

Theme: The Line Dividing Good and Evil

“The Struggle with Good and Evil”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

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Genesis 2:15-17, 3:6-7

5 The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. 16 But the Lord God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—17 except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

6 The woman...saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. 7 At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

VIDEO The Line Dividing Good and Evil Week 1 Sermon Starter

SLIDE The Struggle with Good and Evil

I would like to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Meditation Moments. If you are new to our church we provide these every week. You will find a Scripture passage we will be using listed on top with a place below that’s for you to write down anything you would like to remember from today’s message. Every week I pray that something you experience during worship would speak your heart and the Holy Spirit would use that to touch you. I encourage you to write these things down that you might feel God may be speaking to just you today. Continued on that side and on the backside you will find daily Scripture readings. You’ll have a chance to read the Bible on your own this week and each passage will tie back into what we are talking about today. If you don’t have a Bible, you can take one from the pews and we will replace it so you can have one of your own. You can also get a pocket New Testament on the tables as you leave if you would like a travel Bible.

Today we begin a new six-week series of sermons on the struggle that we have as human beings between good and evil. There is a line that cuts through the heart of every human being that separates good and evil and we struggle with this. John Steinbeck once said this about the struggle between good and evil.

SLIDE (Photo of Steinbeck on the left) **“I believe that there is one story in the world, and only one. . . . Humans are caught—in their lives, in their thoughts, in their hungers and ambitions, in their avarice and cruelty, and in their kindness and generosity too—in a net of good and evil. . . . There is no other story. A man, after he has brushed off the dust and chips of his life, will have left only the hard, clean questions: Was it good or was it evil? Have I done well—or ill?”**

This is our story. This is the defining story of the human condition. As far back as you can go in human history you will find this struggle between good and evil. The ancient mythologies were all stories of the struggle between good and evil. Today we find modern stories in film and theater and novels which capture the struggle between good and evil. I'm going to see how familiar you are with some of our modern-day villains that we find in film. As we run this video clip, I invite you to shout out the name of each of these villains as you recognize them. This will be a pop quiz to get us started in this sermon series.

VIDEO Villain Clip

In this clip we see Scar, Darth Vader, Baltimore, Gollum, the Evil Queen, the Joker and the Wicked Witch of the West.

SLIDE The struggle between good and evil

We know these characters, even if you missed the names of one or two of them. We know them because they have been ingrained in our culture and they epitomize and represent evil. And in every one of those stories you know that good wins out over evil. We need that to happen and we want that to happen. It's also part of our story, that we believe and hope in the fact that someday good will conquer evil.

You also know that in every one of those stories there was a heroine or a hero. There was somebody who was willing to stand up to the evil, and it usually is not just one somebody. There was usually a person who is willing to die for a chance to save the world and they were usually surrounded by a whole group of other people. There was the Timone and Pumba in the Lion King, there was the Fellowship of the Ring, there was the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion and the Scarecrow, there were the friends of Harry Potter, there were the Seven Dwarfs and there was Han Solo and Chewie and R2D2 and C3PO. It always seems to be a group of people who, in the end, help good to triumph over evil.

This is our story in the Christian faith. We don't believe it's a myth or simply

a novel that is fiction. We believe that Jesus Christ came to show us the way. He came to invite us and inspire us and call us to be a part of this great battle with Him. He laid down his life for us on the cross and then He was raised from the dead to triumph over evil in a way that would call us and send us forth for the rest of our lives as his followers. Our role is to join Jesus Christ in pushing back the darkness, which is why we in this church talk about being the presence of Jesus Christ in the world and being salt and light. This is our story and we don't believe it's a myth. We believe it actually happened and it still drives us some 2000 years later as we see the struggle between good and evil continue in our world.

I would like to think that the villains of the world are just Hollywood characters, but we know that is not the case. We watch the evening news or we see it online or we read about it in the newspaper. We understand that evil is all around us and is very, very real. We saw it a few weeks ago in Centennial, Colorado, and then a year before that in a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, and in an elementary school in Connecticut. We saw it in a man who set his house on fire and then sat across the street with a gun aimed at the firefighters who came to save it. We saw it in a woman in a New York City subway station who pushed the man she believed to be Muslim in front of a subway train for revenge for what happened on 9/11. These are the kind of stories that we read about and we see that evil is very much a part of the human condition and very real in 2014.

Most of us would agree that the 20th century was the most technologically advanced century we humans have ever seen. We feel like we had really moved to somewhere and we became more civilized and more educated than any other time in human history. But when we look at the 20th century, it also is a testimony to how we human beings struggle with the line between good and evil. There were 104 armed conflicts between people groups in the 20th century. 231 million people died as a result of those wars and tribal conflicts and the tyranny and oppression of their government leaders. That is 231 million people who died of starvation or mutilation or in the act of war or in concentration camps. When we think of villains in the 20th century, most of us would point to one main character that we see this video clip.

