

John 1:29-42  
Psalm 40:1-11  
January 19, 2020

## God Is Faithful

On the popular crime drama NCIS, the lead character is a former marine sniper named Leroy Jethro Gibbs. I am sure all of you know about this, except some of the younger ones who may not be in the habit of watching the show. Gibbs, as he is affectionately called, has his own set of rules that his subordinates must learn. They are a bit random and there are some repetitions (there are two rule ones and two rule threes, and the last is rule 69, in total there are 35 rules). Rule 39 is, “there is no such thing as a coincidence.”

In the movie Ghandi, which is a good one to see if you have never had the chance, and also a good one to see again if it has been a long time, there is a scene near the beginning of the movie in which Ghandi was practicing law in South Africa. He was walking down the street with an Anglican clergyman and having a conversation about the "Sermon on the Mount," specifically the part about turning the other cheek and going the extra mile.

The priest said he thought those were challenging suggestions but were not meant to be taken literally, but as hyperbole, metaphor, or something like that. Ghandi said, “not so sure.”

Just a few weeks ago, TIME magazine published its annual, Person of the Year volume, and named the 16-

year-old Swedish climate environmental activist Greta Thunberg, as this year’s honoree. When she was 15 she decided to play hooky from school to protest at the Swedish parliament until they established better policies. All she did was sit on the sidewalk across the street from the building in her home city of Stockholm, with a handmade sign on white poster board, with, “SCHOOL STRIKE FOR CLIMATE,” written on it in black marker.

The second day someone came and sat with her. Then 7 or 8 people showed up. Inevitably someone posted something online and students in other places around the world followed suit. Millions have participated. She has traveled the world, spoken at the United Nations, and visited the Pope. Regardless of how one feels about the climate debate, one wonder how these things happen.

One doesn’t need a fictional character on TV or a grand historical personage or a “person of the year” to think about these things. Similar events happen on a smaller scale in our personal lives if we are paying attention.

## The Wedding

It was announced last week that my son Samuel and his fiancée Grace are getting married on February 8th. This wedding came together very quickly. When they came to visit me last week, I knew they wanted to get married soon, but didn’t know of a date. At Christmas

they had spoken about sometime in February, but nothing was set in stone.

As we sat at the dinner table eating pizza, they said February 8th would be the day, which meant that I would probably need to arrange for a guest preacher on February 9th. I said to Grace, “is that date confirmed?” She said, “yes.”

That very second, my phone rang. It was Mike Reynolds. I said to him, “Mike, are you able to preach for me on February 9? My son is getting married.” He said, “yes.” I know he had another reason for calling, but it eludes me. I hung up and told them it was arranged from my end.

Sometimes I have heard these things called, “divine coincidences,” meaning that rule 39 touches upon a theological question that can be baffling, because we do not always have these kind of moments. Does God order our lives? Is Providence more than just a word?

Does God work in the lives of children who have given no thought to theological questions or through a Hindu lawyer in early 20th century British Empirical South Africa, or a character on TV, or arrangements for a wedding? When things come together, does it mean anything?

Jesus and John

The bible is rife with such stories, no less than the story of Jesus. In John’s gospel we have read how

Jesus has met his first disciples. It seemed all arranged. He didn’t do much except get baptized in the Jordan River. The sequence of events is as rapidly told as my story about the wedding.

John the Baptist sees Jesus and calls him, “lamb of God.” Why anyone would understand what that meant is a mystery, but they did. Two of them broke off to follow Jesus. One of them was Andrew who went to tell his brother Simon. He told him he had found the Messiah. Why anyone would understand what that meant is also a mystery, but for hundreds of years the idea had been growing among the people and the time was right.

When Jesus saw Simon he looked at him and said, “you are Simon, son of John. You shall be called, ‘Cephas.’” Cephas is the Aramaic word meaning, “rock,” which means “Peter” in Greek. We know him as St. Peter.

Order

I believe that God *does* order our lives, *and* the world. As a matter of fact, one of the first statements in the bible is,

“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep . . . “ And then, “And God said,” and the ordering of the chaos began.

What the bible teaches and I believe is that whether it happens in a grand historical moment or a brief

personal experience, God is still ordering that chaos. Furthermore, when sometimes we think the chaos is winning, God allows us to see this ordering, going on around us. These moments are grace. They are glimpses of God's continued creativity among us, to sustain and encourage us, to strengthen and guide.

Sometimes these revelations are more widely known and at other times they are kept private, and we are never quite sure what to do with them. Sometimes we can not sense any order in the chaos, but the inference of the faithful is that these moments reveal a deeper reality, that God has ordered everything, even when we can not see it as such.

The story of Jesus, from the humble birth and baptism, the calling of the disciples, his relationship with John, all of it, is one of the most widely known examples, the most widely known. Over time, people have become convinced that in Christ they have witnessed God's ordering of the chaos right in front of their eyes.

And it has led to some more advanced theological notions:

The Rule of Love and the Golden Rule, Providence itself, the Forgiveness of Sin, Resurrection.

When these things happen, and when they do not, or when we can't see them for some reason, we can have faith, we can relate to the psalmist;

"I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a dry place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. . . . Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you have planned for us no one can recount to you, were I to speak of them, there would be too many to declare."

Or, Paul, in his introduction to the Corinthian letters, who put it this way;

"I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. *God is faithful*, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." *God is faithful!*

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