



*“Half Measures”*

*God works through human brokenness to bring about God’s good purposes.*

*Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28*

Sunday, August 13th • 10th Sunday After Pentecost

First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois

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The term “half measure” is defined by Webster’s dictionary as “a partial, half hearted, or weak line of action.” Another way to understand the term is to view it as less than our best effort. It is an attempt but not a full commitment. With that in mind I think it is fair to say that in this world half measures abound. It doesn’t take long to think of a law or resolution that is a weak line of action against significant issues.

At various times in history the church has done things in half measure. Before the 13th century the church wanted people to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their might. However, the Bible was transcribed in Latin making it unreadable by almost all congregation members. Thus the church, the body of Christ, did not have direct access to the word of God. In this half measure, this lackluster effort the church failed share the continual care God exercises over the universe God created. Later on, the church, in the United States, failed to take an outright stand against slavery. There were a few pastors and churches who worked towards ending slavery, but the universal church’s actions to proclaim that all people are worthy of dignity and, are slave to no person because they bear the image of God, were weak at best. Today, the church has not blatantly denounced and worked to end the ethnic cleansings happening in South Sudan and Gaza. Half measures have existed throughout all of church history and are still a reality of this world, religious and secular.

Clergy are not immune to partial, half hearted, and weak lines of action. I claim God as my Lord alone, and yet, oftentimes, I place things like clothing, vacations, and bicycles before God. Other times I make claims about treating people with dignity like the prophet Isaiah implores us to do, but my actions tell another story. I also say I desire to honor God but in reality I am jealous, I want a house with a finished basement not an apartment. Sometimes rather than putting a stop to degrading and abusive conversations I chose to stay silent and do not defend the defenseless. During those times my relationship with God is partial. It is weak. I am living as a half measure Christian.

I think, Reuben, Joseph’s brother took a half measure to save his brother’s life. He and his other brothers were out shepherding their dad’s sheep, as was their responsibility. Joseph was at home instead of in the field so his dad called to him and told him to go visit his brothers and bring him back a report on how they were doing. So Joseph left to find them.

Being his father's favorite son Joseph had been given a unique coat. It was so vibrant you could pick Joseph out of a crowd from a mile away. It was not like looking for Waldo in "Where's Waldo. In that coat Joseph stood out from the crowd. His brothers saw him coming from a long way off. As Joseph approached them they began to talk about how much they did not like their little brother. Things quickly escalated, as they do when people share a common disdain, and say words without thinking them through. Soon Joseph's brother's were talking about killing him. Then they devised a plan. They would murder their brother and then take that fancy coat he had, shred it, and dip in animal blood. Then, they would show it to their father as proof of his death and to secure their alibi.

Well Reuben was there listening to his brothers, but he was not fully on board with his brothers murderous plot. So he came up with an alternative idea. One that can be labeled a half measure. He suggested they throw him into a hole in the ground and leave him there. Reuben could have told his brothers they should not kill Joseph. He could have stood up to for his little brother and told everyone else they were not going to kill him, that they weren't even going to touch him. Reuben did no such thing. He acted with a half measure when he told his brothers they should just throw him down some deep dark hole and leave him to his own devices.

Half measures are part of life. We do them when we halfheartedly tell someone to stop being a bully and saying abusive and aggressive things. We participate in them when timidly call attention to systems that keep people from flourishing with words that quickly fade from memory. We do not have to think long to name our half measures. We all have them and we all do them. If half measures are a reality, as I claim, the question becomes why do they exist? The short answer is because of sin. Sin causes us to do things with lukewarm effort when we ought to be following after God with fiery passion. Sin steers us away from God and righteousness and to complacency and indifference. Sin is at the core of human brokenness, which means half measures are part of life. Sin is why they exist.

This text isn't just about half measures, human brokenness and sin. As we approach the word of God we can be certain that God will always disclose something to us about God's self and about us too. Over the course of the summer we have learned from the book of Genesis that God is creator of the universe, in his hands all things are held together, and he has made promises to his people. God could just make things happen the way he wants them too, he is God after all. Yet God lovingly cares for all of creation and works out his good purposes through human action even when our actions do not measure up. That means God works through human brokenness, our half measures to bring about God's good purposes. Although Reuben might have come up a little short in confronting his brothers and their devious plan God worked through that half measure. Our text this morning does not share with us, but if you were to read the rest of Joseph's story you learn that God worked through Reuben's half measure to bring about good for Joseph's entire family and ultimately the entire world, thus fulfilling the promise God made to his father Jacob to bless all of humanity through his lineage. When our attempts to walk in the righteousness of God are weak and our efforts lackluster, God still works through them to bring about God's good purposes. God is not bound by or limited to our tepidness. God moves through our efforts, as feeble as they may be, to accomplish God's will. This is good news. God is not dependent upon us or our actions, but works through them to care for all that which God has created.

What is our role in life if we are broken by sin and often times do things in half measure? We are to continue to seek God in all things like Joseph's father did. We are to act in ways that honor God as Joseph's grandfather Isaac did. We are to walk in ways of righteousness as Joseph's great grandfather Abraham did. As we do God will take our actions and turn them about to bring his promise of providential care into full measure.

In short, this Joseph narrative illustrates for us a few things. One that humans are broken by the powers of sin which results in us taking half measures. Two, God works through human brokenness, our half measures to bring about God's purposes on earth. Three, we are to continue to pursue God, offering to God our efforts in the knowledge that God will bring about his full measure through our actions even when they come up short.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.