

Calvary United Methodist Church  
September 8, 2019

**“NO DISTRACTIONS”**  
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

**Children’s Message:**

Genesis 1:27

I invite the children forward for the children’s message. I saw a few children here this morning and invite you to come up on the stage. Come on up here on stage. Good to have you here this morning. Welcome.

A week of school done already, right? All went well? Some new friends? Some new teachers? Less stress? Or at least the worry about what it was going to be like. Well, thank you for coming up this morning.

We are going to talk to you about another story, which is often what we do up here this morning. And it’s about God telling you how you came about. God says this:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

We don’t know necessarily how it all happened, but we have this story that God, the one who created all of us, created a whole great big creation. And if you started at the very beginning of the Bible, it talks about how God created earth, the heavens, and the seas, right? It’s everything around us: the wind and the fire and all those things. And He said He created the birds of the air, right? You got that much of it? He created the animals. Now, there are thousands and thousands of different shapes and different sizes of animals and critters. He created the fish of the sea, but you know what the very best thing God created? Any guess? You and you. You are a gift. You’ve heard that. We are gifts from God to the world around us. And it’s very important. And God not only created you as a gift here, even before you were born God helped to shape you in your mother’s womb.

I want to read this scripture: For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

Wonderfully made...could you imagine that our minds and our eyes and our ears and all the organs that keep us working like a well-oiled machine, we can just keep going and going because God has created us. And to be wonderfully made it means someone says: You are just wonderful. Have you ever had anyone tell you that? If not, I’m telling you: You are just wonderful!

It’s like God’s delight. He’s just so happy. Do you have a moment when you are just delight-

ful, like playing in the snow...not just yet...no snow yet today, right? We'll maybe do it in the leaves first.

And what amazes me when God created us...he created us all different. You've heard the story about fingerprints. Are any two alike? Nope. Millions and billions of people in this world and no two of us have the same fingerprint and we come in different colors and shades, we come in different heights, we come in different weights, we come in different ethnicities and cultures, all around this world.

And God said: I made everybody. That's pretty amazing that God did such a great job of making everybody so wonderful because He says: You are so different from everyone else, this goes for you...you have some gifts, you have some mind, you have some stories, you have some talents, you have all those things that nobody else is like and so you also are part of God's plan to change this world. You'll be able to do things that somebody else has never been able to do. One person working with others at one point invented such things as lights. How about that? And people have learned to do medical things that no one before them ever did, to find cures for diseases and the stories are just endless of what new people today do that people before couldn't do because we are all gifts.

Now, the next one sometimes is hard to believe, but you are beautiful. You know that. You are very beautiful and you are too. You could have said, "You are too, Jeff." Come on, a little help. You are very beautiful. You are a gift of Almighty God and you know what else? You are wonderfully made, you are created by God and I want you to think just someday how special you are because God says: You are special. And I'm thinking so wonderful, this part I love...you are known by God. Wherever you are, this prayer we just said, God goes before you, God's behind you, God's around us.

So when I am out in the woods in the fall and I just like to hike and I like to enjoy the beauty, I could sit down in the quietness, I can talk to God. How do we talk to God? By praying. Did you know there was going to be a test today? You've gotten all these answers correct. That's a good thing. When we pray, it's just like, it's nothing special. It's just talking to God. It's us communicating to God all of our thanks for when I look at the forest and the sky and feel the rain on my skin, all those wonderful things that make this world. But God knows us so much that when we are sad, God says: I'm with you and I want to make you feel happy. And when we are happy, God says: Let me be a part of that and celebrate too.

God's a part of every component of our life because God wants you to know that you are created to be you and no one else. Sometimes I've looked around through life and said: Boy, I wish I could play an instrument like someone or run like someone else or I wish I could do what they do. And God says to me: Just do what you can do. You are not called to be like anybody else. You are called to be you, so are you. Be the best you you can be to make a difference in the world of what we are a part.

And we find that a part of that is by reading God's Word and in a few moments we are going to give the Word, we are going to give Bibles, to those who are entering third grade. But when we get these Bibles, we read God's word, have people read it with us. We do the praying, which is our staying with God, so that we can sort of always be inquisitive.

Have you ever tried to look and find new things? I used to love to watch how things were made in wood shop or I would like to read about things in other places and so when I find that there are things about the world, I also want to thank God and praise God because God has made us as a gift to the world.

I hope I'm around long enough to hear of all the great things you will do with your life, remembering always that God loves you.

