

Acts 9:1-20
August 19, '18

“THE CAVE”

ONE MORNING, A YOUNG MAN NAMED GRAHAM DROVE TO HIS GIRLFRIEND JONI'S HOUSE TO TAKE HER OUT TO BREAKFAST.

ON THE WAY HOME, THEY PASSED AN ANTIQUE STORE & JONI SAW A LITTLE VASE IN THE WINDOW THAT SHE FELL IN LOVE WITH & THEY WENT INSIDE AND BOUGHT IT BEFORE RETURNING TO HER HOUSE.

AS THEY WALKED IN, GRAHAM SAID, *“I'LL LIGHT THE FIRE WHILE YOU PLACE SOME FLOWERS IN THE VASE YOU BOUGHT TODAY.”*

JONI WENT OUTSIDE TO GATHER SOME FLOWERS & GRAHAM SAT DOWN AT HER PIANO AND AN HOUR LATER, THE FIRE WAS LIT, THE FLOWERS WERE IN THE VASE & THE SONG, “OUR HOUSE” WAS BORN.

MANY OF YOU WILL KNOW THOSE WORDS OF GRAHAM NASH TO HIS GIRLFRIEND JONI MITCHELL AS THE OPENING WORDS OF THE CROSBY, STILLS & NASH SONG “OUR HOUSE.”

*“OUR HOUSE, IS A VERY, VERY, VERY FINE HOUSE,
WITH TWO CATS IN THE YARD, LIFE USED TO BE SO HARD,
NOW EVERYTHING IS EASY 'CAUSE OF YOU.”*

THERE ARE SONGS – LIKE THAT ONE - WHOSE MEANING IS QUITE EASILY DECIPHERED.

YOU READ THE WORDS AND YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHAT THE SONG IS ABOUT BECAUSE IT'S ALL MADE SO VERY CLEAR.

BUT THEN YOU RUN INTO THOSE SONGS THAT CAN TAKE YOU IN ANY ONE OF A DOZEN DIRECTIONS TO TRY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THE SONGWRITER IS SAYING.

TODAY, WE'LL LOOK AT ONE OF *THOSE*.

THIS IS THE SECOND WEEK OF THE THIRD SECTION OF OUR SUMMER SERIES WHERE WE'RE LOOKING AT "*SECULAR MOVIES, BOOKS & SONGS WITH A SPIRITUAL MESSAGE*."

I THINK IT'S FAR MORE ENJOYABLE & CHALLENGING TO FIND A PROFOUND MESSAGE IN A WORK OF ART THAT ISN'T OVERTLY *ATTEMPTING* TO OFFER A PROFOUND MESSAGE.

TURNING TO THESE SECULAR WORKS OF ART ALSO HELPS US OPEN OUR HEART & OUR MIND TO SEE THE SACRED IN THE MIDST OF EVERYDAY SECULAR LIFE.

THERE ARE EVIDENCES OF GOD'S GOODNESS ALL AROUND US.

WE SEE IT IN THE WONDERS OF CREATION & WE SEE IT WITHIN EVERY PERSON WE ENCOUNTER ON OUR JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE.

THAT TAKES US TO THE SONG THAT SERVES AS OUR FOCUS THIS MORNING – "THE CAVE" - BY THE BAND MUMFORD & SONS.

WHILE I KNEW IT WOULD BE MORE CHALLENGING THAN A SONG LIKE "OUR HOUSE," IT WAS A BIT OVERWHELMING TO REALIZE THAT TO EVEN BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THIS SONG, I'D HAVE TO GO TO THE BOOKSHELVES IN MY OFFICE & DUST OFF HOMER'S ODYSSEY & PLATO'S REPUBLIC.

I'D THEN HAVE TO TURN TO MY HOOPLA LIBRARY APP FOR A COPY OF G.K. CHESTERTON'S BIOGRAPHY OF ST. FRANCIS & THEN TO THE LETTER OF JAMES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THEY'RE ALL CLEARLY FOUND & REFERRED TO IN THIS ONE SONG!

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE NO IDEA WHO MUMFORD & SONS ARE – AND I WOULD GUESS THAT WOULD BE MOST OF YOU – THEY'RE A BRITISH BAND THAT WAS FORMED IN 2011.

THERE ARE 4 PRIMARY MEMBERS – MARCUS MUMFORD, WINSTON MARSHALL, BEN LOVETT & TED DWANE.

AS YOU CAN SEE FROM THE PICTURE ON YOUR BULLETIN INSERT, THEY ALL PLAY A VARIETY OF INSTRUMENTS.

THEIR NAME – MUMFORD & SONS - IS SIMPLY MEANT TO INVOKE AN ANTIQUATED FAMILY BUSINESS NAME.

