

“Spiritual Pairing”
Psalm 111
Mark 1:21-28

We have gathered this Fourth Sunday after Epiphany to remember the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi (Matthew 2:1–12). Jews and Gentiles alike have, are, and will continue to be reached by the good news of the birth of Jesus. And, as followers of Jesus, we can live very engaging lives, in words and deeds, clearly living the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

Every day we have an opportunity to pair our words and deeds with God’s good news of redemption. Oh, every day is the same in many ways but not in the opportunities for the spiritual pairing of words and deeds with God’s purposes for someone, somewhere and somehow to be reached by God. It’s not like Groundhog’s day as illustrated in the movie classic Groundhog Day. You’ve said the phrase “it’s déjà vu” haven’t you?

Do you ever have déjà vu? Didn’t you just ask me that? Bill Murray is at his wry, wisecracking best in this riotous romantic comedy about a weatherman caught in a personal time warp on the worst day of his life...TV weatherman Phil Connors (Bill Murray) is sent to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, to cover the annual Groundhog Day festivities. But on his way out of town, Phil is caught in a giant blizzard, which he failed to predict, and finds himself stuck in small-town hell. Just when things couldn’t get worse, they get worse; Phil wakes the next morning to find it’s a Groundhog Day all over again...and again...and again.¹

Do you ever have days like that? I do. But, for Christians, a Groundhog Day existence is not the norm.

¹Taken from the iTunes Preview website from a description about the movie, Groundhog Day, starring Bill Murray.

As followers of Jesus, each day is a new day. Oh, there may be certain things that stay the same, like remembering to put on my hearing aids, brushing my teeth three times a day, using the Waterpik two times a day and flossing my teeth after each meal. But each day is filled with new opportunities. All I need is the desire to see them.

Believing God is central to a Christian's and church community's overall health. In this regard, Pastor, Author (*Crushing: God Turns Pressure into Power*) and Speaker T. D. Jakes writes, "God's aim has been to reclaim within the heart of every human being the place in which He [God] rightfully resides as source."² With God as the source of life, our lives, each day, have routines that are repetitive but also opportunities for the inbreaking of God's activity and presence.

Psalms 111 and Mark 1:21-28 assert that perceiving what God is up to is central to a dynamic and transformative experience with God and others.

Psalms 111 instructs both individual and community to engage with God's presence and promises. Psalm 111:2 reads "Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them."

Mark 1:21-28 depicts that Jesus' ministry had, and the ministry of those who follow him have a profound awareness that the kingdom of God is near. The now and not yet of the kingdom of God is grounded in love. Living an ethic of self-sacrifice demonstrates love for God and others. Engaging the real world and its real-life issues makes the church visible. Addressing racial injustice, gender inequality and poverty is all about healing the hurting. Our words and actions of good news bring salvation. Mark 1:27-28 reads,

²T. D. Jakes, *Crushing* (New York City, New York: FaithWords, 2019), 205.

They [those in the synagogue] were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” At once his [Jesus] fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

The church is known by how it loves and therein lies the predictability of the unpredictable movement of God in a déjà vu moment.³

Live fully in the déjà vu moments of life that God gives you. An experience with Jesus leads us to seek the pairing of our words and deeds with the purposes of God for hope, peace, joy and love to be made manifest in our lives and the lives of others. Again, T. D. Jakes writes, “If there’s anything that God has always requested His [God’s] people to do, it is to believe Him [God].”⁴ Psalm 111 and Mark 1:21-28 teach us to study how God is at work and believe that the kingdom of God is always near.

God is at work in those déjà vu moments. Pair your words and deeds with God’s purposes. Believe God. Challenge evil. Expect the unexpected. Reveal God’s goodness in your words and deeds. Break the usual social, political, economic and religious patterns, so that others are surprised and perhaps ask, “What is this? A new teaching with power!” Live an individual and communal epiphany. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 31 January 2021
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³In the three paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Khalia J. Williams, John Byron and Erin Dufault-Hunter in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 218-219, 225-226 and 227-228.

⁴T. D. Jakes, *Crushing*, 215.