**Message:**

Luke 14:25-33

These words are not easy words. I love to think of the loving stories of God, right? We all have them. All those loving message that tell us: I love you; I'm with you; I'm your strength; I'm your shield; word after word tells us all those things. But Jesus was headed to the cross now. He knew that his time was coming to an end here on earth and he had to be certain that somehow the people around him knew that this message he had shared with them for three years was an essential word of God that would forever change the world of which we are yet apart. And he knew if he didn't lay it on them the importance that God is number one and that following Christ's way was number one in their life, then other things would meddle into our lives and we've done it.

We have a very jealous God. You know what jealousy looks like. It can be real ugly and in some places here, I've seen in my own ministry, it can be very dangerous. Spouses, someone is jealous of another and sometimes there are reasons to be jealous and other times it is made up in our own minds where it dissolves relationships.

God says it this way about the interruptions in our life, about the other things that are distractions: our parents, our families, our friends, our work, our employment, our sports, our hobbies...I won't have it. You have heard that in jealousy, right? You are out! I don't trust you anymore. I have given everything for you: a spouse and find you with someone else, someone in a broken relationship, friends, commitments to other groups you are a part of. You are either, like we say all the time: in or out. You are committed or you are not. And God said: I, He used a word I don't...I don't even like to say it. As a kid when we were around our house we were never allowed...we could strongly dislike something, but we weren't allowed to hate it. Hate is an ugly word. He said: You must hate your mother, father, your brothers, sisters, your family, your home, self-worth. What is God saying? He's not really saying to hate as much as: I'm trying to let you know how much I need to be one. I am a jealous God. I won't be second place. I won't be third place. I won't be a leftover.

How many of you like to fill that part of a relationship when you get a call and you know they have called all your other friends and they weren't available so you'll do. Right? You've been there. We've all been there. God says: I won't have it. I simply won't have it. I know you love your family and for us to say: But how can I put them...God says: Look. When you put me first you'll love your family in a greater way. In a greater way because the more you love like God, the more you put God first, the more you'll be sensitive to your family, the more you'll be sensitive to work and the other organizations where you spend your time, where you spend your money and where your commitment is because when God is number one, our whole life has a center of peace that it had nowhere else.

You see, sometimes we want to just say: Well, God wants a little part. So we just come and serve God a little or give God a little and whatever. I love this picture of the Bible. That's sugar coated. Did you ever see a sugar coated Bible? We like to do it today.

I'm amazed in the last two decades or even more many of the ministries will be a special on television and they are not all bad, I'm not saying that. But many have this word: If you follow God, God will bless you. God will grant you prosperity. I'm waiting. Right? God will grant you every desire, every wish.

I was with a mother two weeks ago in this community hospital who has buried three of her four children and one of her grandchildren. Tell that to that mother: everything is fine when you love God. I've travelled enough of this world to know people work from daylight till dark, give everything they have and they've yet to see prosperity. You see, God doesn't promise those things and when we only want that part of God, there is this biblical warning: Sugar coated preaching is dangerous to your soul. It comes from 2 Timothy 4. Look it up yourself. It is better to speak the truth that hurts then heals than falsehoods that comfort and kill.

If you are in a relationship, as much as truth hurts sometimes, once the truth is said we can start making it right again. We cannot continue to think that God only wants to fill a stadium with lovey dovey action because the people of the world around us who are broken, the people that I mentioned last week who are in the desert and sometimes that is us, who are looking for life, we are looking for hope, we are looking for new things, we want the Lord who said to his disciples: Come and follow me and I'm going to show you new life.

When he first called them, do you realize what they gave up? Let your fishing nets, let your families, come and follow me. And although that was good for a couple years, I'm hanging out with the guy who is healing people. He really went big. I would fly in this culture, changing water into wine. Wow! We'll be right there.

It changed on that night of the last supper when he said: I have to tell you, three years later, the time is coming to an end here. I'm going to need you more than ever because I'm leaving and this bread that we are going to eat tonight, it is going to represent my body that is

broken for you and this cup, it's going to represent something you don't want to hear. He didn't tell that at that point within a very short time I am going to be taken away, I'm going to be beaten, I'm going to be arrested, I'm going to be put on a cross and crucified for you. That's a pretty big call.

That night, we could see the guy who says: you know, I've been thinking about another job anyway. Right? I don't know if I want to be...but he was saying: I have good news. No matter what they others think, what I have to tell you is that you can change the world because you are a gift and you are talented, as I just shared with the children.

