

“SURPRISED BY GOD, II.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Job 5:8-16

Introduction.

Last week Gary V, the director of the Lynden Chamber of Commerce, posted an article about our country's 250th anniversary celebrations. He acknowledged God as our creator and our nation as being under God.

Down in the comments someone wrote:

“God is man's creation, an imaginary sky fairy, the bible [is] fiction.”

If God is man's creation, if God is a figment of our imagination, then you would expect God to be more like us, to look and think like us, created in our own image. This imaginary God would never surprise us, He would only be an echo of our thoughts and ways. This God would be predictable.

If God is only our creation, then He can never *surprise*, correct, or judge us. The God of Scripture continually surprises, confronts, redeems and transforms people in ways we would never have invented.

No human mind would conceive or create a God like the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is unpredictable, full of surprises, saying and doing things completely unexpected. In fact, if you really think about it *everything* God does in and through and for us is an unexpected surprise.

Anything good that God does is truly a surprise. We deserve nothing good and only judgment. The surprise is that God doesn't treat our sins as we deserve, that He doesn't count our iniquity against us, that He doesn't remember our sin against Him forever.

God delights in acting in ways that no one anticipates. As Isaiah says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

1. God chooses the least likely people

- Genesis: Younger brother Jacob instead of Esau.
- Joseph: Sold as a slave before becoming Egypt's rescuer.
- Moses: A fugitive shepherd.
- Gideon: "The least in my father's house."
- David: The forgotten shepherd boy.
- The disciples: fishermen, tax collectors, ordinary men.

"God chose what is foolish...weak...low and despised." (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

He delights in displaying His power through ordinary people. Don't think God can't use you.

2. God often works through weakness instead of strength

Our instinct is to remove weakness. God often uses it.

- Gideon's army reduced from 32,000 to 300.
- Moses' speech difficulty.
- Paul's thorn in the flesh.
- Christ crucified.

"My power is made perfect in weakness." (II Corinthians 12:9)

3. God delays far longer than we expect

We expect immediate answers. God often says, "Wait."

- Abraham waits decades.
- Joseph waits years in prison.
- Israel waits 400 years in Egypt.
- Lazarus dies before Jesus comes.

God's delays are never God's absence. He is rarely early, but never late.

4. God brings life out of death

This may be God's favorite surprise.

- Isaac born to barren Sarah.
- Dry bones live (Ezekiel 37).
- Jonah comes out of the fish.

- Jesus rises from the dead.
- We were dead in our trespasses and sins, and God had mercy.

Every resurrection is a surprise.

5. God wins battles in completely unexpected ways

- Trumpets at Jericho.
- Three hundred men with torches.
- A shepherd boy's sling against Goliath.
- A cross instead of a sword. The greatest victory in history looked like total defeat.

6. God turns evil into good

- Joseph: "You meant evil...God meant it for good." (Genesis 50:20)
- The Cross: The greatest crime in history became the greatest act of salvation.

7. God shows mercy where everyone expects judgment

People expect condemnation. God surprises with grace.

- Nineveh.
- Rahab.
- Ruth.
- The woman caught in adultery.
- The thief on the cross.
- Saul becomes Paul.

God delights in saving people everyone else has given up on.

9. God transforms suffering into blessing

No one chooses suffering. So we are surprised how often God uses it for our good.

- Joseph
- Naomi
- Job
- Paul
- Jesus

And of course the greatest surprise of all is also the greatest scandal.

Jesus, the Son of the living God, and very God of very God, came to earth as a poor peasant in an oppressed backwater town, refused political power, allowed Himself while innocent to be falsely accused and condemned as guilty, to be tortured, and die a shameful criminal's death on a cross. To the ancient Roman and Jewish imagination, a crucified god was not an inspiring invention; it was a scandalous, weak, and foolish concept.

Jesus was a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Greeks. A colossal failure.

10. God exceeds our prayers

God continually answers our prayers beyond what we could ask or imagine.

Paul prayed for his thorn to be removed. God gave him something better: "My grace is sufficient."

Job 5:9 He does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number.

SERVE Surprises:

Everything God did during Serve week was a surprise. We deserved or earned or merited nothing good He did, and we only deserved the bad He didn't do.

A man driving by the Blaine CCC worksite saw what the kids were doing and stopped and gave the leader \$100. Later that work team went to visit Peace Arch Park and got in the wrong lane and ended up going into Canada and was delayed both ways over three hours. The money bought the group dinner on the way home. Surprised by God and His advance provision for their need through the generosity of a stranger.

Another day a man saw the group buying snacks at a gas station, and paid for everything.

The kids were blessed by talking to some of the older adults on job sites, and kids were a blessing to the senior saint. Great intergenerational interaction.

Deepening of relationships, kids with kids, kids with leaders, kids with church members.

Kids were nervous about street night, but really glad they did it, took them out of their comfort zone.

Cedar Springs had three truck loads of gravel that they said their small staff working around then guest were staying there would take them a year to finish. The Serve kids finished it in four days, a years worth of work. God arranged the timing so for a four day window of time with no guests on the property.

We blessed the Blaine Community Church, and now heard they were interested in sending their kids with us when we go on Serve next year.

More Surprises.

One of the leaders shared with us that this Serve trip was the one-year anniversary of when her husband took his own life. She was here with two of her kids. She was ministered to and blessed during Serve.

One of the students shared that a month ago he was driving and hit and killed a pedestrian. He was ministered to during Serve.

The Cascade Crew made up of our own youth group, how well they did, how much they did, how hard they worked early and late, how they related with our guests and with each other. They were a great reflection on First Church.

There were several other deep personal situations that God ministered to throughout the week, lots of one on one sharing and prayer.

Application:

Surprises don't only happen in special events. You have tasted the kindness and goodness of God every single day of your life, with every breath you take.

Everything God has done for you down to the most mundane is a glorious surprise. Everything God hasn't done to you is a humbling surprise. All of God's surprises are cause for worship, cause for obedience, cause for a righteous response in light of the abounding grace and mercy.

Open your eyes to the hand of God in every detail of your life and give to God your repentant heart, the humble sacrifice of an obedient will, a forgiving spirit, and loving worship.

1 Corinthians 2:9 No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.

Let your love for God be evident in your awareness of His hand, His presence at work in your life all the time. Let your love be evident in your faith that God is at work now, and in your faith that He is using you for His good purposes. Expect it, watch for it. Ask for it.

Prayer: Holy Father, thank you for the unexpected and undeserved surprise of your grace, mercy and love, for giving us life, for creating us in your image, for redeeming us by the blood of your Son, for showering us with countless blessings, for using the likes of us for your glory.