

Sermon Notes and Discussion Questions

Third Sunday of Advent

Sermon Title: "Insight Beyond the Surface" – Philippians 4:4-7

Sunday, Dec. 16, 2018

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Spirit of Discernment— Illustration from the movie "Titanic" — The ship was marketed as unsinkable. They put fewer life boats on it for that reason. It sank because it hit an iceberg beneath the surface. The material used for certain rivets to hold the ship together caused the ship to sink quicker. The rivets were not as strong as they needed to be. There was not insight beneath the surface.

Encouragement to us: Ask for insight beneath the surface. Think about Joseph who found out Mary was pregnant. He was going to quietly divorce her. An angel spoke to him when he considered and pondered and said, "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife." The angel gave him insight beyond the surface. Some of us are in challenging situations.

Discernment: Quality to be able to comprehend what is hidden in the darkness. Recognizing right from wrong that is not obvious to your eyesight. If you go behind what you can see, you can find answers to questions you may have. God wants to deepen our perception and elevate our perception and protect our peace.

Sermon in a sentence: God desires that we have insight beyond the surface to deepen our perception, elevate our perspective, and protect our peace.

Paul is writing this letter to a church that is supportive of him. He is ministering to them. He is thanking God for them. Regardless of what you are going through, I want you to rejoice in the Lord always. It is hard to rejoice in the Lord, always. How do rejoice when you don't feel like it?

Paul had just called out two women that were in disagreement. You all need to work it out—sisters in Christ. He was working to reconcile those who were in ministry together. You have to see beyond the surface. Sometimes we are so stuck on "our point", we don't even listen to what the other person is saying. Think about someone else before you worry about yourself.

1. **Discernment impacts how we respond to those with whom we have relationship. (Vs. 4-5)**
Seek to understand before you are understood. Discernment means: I am going to have a heart for what you are going through. I am going to care about your situation. Rather than judging others, respond to those with whom we have relationship with by listening. Let your gentle spirit be known. When dealing with people, it is how you say what you say. Let your gentle spirit be known because Jesus is coming back. Let Jesus find you with a spirit of compassion.
2. **Discernment changes how we conduct ourselves in difficult circumstances. (V. 6)**
There are some people you do not go to in a crisis. Some people rise to the occasion. It is never as bad as what you think you see. Discernment will help you to see your situation from the vantage point of being a child of God. The text tells us not to be anxious, but pray. Prayer is not your first reaction many times. Worry is the typical first reaction; we think about everything that could go wrong and plot it out for years. When we have discernment, we don't have to be worried.

3. It is freeing to not worry about anything. I don't have to worry because I can pray. Pray about everything with thanksgiving. If you are going to worry, why are you praying? If I am going to walk in faith, I am not walking in the fear lane. Anxiety is contagious.
 - a. Faith requires us to see beyond what is in our face. If a few people decide to walk by faith and not by sight, they can encourage someone else that in spite of the problem to see beyond the surface. God's ways are not our ways. He sees what we cannot see.
 - b. The surface says, "My family is messed up." Discernment says, "God cares". The Apostle Peter says, "Cast your cares on Him". There is not a situation God is not concerned about in your life. When we are worried and anxious, all we can see is what is bad.
 - c. Prayer pulls us to faith. Discernment helps us to understand that God understands my situation. Discernment is simply asking the question, "Why am I feeling what I am feeling?" What is the source of my worry? You can combat your worry with prayer. See Matthew 6. Ask God to take care of you, right now, right where I am.
 - d. Sometimes worry is about trying to change something God never meant for us to change. We can't change people. Take the "God robe" off. God says, let ME be God. Trust God to care of His business.
 - i. We try to meet our own needs rather than depending on God. We made decisions without asking God. Sometimes we are in anxious situations because we did not ask or include God in our decision-making and we are dealing with the consequences.
 - ii. "Lord, help me to seek you in my decision-making." Where are your priorities? We sacrifice great for good. Discernment will help us to know God's will. Discernment helps us to choose the option that is in the will of God. The will of God is the safest place to be. When we spend time with God in prayer, we will find discernment and we can walk in wisdom.
4. **Discernment protects our thinking and our emotions in ways that are beyond our understanding. (V. 7).**
 - a. We want to know the whole picture. God gives us step A and B. He gives us just enough so that we will trust Him. The peace that will come is beyond our understanding. Stay with the last thing He told you to do. To get discernment, get rid of the noise. We can get discernment through the Word of God, by the preaching and teaching of God's word or by hard knocks.

Discernment is important to understanding the will of God. When was the last time you had an opportunity to consider, to think deeply, to pray about a situation? Pray until you hear God speak. Now more than ever, we need discernment. People are lying. You don't know who or what to trust. When you don't trust anything, you are wandering. Whatever you are going through, you are better off because you know God.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is discernment? Discuss or ponder why discernment is essential in the life of a Christian?
2. What is the relationship between prayer and discernment? Why is prayer important?
3. Why is it impossible to have faith and worry at the same time?
4. Respond to the statement: Discernment protects our thinking and emotions in ways that are beyond our understanding. (V. 7). How can we make ourselves available to experience this protection offered to us by God through Jesus Christ?