

“SURPRISED BY GOD.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Job 5:9-12

Introduction.

Welcome again to SERVE week at First Lynden. We have been planning and preparing and praying for you for many months, and we are excited this week as arrived and you all are here.

We started several months ago having prayer meetings for you. Each of you has at least one prayer partner. You will have an opportunity to meet some of them at lunch today. We will continue to pray for all of you this week and we encourage all of you to pray daily for what God wants to do in and through you and with all of us together.

Job surprised by God.

Each year all the Serve sites are given a theme and a verse. This year's Serve theme is Surprised by God based on Job 5:9. Our Serve speaker Mitchell Senti spoke on this verse last night.

Job 5:9 (NIV) He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted.

Job 9:10 [God] does great things beyond searching out, and marvelous things beyond number.

Job 37:5 God ... does great things that we cannot comprehend.

It is interesting that the theme verse for Surprised by God comes from the book of Job. If you remember the life of Job, he experienced some of the biggest surprises from God that anyone on earth could experience.

Job's life was completely turned upside down with devastating surprises from God. The Bible says he was the greatest man in the world in his day. In his day he was the Elon Musk or Jeff Bezos or Bill Gates.

Then in one crushing blow after another he lost everything, all of his livestock, all his servants, then his seven sons and three daughters, then later the final blow, he lost his health, he was covered in a terrible painful disease.

It was so bad his wife told him to curse God and die. Later Job would curse the day he was born and beg God to take his life.

It was like an avalanche of bad, a tsunami of bad, he was buried in the senselessness of it all, nothing made any sense, how could God have anything to do with this? He prayed and prayed, but God was silent? It truly was a long dark night of the soul.

And then comes another surprise, a shocking reversal of everything bad. God didn't just restore to him what was taken, God increased it. Twice as many sheep, camels, oxen and donkeys. And seven sons and three daughters.

Surprised by God.

God's surprises come in two varieties, the ones that we perceive to be good and the ones that we perceive to be bad, unpleasant, unwelcome.

But understand this, from God's perspective, for all who have faith and believe, all His surprises are good, the good ones and the bad ones. They are all good.

Romans 8:28 We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

For those who love God, who trust God, who have put their faith in God and want what God wants for them and their lives, all things, all circumstances, all changes, all things are from God, are for His glory and for our good, for our eternal blessing and benefit, according to His purpose.

If as a Christian we are experiencing something that is bad, that is hard, and we are in the midst of and it still is bad or looks really rough, that just means God is not done yet, you haven't yet got to the other side of it to be able to look back and see His hand, to see His grace.

The surprises that God sends into our lives aren't surprises to Him. They don't catch Him off guard, they don't come out of left field, they don't sneak up on Him. The surprises from God that surprise us, are completely known to God, they are actually thought out and planned, they have reasons we may or may not ever fathom.

Scripture is filled with stories of God upending human expectations, turning impossible situations into moments of awe, and showing mercy that catches people entirely by surprise. Let's look at five kinds of those surprises, or five ways God's surprises us.

Surprised by who God uses.

God repeatedly surprises us by choosing the most unlikely people. God chose to use Moses who was a murderer and who wasn't the best at speaking. When God called him, Moses tried to beg off and tell God to use his brother Aaron.

God chose to use David who was the youngest and smallest of Jesse's eight sons and later David was an adulterer and a murderer, and God didn't toss him aside, but continued to use him.

God chose Paul to be an apostle who was also a murderer who tried to destroy followers of Jesus. Later by his own admission, Paul said:

I Corinthians 2:1-4 When I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom.

God chose Elijah who suffered with bouts of depression and Jonah who was a coward and tried to run away from God. The disciples of Jesus were uneducated, rough around the edges, small town kinds of guys.

Why does God do this over and over again, and why does He still do that? Why when God is choosing up sides He picks people who are the least, the ordinary, the weak, the overlooked people, some would say losers?

I Corinthians 1:26-29 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Do you feel too ordinary, too insignificant, not as smart as or not as strong as others? Do you compare yourself to others and feel like you come up short, lacking? God has always done His greatest work through the most ordinary means.

Be prepared this week to be surprised by how God uses even you, the least among you. Be open to the possibility God can and will use even you.

Surprised by God's timing.

God's sense to timing is way different than ours, God works on a completely different schedule, different clock and different calendar.

His ways and His thoughts and His plans are above ours. With God a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as a day.

God told Adam and Eve He would send a redeemer and deliverer to defeat Satan, and then waited 4000 years to send Jesus. In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son to redeem us.

God promised Abraham and Sarah a son and then waited 25 years until they were 100 and 90 years old giving them a son, Isaac. Their prayers were 25 years old before they were answered. Do any of you have any old prayers? God answered, but by His own perfect timing, to show it was Him who did it and not them, God gets the glory and they got the blessing.

