SERMON NOTES – 10/11/26

THE STORY OF YOUR LIFE – 'Conflict'

Exodus 5:1-9

Big Idea

Every good story involves **conflict**. Without challenges, obstacles, and struggles, there is little opportunity for a character to grow or change. The same is true of our lives. Following Jesus doesn't exempt us from suffering or difficulty, but God can work through those experiences to shape us into the people we were created to become. **The ultimate purpose of our story isn't simply reaching a happy ending—it's the transformation of our character along the way.**

Conflict Is Essential to a Good Story

- Throughout this series, we've defined a story as **a character who wants something and overcomes conflict to get it**.
- Most of us naturally avoid conflict. We prefer comfort, predictability, and circumstances we can control.
- Yet conflict is what moves a story forward. Storytelling instructor Robert McKee compares conflict's importance to storytelling with the importance of sound to music.
- Without challenges to overcome, there is little opportunity for meaningful growth or transformation.
- What makes a compelling story isn't simply what the character accomplishes, but **who the character becomes through the experience**.

The Hard Work of the Middle

- Donald Miller compares living a meaningful story to paddling a canoe across a lake.
- At first, the distant shore seems relatively close. We imagine reaching our destination quickly and enjoying the rewards.
- But the journey is usually longer, harder, and less rewarding than we initially imagined.
- Miller reminds us that the real significance of a story isn't found in its ending, but in **the character being shaped through the difficult work of the middle**.
- For Christians, that transformation means becoming increasingly like Jesus—whose own ministry involved tremendous conflict and sacrifice.

Sometimes the Difficult Road Changes Us

- Donald Miller describes a four-day hiking expedition through the Andes Mountains to Machu Picchu.
- Although there were much easier ways to reach the destination, his group chose a demanding 26-mile journey through mountain passes and miles of steep stairs.
- Their guide explained that the difficult journey would help them appreciate the destination in a way that taking a train or bus never could.
- The experience changed the hikers. They arrived not simply having reached their destination, but having become different people through the journey.

- **Conflict can deepen our appreciation, develop our perseverance, and transform our perspective.** Sometimes the difficult road teaches us what the easy road never could.

God Doesn't Cause Everything That Happens

- We sometimes hear people say, **"Everything happens for a reason."**
- But that statement can suggest that God deliberately causes every painful experience, tragedy, or injustice in our lives.
- Some conflicts result from our own poor choices. Others come from decisions made by people around us. Still others arise simply because life is unpredictable and difficult.
- We don't need to believe that God caused our suffering in order to believe that God can work through it.
- **God can bring redemption out of failure, wisdom out of confusion, and new life out of loss.** Conflict can become a catalyst for transformation when we allow God to work within it.

Moses Encounters Conflict

- God calls Moses to lead the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt. After initially resisting God's invitation, Moses finally agrees.
- Accompanied by Aaron, Moses approaches Pharaoh with God's command: **"Let my people go."**
- Pharaoh immediately refuses, declaring that he neither knows nor recognizes the authority of Israel's God.
- Worse, Pharaoh responds by increasing the Israelites' workload, requiring them to gather their own straw while maintaining the same brickmaking quotas.
- Instead of celebrating Moses' leadership, the Israelites blame him for making their already difficult lives even worse.
- Moses then confronts God, asking why God sent him when his efforts seem only to have increased the people's suffering.
- **Answering God's call doesn't mean the road ahead will be easy.** Sometimes faithfulness leads us directly into conflict.

God's Larger Story of Liberation

- Despite Moses' frustration, God reaffirms the promise to deliver the Israelites from Egypt.
- The people, however, are so overwhelmed by their suffering that they cannot even receive Moses' words of reassurance.
- The conflict intensifies through the Ten Plagues of Egypt as Pharaoh repeatedly refuses to release the Israelites.
- Eventually, after the devastating final plague, Pharaoh allows the people to leave.
- The Exodus becomes one of the defining stories of Israel's faith—a story of struggle, liberation, and God's faithfulness.
- The people are shaped by the conflict they experience together, and their deliverance becomes a testimony passed down through generations.

- **God's purposes are larger than the immediate obstacles Moses and the Israelites can see.**

Job: When Suffering Doesn't Make Sense

- The book of Job confronts one of humanity's most difficult questions: **Why do bad things happen, especially to good people?**
- Job is described as a faithful and righteous man, yet he experiences devastating losses involving his family, possessions, and health.
- His friends insist that his suffering must be punishment for something he has done wrong. Job rejects their explanations and demands answers from God.
- When God finally responds, Job doesn't receive a simple explanation for his suffering.
- Instead, Job encounters the reality that God's understanding and purposes extend far beyond what any human being can comprehend.
- Job ultimately acknowledges that there are things he cannot understand.
- **Faith doesn't require us to have answers for every tragedy.** Sometimes it means trusting that God has not abandoned us, even when we cannot understand what is happening.

Praying for Redemption, Not Just Rescue

- We often approach God in prayer asking for our difficulties to disappear.
- We want healing, restored relationships, financial security, relief from suffering, and an end to whatever conflict we're experiencing.
- There is nothing wrong with bringing those desires before God.
- But author Shauna Niequist describes a shift in her understanding of prayer: she realized she had been asking God primarily to **rescue** her rather than **redeem** her.
- Instead of only asking God to make life easier, we can also ask how God might shape us through life's difficulties.
- **The goal isn't simply to escape every uncomfortable situation, but to allow God to transform us through the experiences we face.**

God's Presence Makes the Difference

- Scripture never promises that following Jesus will protect us from every hardship.
- We will experience disappointment, broken relationships, suffering, uncertainty, and circumstances beyond our control.
- But throughout Scripture, God repeatedly promises something far more enduring: **"I will be with you."**
- That promise sustained Moses as he confronted Pharaoh and offered hope to the Israelites even when they struggled to believe it.
- God's presence doesn't necessarily eliminate conflict, but it means we never face our struggles alone.
- Through God's grace, even our most difficult experiences can become opportunities for growth, perseverance, and Christlike transformation.

The Story of the Forest

- We naturally tend to understand life's challenges primarily through the lens of our own experiences.
- But God's story is much larger than any single person's life.
- We are like individual trees growing within God's forest. Each tree matters, but **the story of the forest is greater than the story of any one tree**.
- Our lives are connected to people, communities, and generations whose stories extend beyond our own.
- We may not understand how our individual struggles fit into that larger story, but we can trust that God continues working toward purposes grounded in love, grace, and redemption.
- Recognizing that we are part of something larger than ourselves allows us to face life's uncertainties with greater faith and confidence.

Takeaway

Conflict is an unavoidable part of life, but it doesn't have to be the end of our story. God doesn't promise that following Jesus will eliminate our difficulties, nor should we assume that God causes every painful thing we experience. **What God does promise is to be with us through it all.** Like Moses and Job, we may struggle, question, complain, and wonder where God is leading us. Yet even in those difficult moments, God can be shaping us into the people we were created to become. The point of our story isn't simply reaching the destination—it's the transformation that happens along the way. And when we remember that **we are part of God's much larger story of love, grace, and redemption**, we can face the conflicts of life with courage, perseverance, and hope.

Sources Cited

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Robert McKee, STORY: Substance, Structure, Style and The Principles of Screenwriting
Shauna Niequist, BITTERSWEET: Thoughts on Change, Grace, and Learning the Hard Way