VIDEO **Hitler clip**

SLIDE **The struggle between good and evil**

On the surface those words might seem inspiring, but we know different. We know that 6 million people were killed in the concentration camps and there were another 7 million killed as a result of Hitler. More than 40 million died

because of Stalin and his tactics of starving nations into submission. Hitler resided over a country that was predominately Christian. Even those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ become perpetrators of evil and horrific acts because of our human struggle with good and evil. How does this happen?

Part of what I want to do today is simply make the case for you and remind you of a fact that evil exists. I also want to suggest today that evil does not exist just in other people. When I was a sophomore in college I took class on Eastern European history and we read several books by Alexander Solzhenitsyn. His quote is one we used to promote this sermon series. He was a Russian dissident under the Soviet regime and a great literary figure of the 20th century. He was a devout follower of Jesus Christ and spent many of his years in the gulags which were the concentration camps in Siberia. He wrote these words.

SLIDE Alexander Quote (Graphic)

"If only there were evil people somewhere, insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor through political parties either—but right through every human heart, and who wants to destroy a piece of their own heart."

SLIDE W H Auden Quote

WH Auden said this once, ***"Evil is unspectacular and always human, and shares our bed and eats at our own table."***

We have to recognize within ourselves the path that leads us to do evil. This is a part of who we are as human beings and we struggle with this. It defines us in many ways. What typically defines us is which side of the struggle that we come out on as we wrestle with good and evil in our lives. In the next few weeks we will be talking about evil in a variety of ways and today is simply an introduction to the topic so that we can begin to wrestle with it in our own hearts and in our own minds. We will talk today about what is evil and how we might overcome it, but I also want to give you an idea of where we are heading the next few weeks.

Next week we will talk about the devil. We associate evil with the devil and so we will talk about what we know in terms of the devil. We will look at whether the devil is simply a symbolic representation of evil or if the devil actually exists. If you were brought up in church, you might find that many of the things you thought were true about the devil are not really what the Bible teaches about the devil. We have fumbled on the idea of the devil in the Christian tradition as it

relates to Scripture and so we will take a closer look at that. We will try to make sense of the devil and that is next week.

In two weeks, on Martin Luther King Jr. weekend, we will look at what happens when an entire society falls prey to evil. We will look at what happens when evil goes viral in culture and in a society. The week after that we will look at how each of us struggles with temptation. We will look at why the top-selling books in the last year all had something to do with shades of gray. The week after that we will talk about what happens when religion goes bad and how religion is sometimes used to perpetrate evil, especially evil in the name of God. Finally, we will wrap up this series by talking about evil's ultimate defeat and how we understand that as followers of Jesus Christ.

When we think about a definition of evil, it can be really hard to define. There are a variety of things that we think of when we look at evil. The word for evil in the Hebrew Bible and the two words for evil that we find in the Greek all have meaning that go from bad to a terribly tragic situation to out-right wickedness or intentional evil. Often in the English language we use evil to express a degree of badness. There is bad and then there is evil and evil seems to be something worse than bad.

Webster's dictionary gives this definition of evil: morally reprehensible, sinful, wicked or causing harm. The pursuit of our own gratification, even when our pursuit is something that we know to be wrong, is known as evil. The idea is that when we do wrong things in order to pursue our own desires and needs, then it becomes evil.

A second degree of evil might be when we pursue wrong knowing that it will hurt other people. This is the idea that we will do whatever it takes to get what we need and we don't care if it hurts somebody else or causes pain.

If we take it one step further, the most depraved sense of evil would be hurting other people intentionally to bring us satisfaction. It's not just that we know we are going to hurt them in order to be satisfied, but we actually derive satisfaction itself causing hurt and harm and pain to others.

Evil is, in some sense, this idea of doing the wrong thing, but it also can mean the idea of being broken or the absence of something good. In some languages the word evil simply means dark or the absence of light. Most cultures agree that evil is about doing something that is wrong and not caring what the consequences might be for other people, or doing it even though we know that

there will be painful outcome for other people.

This leads us to the passage before us today, which is one of the foundational stories in the entire Bible. In Genesis chapters 2 and 3 we find the creation story where Adam and Eve are placed in the midst of a garden. This story is all about that struggle between good and evil. Some people look at the story of Adam and Eve and believe that God was trying to tell us ancient history. Others look at the story and they see it more symbolically. But regardless of how you look at this story, it is meant to teach us something about ourselves. It is meant to hold a mirror for each one of us so that we can see our own soul and what can happen to us as humans.

The truth of this story is that Adam and Eve represent me and you. God places them in the midst of Paradise and God gives them the most wonderful things to eat. God gives them much to explore and experience. God says, "You can have all of it. It is all a gift to you. I love you and I give this to you so that you can be blessed. I want good for your life and so take it and enjoy it. There is only one thing you cannot do. There is one tree that has fruit on it that you need to stay away from. This one tree belongs to me. It's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and if you eat its fruit, it will be toxic for you. It will hurt you and damage your soul. So please, have anything you want in the garden, except to eat from that tree."

You know how the story goes. After they got this set of instructions, what tree did Adam and Eve most want to eat from? Isn't that our story? When somebody tells you "no", what becomes the thing you most desperately want? We all have a desire in some way for the forbidden fruit. We sometimes say, "The grass is always greener on the other side." There are a number of other different ways that we talk about it, but we find ourselves not content with having everything else in Paradise, and we want the one thing we are not supposed to have.

