

Soul Searching

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Preacher: Pastor Cathy Hall Stengel

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[2 : 30] Good morning, everyone. How are you? I just was talking about putting my papers here, and there they are. I was just momentarily confused.

It is good to see you on this beautiful morning when it's not raining, the sun is shining, and that means that, yay! I'm hoping that the water level will continue to go down and out of people's basements.

I've heard there's been some flooding, and there were some joking around people kayaking around neighborhoods and canoeing.

And, you know, you remember there was a TV show in Florida where you used a huge, like, pontoon boat to go really high speed around in the, what do you call it, like, in the Everglades.

Anybody remember? Well, I think you could do that in my backyard yesterday, but not today. Okay. I think you could do that in my backyard. This morning, first of all, the peace of Christ be with you.

[3 : 39] And may we just in body and spirit express that peace to our neighbors as they are around us. Just peace and peace and more peace to everyone.

Just glad to have you here. You know, eventually, if we get to the point where we get up and do this, then, you know, that means that us pastors have to talk shorter, pray shorter, preach shorter.

So, don't ask for it just yet. Last week, as we began this series of God's creativity and being drawn in, we talked about dreaming.

And this week, we are going to talk about soul searching and how soul searching helps us to see the big picture. So, hear these words.

Soul searching can sometimes feel like taking a moment to see the big picture. In a world of quick fixes and instant gratification, we sometimes really want to skip the question, what one thing do I need to focus on right now?

[4 : 54] Some people are microscope-focused on something. Other people have 65 things in their vision and others somewhere in between.

Clearing the decks in order to give ourselves space to time and time to think and ruminate, to consider what's necessary, feels sometimes like a luxury that we just don't have.

But creativity experts and Jesus point to the importance of taking reflective time. The importance of that and the project of our lives in work as Christians depends on this work that we do.

Because otherwise, we may be circling our way just like the winds on Tuesday night through our lives. And so, if we can't figure out what is our direction, what do we see and how do we get there, we sometimes don't realize that you don't have to fix everything.

Rich Henderson, are you listening? You don't have to fix everything. So what one thing would we work on at this point in our lives?

[6 : 22] What's the one thing that gets the bigger amount of space? What is it that you feel drawn to in that space?

I invite you to join in this repetitive response.

In the world of the driven, let your love be a given to imagine, to dream, to create, to redeem for the sake of the living.

Let's pray. All knowing God, you are as close as the air we walk through and breathe. Open us to stop and feel your presence this day, so that we might learn that you have for us to do in the midst of so much to do.

Draw us into your quiet patience and give us the courage to wait. Amen. Am I on?

[7 : 42] There we go. The first hymn that we're singing is Make Me a Captive Lord. And the thing that comes to mind is the great paradox of the Christian faith, that the more we die to ourselves, the more alive we are in Christ.

And this particular author does a beautiful job of describing some of those paradoxes. So think about those as you're singing, and I invite you to stand as we sing Make Me a Captive Lord.

Amen.■ Make me captive, Lord, and then I shall be free.

Force me to render up my sword, and I shall conquer me. I sink in life's alarms, and by myself I stand.

I imprison thee within thine arms, and strong shall be my hand. My heart is weak and poor until its master find.

[9 : 21] It has no string of action, sure, it varies with the white. It cannot freely move till thou hast wrought its chain.

Insated with thy matchless love, and deathless it shall reign. My power's faint and low till I have learned to serve.

It lacks the needed fire to blow, and lacks the priest to know. It cannot drive the world until its self be dreaded.

Its flag can only be unfurled when thou shalt breathe from heaven. You may be seated.

Good morning.

[10 : 42] It's nice to see you all here. Good morning. feather. So, through all the midst of our trials, our circumstances, our difficult times, our hope and our salvation rest with Christ.

and he allows us to give back to our church with our time our money and our presence here and that allows us to go out and help others so in this time of offering i invite you to think and pray of how you can be in service to others thank you offertory peace is lead me to the cross and i know you all know it so please feel free to sing along with us or to just meditate on the words savior i come quiet my soul remember redemption's hill where your blood was spilled lord my ransom everything i once held dear i counted all as loss lead me to the cross where your love poured out bring me to my knees lord i lay me down rid me of myself i belong to you oh lead me lead me to the cross who were as i i tempted and tried you are word became flesh for my sin and death now your wisdom everything i want everything i once held dear i counted all as loss lead me to the cross where your love poured out to the cross where your love poured out bring me to my knees lord i lay me down lead me of myself i belong to you your love poured out then my mind lead me of myself lead me of myself lead me of myself indeed lead me of myself lead me of myself lead me of myself lead me to the cross lead me of my heart lead me of member lead me OF myself lead me to the cross

