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| Judges 6:11-17+36-40John 17:20-23  | A Bigger Plan | Pinelands – 9am – 03/02/2024Thornton – 10:30am – 03/02/2024  |

On arrival everybody gets two puzzle pieces  *(we are all connected – pass the puzzle piece on to a friend… That connects you to them and all of us)*

**THIS IS WHO OUR GOD IS…**

 He is the Creator of the universe…

 He put the stars and planets in place

 He plays with Galaxies like we play with marbles

 He is the Creator of the universe…

 That is soo BIG, it is measured in light years.

 If you do not believe the creation story…

 He is the creator of Evolution.

 Modern science is even challenging the Big Bang Theory…

 OUR GOD is behind whatever started the universe?

**THIS IS WHO OUR GOD IS…**

 He can, at Gideon’s request, prove himself buy…

 One night making a fleece of *wool wet with dew,*

And all the *surrounding ground dry…*

 And the next night the fleece is dry and the ground wet.

 Our God goes to great lengths to prove himself to the Israelite

Nation… through plagues and miracles

**AND…**  in an instant destroys the Egyptian Army

 as they cross the Red Sea.

**THIS IS WHO OUR GOD IS…**

 He can be as small as a single sperm and impregnate

 a 15 year old virgin and grow up to be a man…

Who can walk on water, multiply food, heal cripples,

restore sight to the blind, turn water into wine,

**AND…** Appear to the disciples through locked doors.

**THIS IS WHO OUR GOD IS…**

 **He can…** Command Angels and Heavenly Beings.

 Manipulate the laws of physics and nature.

 Raise people, and himself, from the dead.

 **BUT** Chooses to Limit himself to a Physical Human Body,

 To connect with us, To inspire us

 ***To be in relationship with him.***

**THIS IS WHO OUR GOD IS…**

 He longs to be at ONE with US.

**GOD INVITES US…** Into Worship

 Into Relationship with himself

 To Partner with him in this chaotic World

**GOD CONNECTS US…**

 To each other as brothers and sisters in Christ

 To each other as the Body of Christ

 With all Christians around the World as the Family of God

 **THIS IS WHO OUR GOD IS.**

We live in a very **CONNECTED world…**

 Maybe more so now, than ever before.

Ever heard that saying… **“IT IS SUCH A SMALL WORLD”**

Ever had the experience of meeting someone,

 And after a short conversation you discover they…

 Know or are Related to someone you know or family

 We just seem all **CONNECTED.**

My son Ryan who is a teacher in Scotland in Kirkcaldy…

 Discovered a Student in his class…

Knew my Mother (Ryan’s Grandmother),

Who once lived in White River, Mpumalanga.

 It is such a small world.

As the song says…

 ***“The mountains divide and the oceans are wide,***

 ***But it’s a small small world after all.”***

**We are all CONNECTED.**

Remember the Covid Pandemic in 2020,

when our churches were closed for many months.

During those times we learned to be Church differently

 We did on line worship during lockdown

 We were reminded that the Body of Christ **is NOT…**

 Contained within Church walls.

  **The Church** is **BEYOND…**

 Buildings, Meetings, Fellowship Groups

**AND…** The Church Survived all that…

 **AND…** Through all that… **We were still CONNECTED**

We ARE still **CONNECTED…**

We were reminded we are part of a **Bigger Plan**

 We are more than just what we see in the here and now

 We are connected in ways beyond our understanding.

**One of the most profound prayers** in the Bible is the one in **John 17.**

We read a few verses earlier…

 **Jesus** (God the Son), is praying to **God the Father.**

**Think about it…** **God is speaking His desire *to Himself,***

**and His prayer is for us.**

Let me read it again… **John 17:20-23…**

***“I pray not only for them, but also for those who believe in me because of their message. I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me. I gave them the same glory you gave me, so that they may be one, just as you and I are one: I in them and you in me, so that they may be completely one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and that you love them as you love me.***

That prayer is a prayer for **Spiritual Connection…**

 Christ connecting with Himself as God

Christ reminding us we are part of Him

And therefore part of one another.

I find it helpful to remember that…

**The CHURCH IS…** A living organism… ALIVE!!

 ***Much more that just…***

 Activities, Programs and Buildings

**The CHURCH IS… PEOPLE…**

 Living and Experiencing Life

 *CONNECTED* to God

 *Connected to* each other

**Gideon** comes to realise that…

 Even though he is part of the weakest Clan

 He is Still part of God’s **Bigger Plan**

 He is **CONNECTED** to God in ways beyond Himself

 He is Connected to the people of his clan.