You see this in children. You put them in a room with toys and they finally each get settled in with their own toy playing in the room, and then you put a new toy in the middle of the room and you tell the children that they can play with all the other toys in the room, but they have to stay away from this one because it is special. Which toy do they want to play with? This is our story.

I love this story because of what Adam and Eve do next. They decide the first thing they will do is go and look at the fruit of that tree. They don't decide to stay as far away from that tree as possible because they know they are not

supposed to eat it, but instead they say, ***"I'm going to spend as much time as I can looking at this piece of fruit and at this cool tree."*** They recognize that the shade is wonderful under the limbs of this tree. They notice how beautiful the fruit is and so they decide to smell it. It smelled delicious.

This is our story. We get as close to the line as we can without stepping across it just because we can. I remember a young man coming to see me several years ago who was struggling with alcohol. He told me that he would test himself by going to the bar with his friends and simply ordering a glass of milk. "The rest of my friends each get a drink and I simply sit and watch."

All I could say was, "Dude—that is not a very smart way to avoid alcohol. You need a new place to hang out and you might even need new friends."

But this is what we do as humans. We play with fire and we get close to it. We pretend like we are not going to step across the line and we flirt with disaster. This is exactly what Adam and Eve are doing in the story and once again it is our story. This is the struggle that we face.

Then a new character enters the story. This talking serpent shows up and whispers to them. My hunch is that you have heard the talking serpent before. I know that I hear it every day. The serpent whispers, ***"Do you think God really meant what he said? Don't you think that God was just speaking metaphorically? Maybe God was having a bad day. You know what? I bet it was reverse psychology. I bet that God really wants you to want that and so he told you not to have it so you would go ahead and eat it because it will be good for you. God knew that if he told you it was good for you that you wouldn't eat it, just like broccoli and brussel sprouts."***

We all have the ability to listen to self-justification and to make a rationalization in our minds for why we do the things that we know are wrong but we really want to do. Instead of saying, "Be quiet. I'm not going to listen to you," we continue to flirt with the possibilities. I know that I hear that voice and I'm guessing that you hear it as well. This is our story. The apostle Paul said it was his story as well. In Romans 7 he says these words.

SLIDE 19 I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.

Every day we wrestle with the serpent. The psychologist Jung described this as, "the shadow." We wrestle with that shadow and we decide whether we give in to the dark side or whether we will walk in the light. We feel this struggle

between good and evil. We know it and experience it every day.

One way that might be helpful in understanding this struggle with evil is using the literal word for sin in the New Testament. The word in the Greek is **hamartia** and the word in Hebrew is similar. The word is an archery term which means to, "miss the mark." It can also mean, "to stray from the path."

SLIDE sin = hamartia = "to miss the mark"

The idea is that there is a path in life that we are supposed to walk. Hamartia happens when we stray from that path and miss the mark. I know that in my life I have strayed from that path and missed the mark many times. I'm guessing that you have done this as well, by thought, word and deed. I do it by the things I have not done and the things that I have done that were not good. I have said things I wish I hadn't said and not said things I wish I had said. There is this idea where the Bible uses directional terms to talk about evil or sin and how it is that we can stray from the path and go in the wrong direction.

SLIDE repent = "to turn back onto the path"

Another word used in the Scriptures is, "repent," which means literally, "to turn back onto the path." It literally means to turn around and go in a new direction. Repentance is about getting back on the right path. This is another regular part of our journey in life, and sometimes it happens daily, as we stray from the path and then return to it. The important idea for me to remember is that there is a path which I'm supposed to walk. If I walk in that path, the Scriptures tell me that there is life.

Consistently in the Bible you find Moses saying to the children of Israel, "**See, I set before you blessings and curses, life and death. Choose life.**" This is the path to choose that path and walked in life.

Joshua says the same thing to the people of Israel, "**You have to choose this day who you will serve. Me and my house, we will serve the Lord.**" We are going to walk on this path and choose life.

Part of the task of understanding the struggle between good and evil is understanding there is a path that God hopes and dreams for us to walk. We might ask, "What does that path look like?"

We can sometimes intuitively know this because we have a conscience which often helps us stay on the path, or least helps us to know when we have strayed. Of course our conscience can be shaped by our culture or our parents,

but it also can be misshaped, which happens for some who grow up in a destructive environment. We, as Christians, believe the Scriptures can help us to discover this path, especially when we have not been shaped in a way that is positive or leads to life.

Finally, we believe that Jesus came to show us the path, which is why he said these words, "I am the way, the truth and the life." In the early church those who followed Jesus were called, "Followers of the Way." Here in this congregation we say that we want to be Jesus Christ to the world. This is why we look at Jesus and the way he lived and we say, "This is how I choose to live. This is who I choose to be." The Scriptures help us to see this and how it is that we might find this path that brings us back.