Lead me to your heart Lead me to your heart Lead me to the cross where your love for now Bring me to my knees, Lord, I lay me down Lead me of my side, I belong to you Oh, lead me Lead me to the cross where your love for now Bring me to my knees, Lord, I lay me down Lead me of my side, I belong to you

Oh, lead me Lead me to the cross Thank you Oh, lead me to your love for now Move me You may be seated.

Will you pray with me, please? Father, giver of life, you ask us to be stewards of your abundance, caretakers of what you've entrusted to us.

[17 : 11] Help us to use your gifts wisely. In your name we pray. Amen. What holds us back from connecting with the presence of our creator?

Artist Pablo Picasso said, Every act of creation is, first of all, an act of destruction. That means that whenever God leads us into new territory in our lives, the way we've always done, life will change, something will be different.

Sometimes what holds us back is our fear that if we don't just plow forward in the same old ways, we won't be able to handle the change.

Hear the good news. You can handle changes. Why? Because God is always with us. And as our greeting and passing of the peace today, I invite you to turn to your neighbor and greet them with this assurance.

You've got this. So let's hear you. That's right.

[18 : 32] You've got this. We don't need to know what it is that each of us is struggling to change in our lives in order to create more goodness and freedom.

We just need to remind each other that we are not alone and we're supporting one another. We're going to say it now one more time. Would you greet each other again?

You've got this. You've got this. All right. Amen. We come now in time for prayer for those that are with us and that are in our hearts.

So I ask you to join your heart with mine as we pray. Heavenly Father, in a world that sometimes seems to have gone crazy and lost its way, we come to you today not just seeking answers but seeking the strength and the courage for the days ahead.

We pray for courage to be the people who you have called us to be, people who seek justice and peace through your love for all your people.

[19 : 52] Sometimes we struggle with questions that seem to have no answers and problems that seem to not have solutions. As we look and listen to people around the world, sometimes we seem divided and sometimes at war with one another.

Surely sometimes we test your patience but we know that your love is all-encompassing, never-ending, and always forgiving. We know that you love us unconditionally and we know the struggles with our imperfections and our shortcomings.

But in the end, it's you who love us the most and you're always there waiting for us. God, this morning we lift up the people that we name in our hearts, the families and friends who may be sick or who have lost loved ones.

Give them strength and courage for the days ahead. Find us ways to help all your people. We know that you love us all and consider each one of us an important part of your creation.

Help us to be more like you. Today, God, we also lift up those who are getting ready for vacation Bible school.

[21 : 24] We ask that you give them patience and understanding and unconditional love for those children who they are going to be a role model. We know that you are the father to us all and you love us more than any earthly parent could.

Again, we lift those in our congregation who are sick or hurting in any way. Give them the peace and strength to face their situations.

God, we also lift up those who cause others harm, those who feel the need to put others down through name-calling and jokes. For those people also need your love.

Use the people in their lives to show them a different path, a path of goodness and hope. God, we ask you to help us be agents in this world of change.

Give us courage to speak out about our faith and to teach those around us about your love for everyone. And help us to lead by example, showing and speaking with respect to all.

[22 : 39] In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Good morning.

I'll be reading from the book of Luke, chapter 4, verses 1 through 13. Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for 40 days he was tempted by the devil.

He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, If you are the Son of God, tell the stone to become bread.

Jesus answered, It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone. The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

And he said to him, I will give you all their authority and splendor. It has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.

[24 : 10] Jesus answered, It is written, Worship the Lord your God and serve him only. The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.

If you are the Son of God, he said, Throw yourself down from here. For it is written, He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully.

They will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. Jesus answered, It is said, Do not put the Lord your God to the test.

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. This is the word of our Lord. Thanks be to God. We look out into the world in different ways.

In this particular passage, we read about the devil as that is described. He is described, whatever we want to call.