**The Disciples…** Even they did not realise…

 They were part of a **Bigger Plan.**

 They played a role in God’s salvation plan

 They were connected to something **BIGGER** than themselves.

There is a Famous Picture from 1969…

 Taken by **astronaut Michael Collins** during the **Apollo 11** mission.

*It features the planet Earth, part of the moon,*

*and the capsule of Apollo 11 itself.*

Therefore it’s been said that Michael Collins is the only human,

living or dead, that is **not** contained within the photograph.

Those yet to be born, and those who have died,

are still in the photograph, in different atomic matter.

***It is an impressive picture and thought.***

**We are ALL…** Part of a **Bigger Plan**

 *Connected Beyond ourselves*

Western Culture and Anglo-Saxon thought have done Christianity

 **A HUGE…** DIS-Service by ***over*** emphasising…

 A Personal Relationship with God.

 Not that God is not interested in the personal…

 He IS… ***BUT…***

**Our FAITH** has become **all about ME** and GOD and GOD and ME…

 Thus, *ignoring the CONNECTEDNESS* of our Faith.

 Similar to our World… It is all about ME.

***BUT…*** ***We are all* CONNECTED…**

 My ACTIONS… Affects all of those around me.

 My SIN… Affects the community in which I live.

Let me spell that out a little bit…

**If I have a Car Accident…** *Many people are affected…*

 Some are injured, might need to go to hospital/doctor

 That costs money

 It takes time for cars to be repaired…

 That costs money

 Inconvenience of being without a car.

**If I Break the Law…**

***Steal a Cell Phone…*** It is not just me that is affected.

 Someone looses all their Contacts

 All their banking apps and info

 A whole lot of work stuff

 There is a huge ripple effect

 ***Commit Murder…***

 It is not just me that is affected.

 A mother and father grieve a loss

 A family loose an income

 A child looses a parent.

I could go on and on…

**My ACTIONS… GOOD and BAD…**

 ***AFFECTS…* OTHERs… the COMMUNITY**

 **The World around me…**

 ***…NOT just ME.***

**We live in a very** **CONNECTED WORLD…**

 We are all **PART of** a ***BIGGER PLAN.***

When you arrived this morning, you received **2 Puzzle Pieces.**

Depending on your pieces you might have an idea of the

**Bigger Picture** ***BUT…*** You might not.

 *Eg: Blue Sky, Clouds, Tree, Random Colours*

***BUT…*** Because everybody has 2 pieces we are all connected…

***BUT…*** We do not know what the picture is.

***BUT…*** **TOGETHER we make up the BIGGER PICTURE**

**We live in a very** **CONNECTED WORLD…**

 We are all **PART of** a ***BIGGER PLAN.***

**Judges 6:11-17 + 36-40**

Then the Lord's angel came to the village of Ophrah and sat under the oak tree that belonged to Joash, a man of the clan of Abiezer. His son Gideon was threshing some wheat secretly in a wine press, so that the Midianites would not see him. The Lord's angel appeared to him there and said, “The Lord is with you, brave and mighty man!”

Gideon said to him, “If I may ask, sir, why has all this happened to us if the Lord is with us? What happened to all the wonderful things that our fathers told us the Lord used to do—how he brought them out of Egypt? The Lord has abandoned us and left us to the mercy of the Midianites.”

Then the Lord ordered him, “Go with all your great strength and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I, myself am sending you.”

Gideon replied, “But Lord, how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least important member of my family.”

The Lord answered, “You can do it because I will help you. You will crush the Midianites as easily as if they were only one man.”

Gideon replied, “If you are pleased with me, give me some proof that you are really the Lord.

**Verses 36-40**

Then Gideon said to God, “You say that you have decided to use me to rescue Israel. Well, I am putting some wool on the ground where we thresh the wheat. If in the morning there is dew only on the wool but not on the ground, then I will know that you are going to use me to rescue Israel.” That is exactly what happened. When Gideon got up early the next morning, he squeezed the wool and wrung enough dew out of it to fill a bowl with water. Then Gideon said to God, “Don't be angry with me; let me speak just once more. Please let me make one more test with the wool. This time let the wool be dry, and the ground be wet.” That night God did that very thing. The next morning the wool was dry, but the ground was wet with dew.

**John 17:20-23**

“I pray not only for them, but also for those who believe in me because of their message. I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me. I gave them the same glory you gave me, so that they may be one, just as you and I are one: I in them and you in me, so that they may be completely one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and that you love them as you love me.