THE SONG “THE CAVE” THAT SERVES AS OUR FOCUS THIS MORNING IS FROM THEIR DEBUT ALBUM ENTITLED “SIGH NO MORE.”

AS I SAID, THERE ARE VERY CLEAR ALLUSIONS TO HOMER, PLATO, CHESTERTON & THE LETTER OF JAMES WITHIN THE LYRICS OF THE SONG, BUT AS I READ IT, I SEE THE STORY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL.

I DON’T THINK THEY’D MIND SUCH AN INTERPRETATION, THOUGH.

IN AN INTERVIEW ABOUT THE MEANING IN THEIR SONGS, ONE OF THE MEMBERS SAYS, “...*SOMETIMES PEOPLE THINK WE’VE WRITTEN A SONG ABOUT SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM THE WAY WE INTENDED IT & I DON’T EVER WANT TO CORRECT THEM.*

WE DON’T WANT TO BE PRESCRIPTIVE IN THE WAY PEOPLE HEAR OUR MUSIC...IF YOU TAKE IT IN A DIFFERENT WAY, THAT’S FINE BY ME.

SO WITH THAT LEVEL OF PERMISSION FROM THE SONGWRITER HIMSELF, I AM MOVED BY “THE CAVE” IN THE WAY THAT IT TELLS ME ABOUT THE APOSTLE PAUL – HIS TRANSFORMATION & HIS MINISTRY.

THIS IS ONE OF THE GREAT STORIES IN THE ENTIRE BIBLE.

IT IS THE ORIGINAL & CONSUMMATE STORY OF CHRISTIAN CONVERSION.

**JUST TWO CHAPTERS BEFORE, WE LEARNED ABOUT SAUL
STANDING GUARD OVER THE COATS OF THOSE WHO WOULD
EXECUTE STEPHEN IN A VIOLENT & BRUTAL FASHION.**

BUT HE'S NOT JUST A PASSIVE WITNESS.

LUKE TELLS US THAT SAUL *"APPROVED OF THEIR KILLING HIM."*

**THEN, AS WE MOVE ALONG INTO THE 8TH CHAPTER – JUST PRIOR
TO THE ONE WE READ THIS MORNING – WE FIND SAUL – *"...RAVAGING
THE CHURCH...DRAGGING OFF BOTH MEN & WOMEN."***

**THEN – IN THE VERY NEXT CHAPTER – WE LEARN OF THIS
REMARKABLE EXPERIENCE THAT SAUL HAD ON THE ROAD TO
DAMASCUS.**

**CARAVAGGIO POWERFULLY DEPICTS THE MOMENT THAT SAUL
WAS KNOCKED FROM HIS HORSE IN ONE OF THE PAINTINGS THAT
HANGS IN "THE GALLERY."**

**IT'S SUCH A STRIKING CHANGE IN PAUL THAT LUKE TELLS US
ABOUT IT IN ACTS, NOT ONCE – NOT TWICE – BUT THREE SEPARATE
TIMES – HERE IN CHAPTER 9 AND THEN IN CHAPTER 22 & AGAIN IN
CHAPTER 26.**

LET'S SAY SOMETHING ABOUT THE SAUL-PAUL THING.

**THIS ISN'T LIKE OTHER PLACES IN SCRIPTURE WHERE
SOMEONE'S NAME GETS CHANGED FOR A REASON – ABRAM TO
ABRAHAM OR SIMON TO PETER.**

**THE NAME SAUL WAS HIS JEWISH NAME & THE NAME PAUL WAS
HIS ROMAN NAME.**

**IT'S NOT - AS IS COMMONLY MISUNDERSTOOD – THAT HE WENT
FROM SAUL TO PAUL AFTER HIS CONVERSION.**

**HIS NAME MAY NOT HAVE CHANGED, BUT EVERYTHING ELSE
ABOUT HIM DID.**

I THINK PAUL FOUND AN EMPTINESS IN THE VALLEY OF HIS HEART.

WHEN HE MET CHRIST ON THAT ROAD TO DAMASCUS, HE STARTED MOVING FROM THE DARKNESS OF HIS SOUL INTO THE SUNLIGHT OF A NEW DAY & NEW WAY OF LIFE.

HE STARTED WALKING AWAY FROM HIS FEARS & HIS FAULTS. HE LEFT ALL OF THAT BEHIND AS HE FOUND NEW LIFE IN A COMMITMENT TO JESUS CHRIST.

LIKE PLATO’S ALLEGORY OF “THE CAVE,” PAUL BEGAN TO SEE THE WORLD IN A WAY HE HAD NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE.

AS HE DISCOVERED THIS NEW WORLD & THIS NEW LIFE, HE KNEW THAT IT WASN’T ENOUGH FOR HIM TO EXPERIENCE IT BY HIMSELF.