When Lazarus was dying and Jesus was told to come quickly, Jesus delayed four days until Lazarus was dead before He showed up. So God got the glory and the family the blessing. They got to witness a resurrection that prepared them for a far greater resurrection. God's timing.

God often seems late, or last minute. He shows that He is at work, that He wants us to learn faith and patience, to trust His timing and will. He wants to humble us and show our dependence on Him.

God is always at work, that I can guarantee you, but when and where and how, we have to wait. If you are waiting on God for answers for issues or concerns, for friendships, family struggles, school or work challenges, future needs, you can trust God's timing.

Isaiah 60:22 When the time is right, I, the Lord, will make it happen.

Psalms 27:14 Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Surprised by God's power.

God has the power and ability to do what is impossible to us.

Of course, we know God does miracles. He can part the Red Sea, He can knock down city walls. He can change water into wine, He can heal diseases, cure leprosy, restore blind eyes and deaf ears. He can raise the dead.

There is nothing God cannot do, no human limitations or barriers God cannot overcome.

Jeremiah 32:17 Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.

And even more impossible, God can change hearts. He can turn hard hearts into soft hearts, He can break through bitterness, anger, hate, He can change darkness into light, sadness into joy.

You have come here this week to serve and help and do things for others, and at the same time God can surprise you by serving you and helping you

and doing things for you, changing you. Be expectant, watch for Him to work. Be surprised by His unlimited power.

Surprised by God's presence.

We often times feel alone, as if we have to figure out how to make our way in life. But we are never alone. God is with us and closer to us than the air we breathe.

God is faithful to His promise to never leave us or forsake us. There may be times when He makes us feel as if He is absent, to test and strengthen our faith, love and loyalty.

Genesis 28:16 Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it."

God may surprise you by meeting you in an unexpected moment, on a worksite, riding in a van, in a conversation, in a worship meeting or a small group, or when you are doing your devotions.

Be expectant, be watchful, pray and ask and wait. Especially in worship, the singing, the messages, the devotion and small group time. God is right here with you.

Surprised by God's grace.

What about sin? What if you have sinned or someone has hurt you by their sin? Is it possible to sin yourself outside of God's grace, outside of God's usefulness for you?

This is the biggest surprise to me. The older I get the more aware I am of how sinful I am, my heart is full of sin and deceit and temptation. And so I am more and more aware of how unworthy and undeserving I am of God's grace and love and of Him ever using me.

We assume God's Gospel and God's love are for good people, not for bad people, sinful people. But God has said even while we were sinners in the midst of our sinning, He came to save us from our sin and to love us with a great love.

Remember the prodigal son how he ran off with his father's inheritance and then squandered it in sinful living and ended up destitute, poor feeding pigs and eating pig food. He finally humbled himself and went back to his father to ask to be treated as a servant in his father's house.

But he is surprised by his father's love and grace that welcomed him with a hug, gave him a robe and ring and a big celebration feast. That is how God welcomes any repentant sinner, with open arms and generous love. That is the surprise of grace for us who are so undeserving.

The gospel is surprising because God saves sinners. God's grace is greater than all our sins and failures, all our guilt and shame. "Our sins, they are many, but His mercy is more."

All of this is made possible by the greatest surprise in the history of the world, when the Son of God who is God, came down and took on our flesh so He could die for us and all our sin. God is the God of surprises.

Surprises that He delights to use the least of us.

Surprises that His timing may seem slow to us but is perfect to Him.

Surprises that He is powerful to do the utterly impossible, even change our hearts.

Surprises that He does this for the most undeserving because of His grace.

Implications and application.

Do you want to be surprised by God?

Do you trust God? Do you trust His perfect wisdom and His perfect goodness? Do you believe that when we pray He hears and answers and only does what is good and best and right? Do you believe that He does even more than we can ask or imagine?

God is the giver of every good and perfect gift. God wants to give you good gifts, good things.

I know you have come to SERVE week expecting to help others. But don't be surprised if God ends up changing you. Many kids and leaders come to the end of Serve week and say the biggest surprise of the week was not what they accomplished, but what God accomplished in them.

I Corinthians 2:9 It is written, “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.”

Pray and be prepared to be surprised. His Mercy is More.

Prayer: Holy Father, you can do all things and no purpose of yours can be thwarted, your purposes will always stand, you work all things according to the counsel of your will and for your pleasure and our eternal good. Comfort our hearts, strengthen our faith and give us boldness and courage to face whatever the future holds knowing you have everything in the palm of your hand, and that your saving purposes in Christ far exceed our ability to understand. You are God, you are sovereign and good and in you alone do we trust.