There are a handful of Scriptures that many of us have memorized because they allow for us to clearly remember what it means to be a follower of the Way. One of my favorite verses that I first memorized was Micah 6:8. I have shared this with you before, but the only religious building on Capitol Hill is owned by the United Methodist Church. When you walk into the foyer you find these words across the top of the pillars.

SLIDE *"What does the Lord require of you—but to seek justice, love kindness and to walk humbly with your God."*

This is the path and we wake up every day and we make a choice. Every morning when I wake up, I have several things on my bathroom mirror that reminds me to make a choice. I want to choose to follow God. I want to follow Jesus Christ. I want to be the person that God has made me to be. I ask God humbly to help me do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly in everything I do.

If we are struggling with what this looks like, we can turn to Jesus and his words where he summarized the entire book of the law and the prophets with the two great Commandments, ***"Love God with your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as you love yourself."***

Jesus also gave us the Golden rule in Matthew gospel which is to, ***"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."***

All of these are ways of helping us to remember the path that we are meant to take. But the truth is that sometimes we will stray from the path and we will struggle. One of the things we remember is that when God came in human flesh, he also gave us a picture of grace and forgiveness and mercy. We are going

to wrestle with our broken places and that's okay, as long as we are willing to return the path, we can start over again.

I read about this story last week and actually saw the video of it on YouTube about a UPS seasonal worker. Before I go any further, I just want to say that I think UPS is a great company and I know that a number of you work for them. Just because I'm sharing this story doesn't mean all UPS workers are bad, just like when you hear about one Methodist preacher doing a bad thing doesn't mean all Methodist preachers are bad. I just want to give that disclaimer up front!

In the video you see a FedEx worker delivering an iPad and taking the delivery tag off the door as no one was home. He took the pickup slip filled out by the owner of the home and left the package down below in front of the door. Several hours later a seasonal UPS worker shows up with a different package. He rings the doorbell and leaves his package next to the other one. He notices the FedEx package but he doesn't notice the security camera overhead. He goes back to his truck and 2 minutes go by. On the video camera he is then captured coming back to the door and picking up the FedEx package box. He looks at it carefully and puts it underneath his notebook and heads back to his truck.

I kept wondering what was happening during those 2 minutes that he went back to his truck. What was he thinking about? Before we jump too quickly to judgment of that worker, I want to suggest that most of us have spent those 2 minutes in that truck. ***"Nobody will really know. Yes they will. Nobody is going to be hurt. They will send them another one. My kids could really use this. I don't get paid enough anyway as a seasonal worker. I deserve this for as hard as I'm working. The insurance is going to cover this for someone."*** Can you see the dialogue going on as the whispering serpent does his work in our ears for those 2 minutes in the truck?

When was the last time you spent 2 minutes in the truck? When have you been tempted and struggled with doing right or wrong? When have you spent time rationalizing a decision so you could get what you wanted? That iPad was around \$399, and for that he not only lost his job but he is going to have that crime permanently on his record.

When I was serving as a youth pastor in Colorado Springs, one of my students lived with his mother who was a single parent with three children. They had no money and their car broke down and it couldn't be repaired, according to the repair man to whom they took the car. He told them he had a used car he could sell to them which would be better than trying to fix her old car. She paid

him \$1000 for that car and within a month it had broken down. It turns out the car had severe engine damage, but the check engine light had been disconnected from the dashboard. Meanwhile, he took her old car, which needed a simple fix, and turned around and sold it for several thousand dollars. The mechanic had then left town and there was nothing she could do.

Is that just par for the course today? You have a car that needs to be sold and you don't tell everybody what's wrong, but you just try to fix it up and get what you can for it. Or do you tell?

I think of the young couple who bought their first house after saving for several years. They moved in and within a few months the doors would not close inside the house. It turns out there had been foundation damage and the previous owners had simply plastered on the walls, gave it a new paint job and made it look good when the house really need more than \$20,000 in repairs. For that young couple that might as well of been \$1 million and they were devastated. But no one is going to go to jail over not disclosing that, right?

We struggle with good and evil. We wrestle with it in the white-collar world and in the blue-collar world and everywhere in between. We find ways to rationalize during our 2 minutes in the truck.

I wrestle with good and evil every day when I ask myself, "***Will I speak poorly of another person? Will I act out of ego and pride or out of humility? Will I react in anger or will I show grace and mercy? Will I think first of other people or will I think first of my own needs? Will I be faithful to God in my heart and will I be faithful to those with whom I have made commitments, or will I do what I want to do.***" There are 1000 other ways in which I wrestle with this every day and I'm guessing that each of us in this room does as well.

Some people think that Christianity is all about a guilt trip and making people feel guilty for the wrong that we have done. If you go to church and it is all about making you feel guilty each and every week then you might be in the wrong church, because that is not the core of the Christian faith. The core of the Christian faith is a reminder that each of us falls short and there is always redemption and grace and mercy available for everyone. We have to know that we need forgiveness, otherwise we don't even want to take advantage of it. We need to know that we are in need of grace so we do need to talk about the problems that we struggle with, but **Christianity is all about the solution.**

Christianity is the good news that no matter what you've done or how far

away you have wandered from the path, you can always come back home. God has come among us to show us how much God loves us, and to remind us that God has already paid for the toxic things that we've done. God has already taken the pain upon himself and we can be free because grace is available to all. God is the God of the new beginning and a fresh start. Our God is the God of the second chance, and the third chance, and even the fourth chance. Our God is a God of hope and this is the message of the gospel.