IT WAS SOMETHING HE HAD TO SHARE WITH OTHERS – SOMETHING FOR WHICH HIS ENTIRE LIFE WOULD HAVE TO BE DEDICATED FROM THAT MOMENT ON.

HE HAD DISCOVERED HOPE – HOPE FOR SOMETHING MORE IN HIS LIFE ON EARTH & EVEN HOPE FOR ALL THAT STOOD BEYOND THE GRAVE.

IN HAVING SUCH AN EXPERIENCE HIMSELF, HE COULDN’T BEAR THE THOUGHT OF OTHERS BEING DEPRIVED OF THE FREEDOM & NEW LIFE HE’D DISCOVERED IN CHANGING HIS WAYS & SEEING THE WORLD IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FASHION.

WHEN G.K. CHESTERTON WRITES ABOUT ST. FRANCIS, HE WRITES OF A SIMILAR EXPERIENCE THAT FRANCIS HAD.

HE SAYS, “*THE MAN WHO WENT INTO THE CAVE WAS NOT THE MAN WHO CAME OUT AGAIN. HE LOOKED AT THE WORLD AS*

DIFFERENTLY FROM OTHER MEN AS IF HE HAD COME OUT OF THAT DARK HOLE WALKING ON HIS HANDS.

IF A MAN SAW THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN, WITH ALL THE TREES AND FLOWERS HANGING HEAD DOWNWARDS, ONE EFFECT WOULD BE TO EMPHASIZE THE IDEA OF DEPENDENCE.

IT WOULD MAKE VIVID THE SCRIPTURAL TEXT WHICH SAYS THAT GOD HAS HUNG THE WORLD UPON NOTHING.”

THERE IS A POWERFUL MESSAGE FOR US FROM ALL OF THESE EXAMPLES.

IN PLATO’S “THE CAVE,” A MAN DISCOVERS THE TRUTH THAT HE NEVER KNEW EXISTED.

WITH ST. FRANCIS, HE WENT FROM A LIFE OF HATRED & SELFISHNESS TO ONE OF LOVE & SELF-SACRIFICE.

FOR PAUL, HE WAS TRANSFORMED FROM A PERSECUTOR OF CHRISTIANS TO A PROCLAIMER OF CHRIST’S GOOD NEWS.

MAKING THAT CHANGE, THOUGH, IS NEVER EASY.

IT’S FAR MORE COMFORTABLE TO CONTINUE DOING THINGS AS WE’VE ALWAYS DONE THEM.

IT’S MORE EXPEDIENT TO CARRY ON IN A LIFE OF EASE – A LIFE WE’VE ALWAYS KNOWN – A LIFE THAT DEMANDS NOTHING OF US THAN IT IS TO BE OPEN TO THE UNEXPECTED PLACES GOD MAY BE CALLING US.

THAT MORE EXPEDIENT LIFE IS THE CALL OF THE SIRENS THAT WAS SO TEMPTING TO ODYSSEUS IN HOMER’S ODYSSEY.

HE HAD TO BE TIED TO A POST TO RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO TAKE THE EASY WAY OUT & LIVE AS HE’D ALWAYS LIVED.

SO, TOO, FOR US.

THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE WORLD ARE SO ALLURING.

MATERIAL POSSESSIONS, A LIFE OF EASE, POWER, PRESTIGE, CONTROL, SECURITY – THEY ALL BECOME A NOOSE AROUND YOUR NECK, CHOKING THE LIFE OUT OF YOU RATHER THAN PROVIDING THE FULFILLMENT & FREEDOM THEY’VE TEMPTINGLY PROMISED.

PAUL’S CONVERSION ASSURES US THAT HE WAS MEANT FOR SOMETHING MORE.

HE DISCOVERED THAT “SOMETHING MORE” WHEN CHRIST MET HIM ON THAT ROAD TO DAMASCUS.

HE FOUND A FREEDOM THAT HE’D NEVER EXPERIENCED BEFORE.

HE DISCOVERED HOW TO LIVE HIS LIFE AS IT WAS MEANT TO BE LIVED.

THAT’S THE MESSAGE THAT PAUL’S CONVERSION CARRIES FOR US.

YOU NEED TO BE OPEN TO THE WAY GOD IS CALLING YOU.

YOU NEED TO ALLOW THE HOLY SPIRIT TO LEAD YOU AS YOU VENTURE FORTH TO LIVE YOUR LIFE AS IT’S MEANT TO BE.

THAT ISN’T EASY.

IT WASN’T EASY FOR PAUL.

WE OFTEN WONDER HOW THE EARLY CHRISTIANS FELT ABOUT PAUL BECOMING ONE OF THEM.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THOSE HE’D LEFT BEHIND?

WHAT WOULD HIS FELLOW PERSECUTORS FEEL ABOUT HIM?

THEY WOULD HATE *HIM* EVEN MORE THAN THE CHRISTIANS WITH WHOM HE WAS NOW ALIGNED!

