**Sermon Series *— Experiencing God*  
Sermon #15: “Where Are You Looking?”  
May 1, 2022**

John 21:17-23

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Slide** | **Sermon** |
| 1 | Title Slide |
| 2 | Introduction – This is an interesting end to John’s gospel. It ends with peter’s redemption and Jesus’ instruction to Him. But it also ends with Peter being more concerned about the disciple John, then the words Jesus had just given to Him.  Here is the gist of these verses:  First, Peter is hurt by Jesus asking him for a third time if Peter loved him. For Peter, it was as if Jesus no longer could believe him. But we know what is going on here. Peter had denied knowing Jesus 3 times and it is Jesus’ way and a strong demonstration of how important it was for Peter to definitely reaffirm his love and loyalty to Christ. The question that seems to be on Jesus’ mind is, “Can Peter be trusted to be the disciple Jesus calls him to be?” Recall that Jesus says that Peter will be the leader of His church. Jesus seems to want Peter to know he is committed enough to follow Him. Therefore, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loved Jesus, each for the 3 times he denied Jesus. But Peter is grieved by the third question. Perhaps Peter didn’t realize Jesus ‘ desire for Peter to be absolutely sure within himself. But Peter says for a third time he does love Jesus. The result is that Peter will tend and feed Jesus’ sheep. I take “Jesus’ sheep” to refer to all those that would become Jesus’ followers, the Church.  The next part of the scripture is a bit odd to me. Jesus says that when Peter was younger he dressed himself and went where he pleased. But when he gets old someone will dress him and lead him where he doesn’t want to go. Then the gospel writer says this indicates the type of death Peter would glorify God. Now, I just didn’t see this connection. So I researched it a bit. This is what I came up with. The term to “tie a belt” around someone is obvious – it means that the person cannot or is not allowed to go on their own. So, in this case it means Peter is detained or arrested. And “lead wherever you don’t want to go,” is Jesus telling Peter he will have some type of violent death. Tradition tells us Peter was crucified upside down on a cross made in the form of an X. Peter seems okay with this prediction but is more interested in what will happen to John. But Jesus in effect tells Peter that is none of his concern. |
| 3 | So what do we get from this passage of scripture today? How does it relate to us?  First, it means the first thing you do after God speaks to you is critical.  When Jesus had told Peter what he wanted him to do – feed and tend the believers and the type of death he would have, it was a time of Jesus opening up the future for Peter – the great leader he would be but also the difficulty he would face. Yet Peter let that sit and was more concerned about John, Jesus’ beloved disciple, and wanted to know about John’s future.  How human it is to compare ourselves with others and how their lives are compared to others. There is something important to our egos to hope that we get the best assignments, the best jobs, the best husband or wife, the best children, the best place to live, even the best church to attend. Did God heal another’s servants, loved ones and not ours? Did God let my ministry friends get the limelight and I had to serve smaller churches? Peter was caught up in comparing himself to this other disciple whom Jesus loved. Remember Peter and John, along with James, were part of Jesus’ inner circle. I think that meant there was a bit of competition among them, at least in Peter’s mind, about how they would lead Jesus’ ministry. Peter was interested in comparing his assignments with that of John’s.  But Jesus had different plans for them: they would walk different paths of ministry that would enrich their lives. Jesus knew how dangerous it is when a servant takes his eyes off God to focus on a fellow servant. |
| 4 | What is God calling you to do to serve Him? Are you developing your love relationship with God so that you hear what God wants you to do right here and right now?  Are you focusing on another servant and being envious of the way you see God blessing his/her life? Are you focusing on another church and feeling that is the kind of church I should be a part of?  When we take our eyes off of God and our relationship with Him and look at others who seem to have it better than us, then we open ourselves up to trouble. |
| 5 | When Jan and I were married, I answered the call to ministry, and she felt her call was to be a great wife of a preacher. After all, that’s the example she grew up with. Her father was a Methodist minister, and her mother was a supportive spouse. (In those days, churches got a minister and his spouse all for one salary. And often times the spouse served in various ways that grew the church as well.) But in my situation, Jan got a call to preach, and we pursued that call. As time passed, it became obvious that she was a great preacher and in high demand. At that point our appointments were based on where God and the Bishop wanted Jan, and my appointments were made in the general area that she was assigned. Thus, I had to commute to my churches and community.  Now, I was fine with that because Jan had a way of ministry that spoke to more people than me. But I had to deal with my church people who didn’t like me not living in the parsonage, not being in their local community, not having my family going to the same schools their children attended. At times I took my focus off my assignment and let these issues become my focus. When I let that happen, my ministry suffered. But then I remembered that it really doesn’t matter the size of the church, nor how far I had to travel, nor the salary I received. What mattered was that God placed me at those churches and, like all churches, they needed leadership and the proclamation of the Gospel. And when I refocused on God’s assignment for me, then I and my ministry flourished. I was more content, and I could see how God was using me. |
| 6 | Do you have your focus on what God wants you to do? Or are you focused upon others that seem they are getting a better deal from God? Don’t be fooled! Every assignment from God has its challenges, but if you are focused on what God calls you to do, you will be enriched and feel close to God and know God’s love and grace. If we focus on others and other people’s churches, then we will struggle mightily and not enjoy the blessings God has for us when we follow his will.  Amen |