If that UPS delivery driver were a part of our congregation I would tell him what I have told many who have been sitting in the court room, waiting for a judgment or verdict. **"You are not beyond redemption. You did something stupid and you got caught and it is going to cost you something. But I do promise you that God walks with you into whatever is next. God loves you and he hasn't stopped loving you. It will be okay and somehow, some way, if you will put your life in God's hands, God will see you through this."** I love this passage in 2 Chronicles 7:14.

SLIDE 14 Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.

This is what is promised to us in the Scriptures.

If this is a struggle for us, then let's talk a bit about how we might overcome the struggle and deal with it in our lives. The central assertion of the Christian faith is that we overcome it by coming to Christ through faith and becoming new people. There is this fundamental brokenness inside of us that can take us away from the path that leads to life. Somewhere along the way in giving our lives to Christ, what we find is grace and forgiveness and new beginning. There is a conversion in which we become a new creature in Christ. It is about coming to God and saying, **"God I need your grace in your suffering. I want to follow you."**

SLIDE We invite Jesus Christ to change us and make us new

This is a decision that we make which has to come from our heart. The Bible tells us that when anyone is in Christ we become a new creation. The old has passed away and the new has come. Jesus says in John's gospel that we become a new person in Christ and we need that new birth. This is the starting point as we come to Christ and say, **"This is who I choose to be. I wish to follow you Jesus Christ so change me and change my heart."** We invite the Holy Spirit

every day to hold us and shape us and keep us on the right path.

SLIDE We invite others to help us

But we also need other people. This is a difficult path to walk alone which is why Jesus started church. The church wasn't our idea but it was God's idea in Jesus Christ. We need more than one person and we need others to walk with us. Jesus called his disciples and followers to be in community together. First there were 12 disciples and then there were 72 and then there were several thousand.

Today you have perfect attendance for the year in church and I want you to continue in that because there is something that we need by being together. Most weeks I am delivering the message, but in many weeks I spend time listening to another church's worship service or watching online because I need to hear that fresh word from God as well. When I come into worship here each week I need the hymns and the praise songs that we sing. I need to hear somebody else read the Scripture which happens at the 11 o'clock service. I need to hear the choir and the message proclaimed. When this happens I find myself wanting to live up to the promises that I have made that morning throughout the week. One day in seven we gather here in this place to encourage one another and help one another. This time of worship is meant to help us keep our heads on straight and stay pointed towards true North and stay on the path.

I find I also need other Christians around me during the week because it is easy to get nudged off the path. I'm so blessed because I have that built-in with our weekly devotional time of the staff and we also do accountability groups in our staff time. We spend some time talking about our souls and where we struggle in faith. I have a couple of great Christian men that I meet with on a regular basis and we talk about our lives and our struggles. This is why I encourage you to get into a small group. As we begin a new year, this is a great time to do that. We have lots of new groups starting on Wednesday nights and throughout the week, and I hope you will consider being part of one of them. This is why our youth groups meet together in small groups, so they can share with each other what is on their hearts.

It doesn't take much for us to stray off the path which is why we need this, time together with other believers. You have heard me say before that I think at least half of us are one step from insanity most of the time and all it takes is a gentle push to move us to the dark side.

I think of one of the catastrophic events the 20th century which happened

in the nation of Rwanda in Africa. You might remember in the early 90s when the Hutus were a repressed minority and the Tutsis had power for a long time. During the colonial era the Belgians had supported this idea because it helped them maintain control over the country and its natural resources. The Tutsis had more Western characteristics and some of them had lighter skin. They were seen by some as inherently better or more intelligent because of their status. The Belgians developed identity cards to separate the Tutsis from the Hutus to make sure those divisions were made clear.

The Hutus eventually regained power and there was a sense that they would never again let the Tutsis be in control. The quest for freedom eventually turned into hatred which erupted in the spring of 1994. My understanding is that the wounds were actually beginning to heal in the late 80s and early 90s but those who were going to lose power began to foster the divisions began. Radio stations began to spew all kinds of vitriolic speech. They began to call the Tutsis "cockroaches" and they dehumanized them because that is the first step to be able to kill people. You need to dehumanize them and talk about them as though they were less than. There was constant talk radio gabage which fostered this idea.

A plan was eventually put in place to give out machetes throughout the country. I remember reading a book by someone who was a Hutu and how they had gotten caught up in the hostilities so easily. He said that when he went to church there were Tutsis and Hutus that sang in the choir together at this particular church. That afternoon they were given the order to take their machetes and kill their fellow choir members and Sunday school teachers, fellow followers of Christ. By this time they had so dehumanized and been convinced of the evil of the other through gentle nudges which happened day after day. The stuff they put in their brain and the stuff they listened to poisoned them and led them to civil war. Over 800,000 people were killed in 100 days in the violence that engulfed Rwanda.