IT ISN’T EASY TO LEAVE THE LIFE YOU’VE ALWAYS KNOWN & FOLLOW A BRAND-NEW PATH.

BUT HERE’S THE THING – WHEN YOU TRULY EXPERIENCE WHAT IT MEANS TO DISCOVER THE NEW LIFE THAT CHRIST OFFERS – WHEN YOU WALK AWAY FROM ALL YOUR FEARS & LEAVE ALL YOUR FAULTS BEHIND – YOU CAN’T HELP BUT WANT OTHERS TO EXPERIENCE IT FOR THEMSELVES.

THAT’S WHAT HAPPENED TO PAUL.

HE COULDN’T HELP BUT SHARE WHAT HE’D LEARNED WITH OTHERS.

HE COULDN’T HELP BUT SEE THE NEEDS THAT EXISTED ALL AROUND HIM – THE “WIDOWS & ORPHANS” THAT JAMES TALKS ABOUT – THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN REJECTED & OPPRESSED BY SOCIETY.

PAUL KNEW THAT HE HAD TO BRING THEM THE SAME HOPE THAT HAD COME INTO HIS OWN LIFE.

HE HAD TO REMOVE THE NOOSE THAT WAS CHOKING THE LIFE OUT OF THEM & ALLOW THEM TO EXPERIENCE THE SAME FREEDOM THAT HE HAD COME TO KNOW.

LET’S GO BACK TO MUMFORD & SONS AND “THE CAVE.”

IT’S ALL RIGHT THERE IN THE SONG & THE LITERARY ALLUSIONS AREN’T COINCIDENTAL.

MARCUS IS ENAMORED WITH THE WRITINGS OF CHESTERTON AND WINSTON ADMITS TO TAKING AT LEAST 10 BOOKS WITH HIM ON EVERY TOUR.

HE SAID, “A FRIEND ONCE TOLD ME THAT IF I EVER SEE A BOOK THAT I THINK I MIGHT READ IN THE NEXT 25 YEARS, I SHOULD BUY IT, SO THAT’S WHAT I DO. I START OUT WITH 10 BOOKS ON A TOUR & END UP WITH 25 BY THE END OF IT!”

AND THERE'S A FAITH CONNECTION THAT CLEARLY CARRIES OVER INTO THEIR SONGWRITING.

WHEN ASKED TO NAME THEIR FAVORITE SONGWRITERS, ONE OF THEM IMMEDIATELY SUGGESTS JOHN NEWTON AND ANOTHER OPTS FOR CHARLES WESLEY.

IT'S ALSO NO COINCIDENCE THAT TWO OF OUR HYMNS TODAY ARE COMPOSITIONS OF JOHN NEWTON & CHARLES WESLEY.

EVEN THOUGH THEIR SONGS ARE HUNDREDS OF YEARS OLD, THEY STILL HAVE A MESSAGE FOR US TODAY.

BY THE SAME TOKEN, EVEN THOUGH THE SONGS OF LOVETT, DWANE, MUMFORD & MARSHALL ARE RELATIVELY BRAND NEW, THEY HAVE A MESSAGE FOR US AS WELL.

(SONG – “THE CAVE” SUNG BY DREW DAVENPORT)

MAY WE LIVE OUR LIFE AS IT IS MEANT TO BE,

MAY GOD'S AMAZING GRACE ENABLE US TO SEE. AMEN.

***The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport
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Evansville, Indiana***

THE CAVE

It's empty in the valley of your heart
The sun, it rises slowly as you walk
 Away from all the fears
And all the faults you've left behind

The harvest left no food for you to eat
You cannibal, you meat-eater, you see
 But I have seen the same
I know the shame in your defeat

 But I will hold on hope
 And I won't let you choke
On the noose around your neck

And I'll find strength in pain
And I will change my ways

I'll know my name as it's called again

'Cause I have other things to fill my time
You take what is yours and I'll take mine

Now let me at the truth
Which will refresh my broken mind

So tie me to a post and block my ears
I can see widows and orphans through my tears
I know my call despite my faults
And despite my growing fears

But I will hold on hope
And I won't let you choke
On the noose around your neck

And I'll find strength in pain
And I will change my ways
I'll know my name as it's called again

So come out of your cave walking on your hands
And see the world hanging upside down
You can understand dependence
When you know the maker's hand

So make your siren's call
And sing all you want
I will not hear what you have to say

'Cause I need freedom now
And I need to know how
To live my life as it's meant to be

And I will hold on hope
And I won't let you choke
On the noose around your neck

And I'll find strength in pain
And I will change my ways
I'll know my name as it's called again

Songwriters: Benjamin Walter David Lovett / Edward James Milton Dwane / Marcus Oliver
Johnstone Mumford / Winston Aubrey Aladar Marshall