[25 : 26] We don't talk about the devil a lot. The devil is known by a variety of names. In Hebrew, it's translated as the adversary or Satan or the judge.

There are a lot of ways in which the devil or Satan are translated in the Bible. And here we have Jesus. 40 days in the wilderness, no food.

Who's going to sign up for that? Not me. Well, if we have communion every day, it might be okay. But the reality is he took him up there to test him.

He took him up there to test him. If you're hungry, then turn these stones into bread. It became a performance thing.

Like, poof, you can do it. If God gave you the power, then you do it. Turn it into bread. Then you won't be hungry. Next, he says that he has the power.

[26 : 35] He, being Satan, has the power over all these kingdoms. And he's going to give it to Jesus if Jesus will worship him.

Well, if you go back to creation, who was it that created this world? It was God. And God has always been three in one.

God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Son, and Savior, and the Holy Spirit, always three in one. So what's the devil talking about? What kind of power does he have?

And then, to Jerusalem, where essentially, he's saying to him, throw yourself down off this building, because doesn't it say that not a hair on your head will be hurt?

And this is where we hear a line that has been used throughout a long time. It is said, do not test the Lord your God.

[27 : 45] Or do not put the Lord your God to the test. So, Jesus passed all the temptations. He did not succumb to the power of Satan.

But let's go back a little bit into this passage. The devil used circumstances that are very important to Jesus.

Jesus was called to feed the hungry. So the first thing we hear about is turn these stones into bread, and not only will Jesus eat, but all the people of the world will have bread.

So he's poking at a place that's really important to Jesus. Because Jesus was called to feed the hungry. And then, looking at all the kingdoms of the world, what was very important to Jesus was people gathering in community like this.

Or as simple as around a dinner table. Jesus was called to gather people and tell stories about faith and conviction and help them to grow in their belief in him.

[29 : 05] So the devil is saying, well, let's take one of these other things that Jesus holds very dear and put him, put Jesus to the test.

and then the last one, he's challenging the power of God Almighty when he says, throw yourself off this cliff, off this building.

God will save you with angels and you will not have a foot dashed upon a stone. as Christians who try and hope to live within God's dream, it might be more helpful sometimes if we look at a wide angle lens.

Now, props. So, you know what these are, right?

They're binoculars. So, see, I have to blind myself in order to look in them. But the reality is that when I look through these, much like you look through a magnifying glass, I see individuals, I see people, close.

[30 : 35] Don't worry, it's not too close. sometimes that's the way we look at our lives. We are so focused in that unlike Jesus who could see far and wide and see what it was that he was called to do enough to resist the temptation, it was as though he were looking and I can't quite do this.

I can get one eye. And if I look in here, then first of all, you are much further away. I still can't capture you all, but I know that I could if I use the panoramic view on my phone.

So, does God want us to get that far away so that we see everything? Because if we see everything all the time, I can guarantee you we are paralyzed by what we see.

It's too much. It's too much and sometimes we are overwhelmed. Is anybody overwhelmed by a lot of chaos and people and stuff like that?

There are a lot of people who find themselves least comfortable surrounded by people. Soul searching is what Jesus did for 40 days in the wilderness before preaching his sermon in Nazareth, his last sermon.

[32 : 15] And there it is that Jesus preaches on what his sweet spot is, which is that which he knows he's called to. Feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, provide justice for the people who are outcasts, like the lepers, like the people who have been judged as unworthy by so many.

He was, as he preached, to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, so to let the oppressed go free and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

In these temptations, we overhear Jesus soul-searching. He went, he chose to go 40 days in the wilderness.

Maybe it's to strengthen himself for what he knows is coming. Maybe it is to be mindful of all the suffering of the world and only he can hold it.

And soon, in his death and resurrection, he will be able to show that to other people. And so, in order to tempt someone like Jesus, as we hear, one of the names for the devil is the adversary, and he pulled out three of the most important things to Jesus.

[33 : 39] Feed the hungry, work for justice, gather community of committed disciples. None of those were evil, and Jesus acted on every one of them in his ministry.

He just tried to get Jesus to take his focus and turn it. Now, I have to go the long way.

This is a church window that was given to me a number of years ago, and much like churches had stained glass windows and all the windows, which were beautiful, but they also kept people from being distracted by what was going on outside.