A man who was involved in the killing wrote this in his book detailing the horror.

SLIDE "The worst thing about the massacre was killing my neighbor. We used to drink cool beverages during the day together. His cattle would graze on my land. He was like a relative to me."

How does this happen? Most of them were Christian people who were nudged a bit each and every day.

Every time we go through election season we hear the vitriol that comes from the right and the left. There is talk radio and we hear these voices from the extremes to which dehumanize the other. We have names for them that we use and we set aside their value as human beings. I think about what happened in Rwanda and I think, "Surely, this could never happen here? We are Americans, we would never do this." I might be convinced of that except that it happened in Germany to the Germans, and in Czechoslovakia to the Czechs, and in China to the Chinese, and in Russia with the Russians, and in America during slavery and the civil rights movement.

What it takes to make sure this doesn't happen is that somebody in the choir loft or in the praise team saying, "This is not right." It is a pastor who has the courage to stand up and say to the people that weekend, "I don't care what anybody else says, you belong to Jesus Christ first and this is not His way. If we get killed, then we give our lives because this is not the path."

I wonder if you or I would be that person. Would we stand up to be counted even if your life was in danger to do what is right and what is just and to stand on the side of good? As the Scripture tells us, would we stand up and speak for those who cannot speak for themselves? Maybe you remember this famous quote from Edmond Burke.

SLIDE Edmund Burke Quote (Graphic)

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

How do we overcome evil in our lives and society? We make a conscious decision. We wake up every day and we remember that our mission is to do justice and love kindness and to walk humbly with our God. We love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We study the Scriptures and through those Scriptures we find ourselves understanding what it means to be authentically and fully human and we seek to live in that path. We come to Christ and we ask for his strength and grace. We worship together and we pray together. We remember the mission above all else.

I invite you to write down Romans 12 somewhere on your Meditation Moments for the week. You are not going to be reading from this chapter this week but it is a powerful chapter for dealing with evil in our world and staying in the path that we are called to walk in as followers of Jesus Christ. Here are just a few snippets from that passage of Scripture.

SLIDE 9 Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is

wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. 10 Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.

17 Never pay back evil with more evil.

20 Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink.

21 Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

We are meant to help each other live this out as people of faith. And in Hebrews 10: 24-25 we find this wonderful passage of Scripture in which the writer of Hebrews is trying to tell the Christians in the first century how they are meant to live and why it is important they gather together in seeking to live out the way of Jesus Christ.

SLIDE *24 Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. 25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another...*

I love this idea that we are meant to motivate one another to love and good deeds. We don't just encourage each other but we motivate each other and I want to encourage you to take this seriously to motivate each other. At least once a year I will do a funeral for someone and members of the family and friends will say of that person, "They made me want to be a better person. They were constantly challenging me to do more than I would've done otherwise. They were constantly asking you to think about other people and not just myself."

That word "motivate" that you see in this passage of Scripture actually means literally in the Greek, "to come alongside and to jab." We are supposed to do that for each other. My wife does that for me sometimes when she encourages me to do something I might've missed out on. She will say something to me like, "Well, you're a preacher, aren't you? Don't you think you should be doing something like this?" She jabs me until I finally do it and likewise I am sometimes jabbing her. We are meant to motivate one another to love and good deeds.

Every week when I get up here to preach, I'm trying to jab you and motivate you to love and good deeds. Do the people around you, like your family and friends, say that you motivate them to love and good deeds? That is what we are meant to do for one another and it's part of what we do as we gather for worship as the church.

Over the course of 2013 you all touched thousands of lives all throughout the world through different mission trips and ministries that you were part of. You did things locally and globally and on Christmas Eve you gave to our Christmas Eve offering that we give away, so that children in Africa could have enough to eat and children in Guatemala could have medical care and those who come to the Manna Soup Kitchen will be able to learn how to cook and make a living for themselves. We are going to do some amazing things to help them have a future with hope. You can actually sign up for the trips and be part of one of the teams going too these places.

We ask you as a congregation to give as much to this offering as a gift to Jesus as you spent on yourselves at Christmas and many of you said you gave MORE to the Christmas offering than you spent on yourselves. You were excited about that and felt joy in doing that this Christmas.

I wondered what you would do this year in terms of your giving? Last year you gave \$75,000 at Christmas Eve and I was hoping we could do more this year. I texted our business manager, Robb Bourdon, this week even though he's on vacation and he told me you all did almost \$85,000! On Christmas Eve together this year you pushed back the darkness for hundreds of kids in Africa and Guatemala and right here in Durango.

You did something miraculous because you made a choice. You said, "I belong to Jesus Christ and I want to be the presence of Christ in the world. This is the WAY and what my life is about is NOT my self-gratification, but about changing the world." I am so proud of who you are and the congregation you have become.

Michael Davis said at a memorial service for his daughter Claire that the killer was blinded by anger and didn't know what he was doing. "My wife and I forgive Karl Pierson for what he did," Davis said. "We would ask all of you here and all of you watching to forgive Karl Pierson. He didn't know what he was doing."