You can bring life and hope like nobody else can and we live in a world today where too many times we say: What's in it for me, right? What's in it for me? You want me to serve, you want me to teach, you want me to give, you want my presence. What is in this for me?

And Jesus started off by telling the others: you first have to be a servant. Remember the washing of feet? Boy, you want me to wash somebody else's feet? You want me to get down and you want me to get dirty.

And then he shared these stories. Remember he said that you won't want to be with me because there would be a cost. Peter said: Those other people might be weak, but Lord, I won't be like them. And he told Peter the night of the arrest what? Before the cock crows you will deny me three times.

God wants us to take a stand. God wants us, God expects our exclusive...hear that...devotion. When we give preference to anything, our home, our family, our hobbies, our retirement, our joy, whatever it is, it is idolatry. We are committing spiritual idolatry and God displays divine jealousy.

Do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God...from Deuteronomy 4.

Wow! God says: I'm not playing here. I want to be, I need to be, I demand...there are not a lot of demands he has...I demand to be number one.

I put this sign in this photo for distractions. Have you ever been driving and especially if you have highways like this around cities and you are in lane 5 and you need to be in lane one and you got distracted and there is no way you are going to get up there before you get there? And there are all kinds of things going in your mind and it's a reminder that when we get through distractions we can't get where we want to be. I believe by grace for God to get to the Kingdom of Heaven, but we can't get where we want to be by bringing that peace right here if we are so distracted by the world. You and I have things to do and sometimes we get to the point of saying: I've done enough. I've done my time. I've given enough. We don't read the Bible the way we used to as adults. There are very few adults who participate in

Christian education as if we are teaching our children once you get to 12 you really don't need to learn about God much anymore. We don't spend as much time in worship because we have other options.

And this word: Hate. Oh, when I think of that harsh word and God says: I can't deal with this. I give you your very life. I give you the comfort of all that you have and I can't stand where your life is because it needs to be coming home to me.

] You see, God has given us a life that we shouldn't have a lot of worries, but when we don't put God first, everything else becomes a worry for us. We have loyalties and I mean there are many organizations and things and the family and the functions and the finances and all the concerns of the world, they are many. And many again are those folks that simply say: I can draw you to Jesus if I want to take you out and tell you all the good things that will happen with being a part of Christ.

I want to tell you I have been so blessed so much by Christ in my life and I want to tell you I've spent a lot of time in a desert. You've been broken. You don't get your dream college. You don't get your dream date. Your relationship is broken and it's not what you want. Right? Your family struggles. You watch some of your family and friends die from the cancers of the world that eat us up. You watch the addictive sides of society where part of them you see the brokenness and you want to say: Lord, where is all this good? And I still say: Yes, I see it, Lord, because we can choose. We can choose to see. But do you realize how many folks around you are in the desert? And they are looking for you, just you, to be a person of hope.

I went to my home town to see my mother on Friday and I went into a grocery store and a guy saw my shirt and I usually wear some of the Calvary t-shirts when I'm working and it said: Shine for Christ. And he said: Oh, where do you go? And I said: I'm a pastor in Harrisburg. He said: Can I pray for you? And I thought: Here in the store? He came around the counter and he says: I gotta tell you, I've struggled with drugs on and off for my life from...I thought he was like in his 20s, he said: I'm 35, I'm just now getting stuff together. And he had a wonderful prayer for me and I prayed for him. God has relieved him of his addiction and he now has this job which I'm sure is a menial job, but he says: I'm working in my church to help others with addictions.

What is it that God is calling you to do? What is the counting the cost? Will you pray for someone? Will you work with your neighbor? Will you truly love God as your neighbor? Will you truly love the Lord with all of your heart? People around us are in the desert. People in our families and sometimes we're there. We all have those moments.

You see, the call of Christ is for a call of radical obedience. That means setting us aside. Us, our desires. Sometimes...have you ever had to say no to things you really wanted to do? I've had a lot of those "no's" in my life...I want to do something, but you know what? It's

not the time. I'll have to forgo that.

Sometimes it's like we: God, did you really expect to be first in my life? And God says: Yes. You say: Say what, God? You want me to put my family, you want me to put myself, my desires... And God says: I have good news. If you follow me and make me number 1, you'll have the desires of your life.

