relationship with God to become personal, mutual, and loving?

What spaces that have been darkened by the world's concern of power, privilege, entitlement, and money can I reflect God's love and blessings?

In the second week of Lent, what ways do I reflect being born of water and Spirit?