Pierson was 18 and also a student at Arapahoe High. He killed himself after shooting Claire. Some law enforcement officers have vowed not to use Pierson's name and have referred to him publicly as "the murderer," but Michael Davis was conciliatory.

"The young man that shot Claire had a name. His name was Karl Pierson," Michael said, fighting back tears with his wife, Desiree, at his side. Michael went

on to say that Pierson "allowed himself to become filled with anger, rage and hatred. ... The fact is that Karl was so blinded by his emotions he didn't know what he was doing."

Michael said his daughter's last words were to ask Pierson, "Oh my gosh, Karl, what are you doing?"

Mr. Davis said of his daughter Claire, **"That was her way of trying to illuminate the emotional darkness that had enveloped Karl Pierson. We cannot let the darkness and evil win. We must choose something more."**

I have an invitation for you as we begin a New Year. The struggle between good and evil is one we will have every single day. We are going to hear the whisper of the devil. We are going to sit in the truck for two minutes. My hope and prayer is that you will choose to walk in the path of Christ every day. My prayer is that you will find strength from one another by gathering together every week of the year and encouraging and motivating one another to love and good deeds, and that when you leave this place you remember that your mission every day is to be the presence and light of Christ in the world; to do justice; to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

I would like to invite you to put your hands on your lap in front of you, palms up as if you are going to give something to God. I invite to pray your own prayer of offering yourself up to God, or if you are not sure what to pray, you whisper these words under your breath, knowing that God will hear your whisper.

SLIDE Prayer

God I offer my life to you. Help me to walk in the path—to pursue your ways—to love you—and to love those you bring across my path. Help to do justice—to love kindness—and to walk humbly with you.

Lord, as the Senior Pastor of this congregation I am in awe of these people and I love them deeply. I am so grateful and proud of the way we try together to walk in the path. You know Lord that we don't always do it and we have failed a million times. How grateful we are for your grace and mercy, your forgiveness and new beginnings. As we begin this New Year God, help us have a fresh start. Help us to grow together as your people, and together to change the world—to push back the evil and the darkness in our lives, in our culture and in our world. We offer ourselves to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

“The Struggle Between Good and Evil”

Theme: The Line Between Good and Evil

Scripture: *Genesis 2:15-17, 3:6-7*

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:

Meditation Moments for Monday, January 6 – Read Genesis 2:9, 15-17, 3:1-14 – The Bible first mentioned “evil” in the archetypal Hebrew creation story, which said that in the midst of God’s perfect garden stood the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God’s gift of moral freedom means each of us has such a “tree” within us, the choice to know good or evil. In the creation story (and in our lives), choosing to know evil produced evil results—shame, conflict and pain.

- As you examine how the Hebrew storytellers depicted the process by which we humans convince ourselves that becoming familiar with evil is actually a good thing, think of times when have you “heard” in your own thoughts something like the serpent’s voice in Genesis 3. Do you find yourself feeling that “I want what I want when I want it” in ways that trump God’s inner voice drawing you to want what God wants?
- How did Genesis 3 portray God’s response to Adam and Eve as they skulked among the trees, trying to hide from God? How did their shame response (garments of fig leaves?) and finger-pointing capture the way evil distorts and spoils relationships? How does this story show that when you’re not perfect, God will not shun you by withdrawing love, but will forgive and restore you?

Prayer: Lord God, thank you that while I was yet a sinner, Christ died for me! Psalm 23 said, “Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.” Thank you for calling me by name, for coming in search of me to save me. Amen.

Tuesday, January 7 – Read 2 Kings 17:9-17, Amos 5:12-15 – Amos was a prophet who pleaded with the people of the northern kingdom of Israel to turn back to God. 2 Kings described the kingdom’s fall, not in military or political terms, but in terms of the people’s moral choices. “Evil” in the Scriptures never existed on its own. It was defined by its opposition to God’s good purpose—“evil” is all that departs from the divine design for a worthwhile, fully human life.

- “Seek good and not evil ... hate evil, love good”—pretty simple, right? If only! In day-to-day life, what most fills your thoughts and grips your heart? In what ways do you open your heart and mind regularly to let God (not other sources) define what “good” is? When you recognize emotional blocks to loving “good” (past hurts, debilitating thought patterns, etc.), are you willing to deal with those bravely and openly, with a counselor’s help if needed?
- 2 Kings comes from a different, long ago culture, so it’s easy for us to see that Israel fell to shocking depths— “They burned their sons and daughters alive” (verse 17). But they didn’t start there. Notice how the passage leads us through some of Israel’s steps on the way to human sacrifice. Review your own life trajectory. One way is to look at the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23). Are you finding more of God’s fruit in yourself this January than in past years?

Prayer: Lord, you spoke through Amos to Israel long ago and through all of Scripture to us today. Transform my “self” so that more and more I naturally seek and choose you—good, not evil. Amen.