So, like here, when a motorcycle goes by or an ambulance goes by, every head goes that way. Because clear windows, we can see out there.

This was the alternative to stained glass windows, which means that while I can see you, and you can probably see some parts of me, it's distorted.

[35 : 04] This is a prism. Anybody have prisms hanging in their house somewhere? and it deflects light.

It bounces light all over the place of different colors. When you hold it and look down on it in your hand, sometimes you can see how it reflects light.

So, sometimes we look through things in a way that is distorted, not quite seeing. Sometimes we look and it feels like trying to find our focus, trying to find what it is that God wants us to do.

It's scattered all over the place. We can't get our hand on it because if you're looking at the way a prism shines light around, you can point this way and it's over there and it's over here and it's over there.

Just use a laser pointer with a cat, you'll figure it out. Or a dog. sometimes, this is a very vacation Bible school thing to do is toilet paper rolls.

[36 : 15] And sometimes we do this. We teach kids. What are we looking for? If you're at camp, you're going on a bear hunt. Anybody ever done that song, going on a bear hunt?

We are people who can be distracted. And not just the people who have some kind of attention deficit disorder. We who are filled with ideas and thoughts and to-do lists and grocery stores and things to fix at home and things to take care of at a parent's house and things to take care of with children or grandchildren or whatever it might be.

We are so often looking in so many directions that we cannot focus. We don't probably have the time to take 40 days in the wilderness to have God help us to figure out what should I do right now.

What is the thing I should focus on instead of trying to do everything? Because when a church, when a person, when a pastor is trying to do everything, you know what?

They not only get really tired, they don't do any of that well. It's the same with all of us. We are tempted.

[37 : 40] Tempted to think that we can do it all. Tempted to think that we can sort it out. Tempted to think that God's calling on our lives is all of the above.

Not A, not B, not C, not D, which is none of the above and the other which is all of the above. God has given each of us gifts.

And Jesus found his sweet spots in feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless and trying to make sure that people like lepers who were treated without justice or care or handicapped people, blind, disabled, all of that.

He saw them. But he was Jesus. He still is Jesus. And what Jesus wants for you and for me while we're living and no matter how you're feeling or if you might be dozing off out there somewhere, that'll wake anybody up because I'm watching.

Whether you're watching online or from here is that really God's plan for you is what God's plan is for you.

[38 : 58] Your plan is not everybody's plan. Your plan is not all of the above. And as long as you are living, God is calling you to take some time.

Turn off whatever you have playing in the car for a little while. Spend some time at night after the kids go to bed. Turn the TV off for a little while.

Go sit in your backyard when it's not underwater. And there's no mosquitoes. Because I can tell you the one thing that will keep me from focusing on God is mosquitoes.

But the truth is each of us is called to grow gradually. A young man who was attending a church that I served, he was doing his residency here in Buffalo working towards being a surgeon.

So when I met with him and his wife and their children to talk about the baptism of their first child, so we got to know each other. So what do you do it?

[40 : 14] You know, she's a stay-at-home mom who used to be a speech pathologist and hopes to go back to it. He is working towards being a surgeon. So what kind of surgeon? Orthopedic surgeon.

Like, just a regular orthopedic surgeon? Oh, no, no, no. He said, I want to be a joint replacement surgeon. And I was like, well, that's interesting.

How is it that you make a decision to be a joint replacement surgeon? He said, well, I grew up on a farm and we had to build and fix and turn everything into something and use all of our resources.

I love to work on cars. I like to take things apart and put them back together and make them work better. And I am a man of faith and I want to make a difference in this world.

Now, while he could make a difference as an auto mechanic, as we talked last week, he said, no, God is calling me to do joint replacement. And so he has studied and worked and researched and he now not only does joint replacement surgery down in Georgia, I believe, he teaches it, he does a lot of work on it, and I thought, isn't that interesting?

[41 : 31] How people get to where they are going? How is it that people become who they're called to become?

A hairstylist who says, I love working with older people like my grandparents, like my aunt, like my mother, who want their hair done every week.

And some of them live all alone. And I want to be a part of their lives by putting my hands on their shoulders and asking them how they are and talking to them.

