

**Hey:**

I think there are a few staples that give away whether you have participated in the church or not. Things like memorizing the Lord's Prayer might be one, but the ones that I love most are the instinctual ones. For example if I were to say to you: "The peace of Christ be with you" on instinct you will surely reply: \_\_\_\_\_ (and also with you.) To a non church goer they would either look at you strange or at best say "you...too" or "thanks...?"

But I can think of one primary example that gives away whether or not you grew up in the church in a youth group or not. It's not lock-ins, or retreats, or cedar point, or car wash fundraisers, or bake sales, or spaghetti sales, or work missions, or any of that. It's as simple as saying "God is good!" (all the time) and respectively "All the time!" (God is good) I recently officiated a wedding for a friend of mine I met in youth group and when trying to find him in a large crowd of people I actually considered using this as a strange Christian version of marco polo. Surely he would have responded.

**You:** All jokes aside, there is something beautiful and reassuring about certain things being instinctual. It's good that our bodies have instincts. It protects us and others when something or someone is falling. Instincts lead us to relationships, instincts provide us with a unspoken, unlearned pathway for natural evolution. In other words, instincts are mostly free of our cognitive thoughts. Instincts can overpower how we are feeling, what we are thinking, in order to protect us. So, how beautiful is it that somethings about God and God's nature, somethings about funky church lingo has found it's way into your minds place of protection and natural evolution. Sometimes when it comes to our faith in God and one another, it is best that even the divine and our relationships have a safeguard from our emotions. We'll return to this in a moment.

**Look:** The inspiration for this opening comes from a room of 53 kids dancing, singing, shouting, running, laughing and playing their way around every corner of this church building. And of those 53, I think 49 of them have very little connection to our church, so friends God has been good to us this week in having the opportunity to present God's love to so many who would be called "unchurched." The kids this week followed the story of Moses. They learned about the unfair conditions that Pharaoh put the slaves through; and yet they learned as our call to worship invites you to remember, "when life is unfair....God is good!" They learned about the ten plagues God uses as a divine sign of judgement against pharaoh and learned that "when life is scary....God is good." Day 3 they learned they learned that about leaving Egypt, traveling through the wilderness, surviving on quail and manna from God and ultimately learned that "when life changes....God is good!" Day 4 they said goodbye to Moses, whom God instructed could not join them in the promised land. And although it was hard to let Moses go, God

gave them a new friend Joshua. They ultimately learned “when life is sad....God is good!” and finally, the children carried the ark of the covenant on a long journey and found themselves in the promised land and learned “When life is good...God is good!” These are some powerful lessons, and things we as adults even need to be reminded of sometime!

Friends there is something special about a room full of children not connected to a church shouting at the top of their little lungs that “God is good.” Just as special is saying “today is our last day of VBS” and the children respond with groans of sadness. Just as special is having 53 kids come running up to Jackie and I at the end giving us hugs and saying “thank you! See you soon!” Friends, you might not like coming to church on Sunday and seeing all of \*this\* (motion to decorations) over this beautiful church setting, but I do hope you find assurance, comfort, and excitement in knowing that we planted the seed in 53 kids to instinctually be able to say now....God is good.

For the sake our message today, I want to focus on the scripture used during day 1 and juxtapose it to the scripture from our lectionary this morning and ultimately set up the question for you to ask which scripture are you currently falling into, and what can you do to in the coming hours, days, weeks, months to ensure you fall into the more positive one. So, let’s review the happy scripture first. Deuteronomy, the book of Law for the Jewish people, and third book in the Torah, the 5 books attributed to Moses says this in the 30th chapter: “Then the Lord your God will make you most **prosperous** in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. **The Lord will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your ancestors, 10** if you obey the Lord your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. This is a call of prosperity and celebration! The Lord God will make you prosperous in all that you do, the Lord will delight in you just as he delighted in your ancestors. For context, the ancestors that Deut is referring to here is Moses and the original band of Israelites who escaped Pharaoh's palace and found themselves in the promised land. It’s really easy to talk about how good God is when you’re on the other side of captivity and 40 years of wilderness wandering, river crossing and complete uncertainty It’s a little less so when you’re in the trenches of it.

Let’s look back at Exodus chapter 5, the scripture used for day 1 of VBS. It says: “**19** The Israelite overseers realized they were in trouble when they were told, “You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day.” **20** When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, **21** and they said, “May the Lord look on you and judge you! You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.” **22** Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent

me? **23** Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on these people, and you have not rescued your people at all.” Some real party poopers you know what I’m saying? How many times do you feel like Moses looking to God and saying “you have not rescued your people at all?” Perhaps it’s after a bad diagnosis, perhaps it’s as a parent when your child is suffering through physical or emotional health and it feels like there is nothing you can do. Perhaps it’s hearing bishops and preachers call year after year that the church is the preferred medium of God’s voice and activism in the world and yet.... (motion to empty pews) it feels like God is being a bit silent on the matter.

If you were here two weeks ago for my message about God’s will not our own you know I shared some of those same thoughts about God and God’s nature in conjunction with where I am in life, where the United Methodist Church is, and where our country is as a whole. I won’t say more than that because lordy have mercy did ya’ll hate that sermon. Joyce and I out here dodging angry phone calls and emails all week long. Lordy have mercy. And yet, I will say that the message remains the same for what we are finding here in the Hebrew teachings. In one case we have Moses super excited and talking all about God’s prosperity and God’s abundance and on the other hand we have Moses speaking directly to God and saying “you have failed to deliver your people.” The difference? 40 years. God’s timing on this matter was 40 years, but God delivered on God’s promise of deliverance. What does 40 years look like in the life of the church? It looks a lot like VBS.

Our station leaders were about 40 years older than the children participating and yet it was them that planted the seed of “God is good” for these children. It’s easy to dismiss VBS as unimportant or a waste of time and money because we don’t see these families again very often, but that is Exodus chapter 5 thinking. I encourage you to see it this way: Our directors, Jackie and I both grew up in VBS and both of return 20 some years later to lead it for the next generation, Ross Henry, our own director of digital communications and my good buddy grew up in VBS, yes he was traumatized by it one year because Kim and Chris Berger are just too good at what they do but hey he’s not only here he’s staff here! Our crew leaders grew up in VBS as children and have returned day after day to lead the next generation of kids. One of girls, a friend of Sara’s I had never met before, told Kim that to this day she still vividly remembers the time they walked on water and how amazing that was. She came back some 12 years later because of the powerful demonstration of faith we put on 12 years back. Brothers and sisters of Christ can I say to you with declaration and a little bit of prophetic power that God delivers on God’s promises? That *God is good* (all the time) and that *All the time* (God is good!)

Dueteronomy closes with hypothetical questions from the Israelites asking “who will cross the river to deliver us?” and “who will ascend the mountain to deliver us?”

implying that they needed Moses again for these are miracles of him. But Moses assures them, “No, the very word is *very* near, not just near, *very near* to you. It is in your mouth and in your heart.” It is as near and automated as an instinct. The same instincts that protect us, and lead us powerful acts of compassion as Rev. Joyce talked about last week in her message on heroic actions, and lead us prayerful response, the same instinct that allows us and a room full of 53 children to shout out God is good. So, beloved, if God is very near to you and to me today, will you trust God’s prosperity to come even in the midst of all your uncertainties and hardships? Will you trust God when life is unfair? When life is scary? When life is changing? When life is sad and ultimately when it is good? Will you as our VBS theme song proclaims: “wherever you lead me I’m gonna follow, I’m trusting you God, *you are good!* Life will get crazy, wild and amazing, but I’m trusting you God for you. Are. good.” AMEN.