Wednesday, January 8 – Read John 1:1-5, 1 John 1:1-10 – The Bible writers often pictured the tension between good and evil as the difference between light and darkness. But when the apostle John wrote, he was able to put it in more specific terms. Jesus, he said—the Lord he had seen and heard—was the light who broke into the world’s darkness, and the darkness couldn’t put it out. Jesus was the one who could deliver us from the darkness we find within ourselves.

- John very deliberately connected his gospel and his letter to the story of Creation. The word “beginning” is right at the start of both documents, along with the statement that “Everything came into being through the Word” (John 1:3). In what ways have you experienced God’s creative power opening new possibilities in your life?
- John knew we have a penchant for fooling ourselves: “If we claim, ‘We don’t have any sin,’ we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Are there areas of life where you are ignoring a God-given inner conviction that you need to face an issue honestly? Talk with God about it now. How can dealing directly with those issues open you to the freeing experience John described: “he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we’ve done wrong” (verse 9)?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for doing your work of new creation in my life. Be light in my darkness, and give me the honesty to let you renew all the parts of me that still need your cleansing touch. Amen.

Thursday, January 9 – Read Matthew 6:9-13, 15:10-20 – The prophet Isaiah said the process pictured in Genesis 3 went on: that some people called good evil and evil good (Isaiah 5:20). Jesus found such people even in his day’s religious circles: people who denounced outward ritual violations, while harboring hatred, slander and bitterness in their hearts. His prayer for deliverance from the evil one was a prayer that God would keep the inner springs of behavior pure.

- Pharisees in Jesus’ day didn’t know about germs, but had intricate washing rites meant to keep small demons from clinging to their hands, making food ritually unclean. While busily plotting how best to destroy Jesus (Matthew 12:14), they criticized his disciples for not strictly following the washing customs. Like them, we’d often rather look “good” than be good. Are you able to be “real” and ask a fellow Christian to pray with you about a spiritual or personal struggle of yours?
- Reflect on the connection between the first part of the Lord’s Prayer and its closing petition. What would life here be like if God’s will were “done on earth as it’s done in heaven” (Matthew 6:10)? As you live into God’s kingdom more and more, what are you asking God to do in you to free you to live more fully in Jesus’ light?

Prayer: Father in heaven, may your will be done in me more and more as it is in heaven. Lead me, Lord, and day by day empower me to erode my ties to earth and strengthen my ties to you. Amen.

Friday, January 10 – Read Romans 7:14-25 – Paul told the Romans, with plainspoken honesty, about how he experienced the line between good and evil cutting through his own heart. Gritting his teeth and resolving to do better, he said, didn’t produce the good results he sought. It was only as he put his trust in Jesus’ grace and power that he found, day by day, God’s grace freeing him from evil’s power in his life.

- Paul’s statement that evil comes from “sin that lives in me” (verse 17) was not an effort to duck responsibility for his actions. It was a vivid way of describing a nearly universal human experience: the sense of a war within our self, of two contending principles of action. When have you found yourself determined to change a hurtful pattern, and yet powerfully drawn back to it again?
- Paul’s picture of our inner struggles was not unique. The Roman philosopher Seneca wrote of “our helplessness in necessary things.” But Paul’s discussion did not end with despair. “Who will deliver me from this dead corpse? Thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (verse 24-25) When have you experienced Christ’s power, not wiping out the struggle, but empowering you to more and more come out on the right side of it?

Prayer: O God, I identify with Paul’s words: “When I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me.” Thank you for your presence and power through Jesus Christ, which guides my resolve to choose your way more and more. Amen.

Saturday, January 11 – Read Ephesians 5:6-11, Psalm 34:13-16 – Because the line between good and evil cuts through each of our hearts, each of us daily chooses our life’s direction. Ephesians 5:9 says, “Light produces fruit that consists of every sort of goodness, justice, and truth.” To live as a child of light is not to choose a gloomy, self-condemning kind of existence. It’s to set out on an adventure with God, exploring and internalizing “every sort of goodness, justice and truth.” As you do that, you are truly choosing good, and living in the light Jesus Christ brought to the world.

- At the end of his life story, *All Is Grace*, Brennan Manning wrote, “My hope, as always, is to point to the God too good to be true ... My message, unchanged for more than fifty years, is this: God loves you unconditionally, as you are and not as you should be, because nobody is as they should be ... My life is a witness to ... a grace that is the pleasure of the Father, fleshed out in the carpenter Messiah, Jesus the Christ, who left His Father’s side not for heaven’s sake but for our sakes ... Grace is sufficient even though we huff and puff with all our might to try to find something or someone it cannot

cover. Grace is enough. He is enough. Jesus is enough.” How will you build your life around that hope-filled, life-changing truth this week, this month, this year?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you invite me into the great adventure of living as a child of your light. The psalmist wrote that you listen to my cries for help. So help me say “yes” to your invitation, today and every day. Amen.

Family Activity: How can we help overcome evil with good? We can share Christ’s love, grace and hope with others in our world. Pray for the students returning to Arapahoe High School in Centennial as they return to a place that was caught up in evil and violence in December. Talk together as a family about concrete ways to reach out to others at school or at work who need to be encouraged. Make a list together of people you want to reach out to and then pray for them as a family.