And I said, that's your ministry. That's what God called you to do. And her response was, absolutely. It doesn't matter what it is as long as we look with eyes to see, which means getting a lot of stuff out of the way.

which means sometimes saying no, which means sometimes saying yes, which means sometimes taking time away and putting it in perspective.

[42 : 47] Because over these life journeys, the passions, the desires, the things, as I said last week, that light us up, we want to be able to go through that, you know, the security at the airport.

We want to be able to go through that scanner and light that thing up. Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, that, I got it all. I'm following, I'm looking, I'm learning, I'm listening.

Because no matter how old you are, if you're not dead, God is pointing you towards something. And maybe you're already there and praise God for that, but if you're not, let's look, let's pray, and let's go together.

And having said that, before I finish, as we listen to what Jennifer was saying about you got this, this morning is Sandy Clemenhausen's last Sunday with us in worship as she prepares to move in with your daughter, right?

And I think it would be good if we all, look, put your hand up, Sandy. She said, I said, can I say something? And she goes, you can do what you want. Be careful.

[44 : 14] So what I want us to do is turn to Sandy and say, you've got this. Let's pray for Sandy and for us all. Lord, as you take Sandy on this new leg of her journey, may she find comfort in being with family.

May she find once again her place in faith, her place in calling, not just what she's called to, but who she calls and cares for.

Be with us as we miss her. But Lord, guide each and every one of us as we each find find our place, find our picture, find our view, and find you in this life.

Let us not be tempted by looking all around or looking down. May we look for you and find you, for here you are, and we pray, oh Holy Spirit, come to us.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[45 : 43] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. One of the most creative things Jesus did in his ministry was to draw people into fellowship around a meal.

His actions were not what people were used to. He invited everyone to the table. Perhaps he sensed that when the food and drink is filling our bodies, people's guards come down a little bit, and they see their common humanity around their common hungry bodies.

Perhaps that's a good model for this community of faith to think about how we might find new ways to be in community with our neighbors around a table.

So we come now to this table to be reminded of this radical, hospitable, creative Jesus that we all follow. And we follow his example, welcoming everyone who is hungry for God's love, for fellowship, for connection, for inspiration, and for new and everlasting life in Christ.

The Lord be with you. And also with you. Lift up your hearts. Lift up your hearts. Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God. Give us right to give our thanks and praise.

[47 : 12] God sent in motion the grandest creativity project of them all. Light where there was no light, water and land, creatures on foot and wing, beauty and laughter, and God called it all good.

And out of that goodness we came, each blessed with gifts of the Creator. We were invited to begin our lives of creating, making, building, planting, crafting, and fashioning.

Sometimes we get sidetracked. And we forget our true calling. We destroy instead of building up. But you, God, keep preparing our lives, calling us again to the joy of relationship with you.

And so we proclaim with the praise of the saints of all time in all places, saying, Holy, holy, holy, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Your creativity knows no bounds.

[48 : 27] And in the fullness of time, you came to us, fashioned in our own flesh and blood. And sending Jesus, you created human and holy connection and showed us what love looks like in public, proclaiming release to the captives, recovering sight to the blind, preaching good news to the poor, and setting at liberty those who are oppressed.

Jesus promised to continue this work through a new covenant of creativity, sending his spirit to remain and move in and through us.

And on the night in which he gave himself up for us, Jesus took bread. He gave thanks to you. He broke the bread. And he gave it to his disciples.

And he said, Take and eat. This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And when the supper was over, he took the cup.

He gave thanks to you. Then he gave it to his disciples. And he said, Take and drink from this, all of you. This is my blood, which is poured out, a sign of the new covenant for the forgiveness of sins.

[49 : 45] Every time you drink this, do it and remember me. And so what will we do? I invite you to repeat after me.

We will break ourselves open. We will pour ourselves out. In food for the hungry. And love for the stranger.

Just as Christ offered all, So too shall we. We will rise to new life.

We will rise to new life. And commit to create. And commit to create. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us in this moment so that we might know your power and presence in our lives.

Make us one so that we can be used to create your reign on earth as it is in heaven. Let this bread and the fruit of the vine fill us with your spirit for the work of play, of loving creation, and loving each other fully.

[50 : 54] And now, with the confidence of children of God, let's pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Those who are assisting us with the law that's otter Thank you.

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[66 : 47] Thank you.