

“The Monday Connection”

Acts 19:23-41/Luke 10:29-37/Amos 5:21-24/Psalm 1:1-3

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1st Presbyterian Church of Sharon

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I. Introduction

A long time ago in a distant land there was a community of ducks. And it was like most communities. Monday through Friday adult ducks worked and their ducklings went to school. Some kept their nests clean, and others not so much. They paid their bills and their taxes. Families went for swims together on Saturdays; adults in front and ducklings following. And on Sundays many went to church.

One Sunday when the duck pastor was quacking his sermon, a majestic eagle soared overhead, carried high by the warm winds. Trained to be on the lookout, all the ducks saw the eagle and got a little nervous. The pastor stopped preaching and also watched the eagle soar high above.

Inspired by the eagle, the pastor began to preach again. He said, “Ducks, YOU have wings. Ducks with wings YOU can soar. Ducks with wings YOU can soar just like that eagle.” All the ducks quacked “Amen.” And after worship the pastor and the ducks waddled home.

Often the connection between what we say we believe and how we live is hard to make. It’s the strange ironies like: the teacher who rarely reads, the doctor who’s a terrible patient, the chef who eats TV Dinners at home. Sometimes connections to our lives simply evade us.

One of the most famous disconnects is in the movie *The Godfather*. Michael Corleone is the ascending head of the Corleone crime family. In the scene he’s in church participating in the baptism of his godson as his men are out murdering all his rivals. The scene is so powerful because as he recites prayers and a confession of faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, there are cut aways to the violence. There is an utter disconnect. And as the Christian baptism is going on, you know Michael Corleone is being baptized himself into the darkness of the mafia. There is no connection between confessing and life, between Sunday and Monday.

II. Texts and Exegesis

We are very “old school” Presbyterians this morning with readings from Psalms, the Old Testament, a gospel and the New Testament. And all the readings are about the connection between the faith we say we believe and the way of our lives.

Psalm 1 is an introduction to the whole book of Psalms. As a Psalm it would be read or chanted or sung in the Temple. In fact, some churches sing the Psalms now. So this is part of faith in a community that worships God. It's about Sunday.

But the text itself is about more than that. It announces a blessing for a particular way of life. In God's creation, the flow of things in life goes a certain way. And in the end it does not go well for the wicked and sinners and those who scoff at God's way of life. But those who read and study and do the way of God are like flowing streams in the desert which produce fruit and life in season and out. The Psalm makes the clear connection between faith and life, Sunday and Monday.

We see the same thing in the famous text from the prophet Amos. He speaks a clear, hard word to people who were busy with religious rituals on Sunday, but then lived selfish and corrupt ways on Mondays. Speaking with the voice of God, Amos says God hates and rejects all religious festivals and worship services and sacrifices and prayers and songs. They are rejected because the people are selfish, abuse the weak, and corrupt the justice system. "Rather," Amos roars, "let justice roll down like a waterfall, and faithfulness like a roaring river." To God the connection between Sunday and Monday is everything.

The gospel reading from Luke is also well-known. In fact, it's so well-known we tend to not really listen and wonder about it. In the context, Jesus is having a conversation with a very serious religious scholar. The question is, "What must I do to live in the salvation of God today and into the future?" The answer, of course, is to love God and love your neighbor. All 613 commandments in the Old Testament come down to that. And the scholar knows the answer.

But the religious scholar is not done. He wants to prove how religious he is. So he asks Jesus a hotly debated question; "So who's my neighbor?" What's going on is that the scholar wants to hide behind the walls of religion and talk theology. So Jesus tells the parable of The Good Samaritan. And in the end Jesus says, "Don't just talk about theology and faith and God like the priest and Levite who 'pass by on the other side.'" Rather, go and do likewise. Be the Samaritan. Be a neighbor." The connection between Sunday and Monday matters to God.

And in the last text, we find Paul in the city of Ephesus. He's on his second mission trip. And he's been in Ephesus two years. A church has started and grown. Paul has preached and taught and done miracles and cast out demons.

And evidently as the growing number of Christians in Ephesus lived out their faith on Mondays it was catching people's attention. Christians were living differently than the pagans there. In fact, it caused a riot.

The issue was that people got concerned that Christian faith was undermining their religion and their economy and their identity. Ephesus was home to the temple of the goddess Artemis, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The temple was also part of the Roman banking system. Trusting the security of the building and the temple guard, kings and

the wealthy deposited vast wealth in the vaults there. And Roman bankers supplied loans from those deposits. So the Temple of Artemis was a source of economic, religious, and public pride.

But as Ephesians became Christians and left their pagan beliefs it became a threat to that pride. It threatened the large silversmith trade which made idols of Artemis. It threatened the Ephesians' religious belief in Artemis. And it threatened their identity as the home of the temple of Artemis. Perhaps it would be like an explosion of Browns fans living in the heart of Pittsburgh. And so people got all worked up and a riot happened.

In the end the town clerk gets the crowd's attention. First he appeals to their pride: "Everyone knows Ephesus is the home of the great Artemis. This Christian faith is no threat to that." Then he talks religion; "This new religion has not robbed the temple bank nor blasphemed the great goddess." And finally he speaks a veiled threat; "There are appropriate, peaceful, legal channels to express your concerns, and it's not this riot. The Romans do not put up with riots, especially in a city with a Roman bank. We would do well to immediately disperse." And so they did.

There would have been no riot in Ephesus had the Christians there lived as only as Christians on Sunday, and then as good, pagan Ephesians on Monday. But they did not do that. Rather they began to live as Jesus encouraged, "You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-16). The connection between Sunday and Monday was growing in Ephesus.

III. Brief Theological Reflection

I think we know the connection between Sunday and Monday matters. I think we know that Christian faith is not just about church on Sunday but also following Jesus on Monday. I think we know it can be a challenge. And I think we know, if we are honest, at any time we are either moving in the direction of a greater connection between Sunday and Monday or drifting away from it.

A whole series of sermons could be preached on how to strengthen the Sunday-Monday connection. But today is just a paragraph. In my experience and observation, the Sunday-Monday connection is strengthened by devotional life, Bible reading, and prayer. It's strengthened by worship and active involvement in a church community. And it's strengthened by what we do: generosity, kindness, fairness, and mission. Our hearts and minds and souls are shaped by who and what we surround ourselves with. And we need to pay attention, because like the Ephesians, we are surrounded by pagan values and beliefs, including some that claim to be Christian and are not.

So I was pondering a "big" story to conclude this sermon. But then I heard a small, everyday story. And the more I thought about it, the more it seemed right. It seemed right because so often the connection between Sunday and Monday is not something big, but rather something smaller, one person, one choice, one day at a time.

A member of our congregation recently shared the following experience with me and gave his permission for me to share it with you. He told me that, a few months ago, he and his wife decided to finish part of their basement. They met with a contractor and agreed to the cost of materials and labor, and also on a start date.

When the contractor arrived at their home a couple weeks ago to start the work, he informed the homeowners that he was surprised to see how significant the price reduction was when the store applied his contractor discount to the material he purchased. He added that, of course, he would be passing the savings along to the homeowners, thus reducing the overall cost of the project. Now, no one would have known if the contractor had simply pocketed the savings. So the homeowners expressed their appreciation for his integrity and transparency. In response, the contractor stated simply that he and his wife are “practicing Christians” and that this was the right thing to do.

“Practicing Christians.” I think that’s a way to say, “we’re living the faith, and there’s a connection between Sunday and Monday.” Indeed, there is.