I remember a comedian years ago. He was a really foul man and he turned himself around to Christ and people wondered how he could do it. They said: Didn't you have to give up your drinking, your partying, your drugs and all that stuff? He says: No, because when I met God I didn't want it anymore.

You see, when God becomes number 1 in your life, we make a difference and I want to tell you...today, God doesn't ask for commitment later...today if you are here, it's your chance to commit and say: God, I'm going to re-up. I am going to be all in for you and this Kingdom wherever I am.

For those of you who received the blast this week, I gave the story about what it was when I was young. There were not swimming pools around my neighborhood. We went to the Juniata River. We went to little mountain streams that were cold and we went to mountain ponds. And when I went to Boy Scout on top of Seven Mountains near State College, the water stayed around 50 to 58 degrees. I get goosebumps just thinking about it. And most people, when you go to get in that water, you do this, right? Mm mm...I think I'll sit for a while outside. Or else you do that jump in and then your body is all exposed. And then you find some sense of comfort.

God is not asking for: well, I just want to be a little Christian. God says to us, to you, to me today: Are you all in? All.

When we make pledges, I don't care what denominational church you are with, churches as for things through your prayers, your presence, your gifts and your service. Are you praying? Calvary needs your prayers. The guy who prayed for me needs your prayers. Your neighbors need your prayers. You need your prayers. Are you praying?

Your presence. I know we are all busy in the summer and when I'm away I try to visit some other churches to get ideas. We are, as I've put in a few times in the blast, we're stronger together, not only in our music, but there is a spirit about a full church that is just different. Do you know that when you are gone you are missed? And if you today are here and you miss a neighbor, instead of calling the office: I haven't seen them, do you know what's going on? How about giving them a call. Right now you know people around you. Give them a call this week and say we miss you.

People never like this one: Our tithes and offerings. Your prayers, presence, gifts. Do you

realize it is \$3700 a day to turn a key into this church? \$3700 to turn the key. We can't do this without your gifts. And it is not about us here, it's about us taking God to people in the desert, the people here who are broken. The children who need Bibles. The children who need to learn about God's love. Without your gifts...and by giving our gifts, it's a reminder to God that we put God first.

And what about your service? I've mentioned again this morning we've had the concerns that we get new leadership within the church. We need you to rise up and simply say: You know what? I'll help. Bible school and Sunday School and Christian Education or work in the kitchen or work wherever, work in the lobby. When I think of people that were called to hang from the cross, I'm thinking: I can't get ushers. Would you like to hang on the cross or would you like to be an usher? Would you like to be beaten and put into prison or would you like to be a greeter? I can't be that greeter. It's a half hour on a Sunday morning. Do you want me to go down that list of what's a lot easier than getting beaten or put in jail or hanging on a cross? There is a lot.

How about finding your place. I don't know what it is. When I was in Colorado Springs visiting, I always visit one of the Methodist churches. This fall I visited Calvary Methodist Church. It's about two blocks from my sisters. This is First Methodist Church. And the mayor of Colorado Springs was there last year and she said: Everything I learned about politics I learned in the church. I don't know if that is good or bad. Her point was that if we want to make a difference, we have to use the power we have. She was speaking that day. Use the power we have for the Kingdom of God.

You all have power, whether you think you do or not, in your family and your friends and your neighborhood. What is the cost and what is it that God's calling you to?

I read in one of my devotionals this past week of a father, actually a family. A family pulled their gifts together, several aunts and uncles, to send their beloved first girl out of their family to college. And they sent her to Duke and everyone is saying she is going to be a doctor, she is going to be a lawyer, one of these powerful things she is going to be. A banker? And the father said: well, she was going to be a banker, but she went to a church her senior year and she is now working in the mission field. How about that?

I don't know what your mission field is. A mission field can be at your bank. It can be a Turkey Hill. It can be a coach for football, baseball, cheerleading, whatever. I don't care where it is. Just know that whatever you are doing you are doing it for Jesus Christ, that you are transforming lives to bring the Kingdom in its fullness.

Scripture reminds us in Jeremiah 29: You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart.

We need to seek God because you and I are a gift of the world to change the world and Jesus

wants us to change the world and now is the time to do it because it is broken. I pray today you will seek God with your whole heart and say: Lord, what is it you want from me? And I pray you will hear.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we thank you and praise you that you would receive all of us, that we are a gift. We are a gift to one another, to the world, an agent of change. Fill us with your Holy Spirit. Touch our hearts. Move us this day, we ask in your Holy Name. Amen.