

Notes: December 10, 2016

Start: 10 AM

Order of service:

1. Meet and Greet
2. Introduction (if new people)
3. Ma Tovv
4. Open in Prayer for service
5. Liturgy – Sh'ma +
6. Announcements
7. Jeri - Drash
8. Praise and Worship Songs
9. Message
10. Aaronic Blessing
11. Kiddush
12. Oneg

Children's Blessing:

Transliteration: *Ye'simcha Elohim ke-Ephraim ve hee-Menashe*

English: *May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe*

Transliteration: *Ye'simech Elohim ke-Sarah, Rivka, Rachel ve-Leah.*

English: *May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.*

Introduction: Seasonal Survival

I want to open where Jeri left off (see below)...:

“Ultimately then, when we face the various pressures of life, part of our pain and suffering comes from the fact we are seeking to live independently of Adonai and because we are looking to the wrong things for our happiness, or for what only Adonai Himself can give. The great purpose for the upward focus is to learn to be more like Messiah and that means learning to live more and more dependently on Adonai and less dependently on the details of life.”

What if we are living dependently with Adonai and following Him with all of our heart and to the best of our ability, yet are still experiencing pain and suffering, especially at this time of year?

Others may experience SAD – Seasonal Affective Disorder, a term coined by psychiatrists conveying a seasonal depression triggered by diminished sunlight during the winter months.

Yet as a congregation, I believe we may experience a different struggle that is both magnified and amplified.

It is magnified in such a way that we examined, challenged and criticized by others, whether family or friends.

It is amplified, because we are in a minority when it comes to our beliefs, whether secular or religious, we are vastly outnumbered.

If you haven't guessed by now, I am talking about Christmas.

Now for starters, this is not a Christmas attack sermon whereby I dismantle its validity based on the lack of Scripture supporting it.

This is not an attack towards those who celebrate it, whether secular or religious.

But rather, this is a survival guide sermon on what you may expect and ultimately how to get through it.

You will be inundated with the barrage known as Christmas, whether it is the plethora of crowded retail stores and their sales, followed by the red kettles as you leave the establishment or the debate of Happy Holidays vs. Merry Christmas, as a believer who has chosen not to celebrate this day, you cannot escape it, even as much as you try.

For me, the annoyance is over a war to save the meaning of Christmas.

A time that is more commercialized and secular than religious, you have believers who are constantly reminding others “the reason for the season” a catchy alliterative tag line defending, if not justifying their belief.

To where, you have others defending the attack against saying Merry Christmas rather than the more generic, less offensive and more inclusive “Happy Holidays”.

For me this is amplified by the likes of a Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity, Laura Ingram, and others, all believers who have taken on the mantle of defending Christmas, against the “liberal left”.

Yet, as believers they have ultimately chosen to accept the tradition rather than the Scriptures.

There are two things that are recommended not to be discussed when in the company of others, politics and religion, yet, when you are invited by your family for “Christmas dinner” that could be a little hard to do. Needless to say, I would say in most families, the emphasis is on the dinner and gift giving than any thing Scriptural.

So, what can a believer in the Jewish Messiah, who was not born on Christmas, yet the vast majority of non-Jewish believers have chosen to embrace this as His birth to do?

First and foremost, stand up for what you believe.

And while you are doing that, pray for strength to endure the potential attacks you may endure.

If you are not willing to take a stand for what you believe, in the face of opposition from family and friends what will you stand for?

One example from Scripture to consider would be Stephen in Acts 6 & 7, conveying one of the most powerful defenses in Acts 7 that Yeshua is the Messiah, ultimately standing against religious leaders and community members who falsely accused him of speaking against Moshe and the Temple, took a stand for what He believed. In so doing...

Act 7:55 But he, full of the Ruach HaKodesh, looked up to heaven and saw God's Sh'khinah, with Yeshua standing at the right hand of God.

Act 7:56 "Look!" he exclaimed, "I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

When we stand for Him, He will stand for us.

Keep in mind you are not alone, just as Stephen was not alone, look at verse 55...

“But he, full of the Ruach HaKodesh...”

For us it took years to get Jeri's family to recognize we don't do Christmas. Each year in October or November Jeri would get a call informing her who her family member was that she was to by a present for. Likewise, I would also receive a name. Even with reminders, every year, not to put our names in the mix, we still got the phone call. I believe it took about 5 or 6 years before we got excluded. We won't even go into the sitting on Santa's knee aspect.

Yet, we didn't alienate ourselves from the family, isolating ourselves even further. Once recognized for what we believe, came the questions, followed by a discussion. Yet, that is ultimately as far as it went.

The roots are so deep for many that it is near impossible to pull them out. Ultimately, it is Adonai who has to do the weeding.

Family is important, yet they are also challenging.

Embrace the Scriptures that are used at this time, in that Adonai has opened your eyes to His foundational truth rather than unsubstantiated tradition.

Isa 9:6 (9:5) For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; dominion will rest on his shoulders, and he will be given the name Pele-Yo`etz El Gibbor Avi-`Ad Sar-Shalom [*Wonder of a Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace*],

Isa 9:7 (9:6) in order to extend the dominion and perpetuate the peace of the throne and kingdom of David, to secure it and sustain it through justice and righteousness henceforth and forever. The zeal of Adonai-Tzva'ot will accomplish this.

You will not find peace in acceptance from others, nor in submitting to their view. In doing so, you are actually denying the truth of Adonai.

If you think you are making peace within the family, think again. It is not real peace, but fabricated. Bullied.

Love them, be a light to them, because you may be that only light...

All of this in the face of opposition, ridicule and mocking.

We had just finished 2 Kefa this past week in which He conveys this warning...

2Pe 3:3 First, understand this: during the Last Days, scoffers will come, following their own desires

2Pe 3:4 and asking, "Where is this promised 'coming' of his? For our fathers have died, and everything goes on just as it has since the beginning of creation."

Though speaking of scoffers asking where is this anticipated return, we too as believers are experiencing scoffing from other believers, likely thinking because we don't do this, we are denying Yeshua.

Yet, what they don't understand is we have not denied Yeshua, but rather the tradition that has been attached to Him. In other words "the sacred cow" that has no foundational Scriptural support.

If your family are staunch believers, then they are concerned that you are, to use a church term "back sliding" because you are going back under the law for which we have been freed from.

Rather than being defensive, go on the offensive without being offensive.

Ask if you can share your perspective

By asking, you are seeking permission to share. If given, then they are obligated to listen, because they have given you permission to speak.

Ask them to provide you with Scriptures supporting what they believe.

Rather than make this a monologue, asking them for their input as to what they believe makes this more of a dialog, invoking interaction, rather than a one sided mini sermon.

Act 6:8 Now Stephen, full of grace and power, performed great miracles and signs among the people.

Act 6:9 But opposition arose from members of the Synagogue of the Freed Slaves (as it was called), composed of Cyrenians, Alexandrians and people from Cilicia and the province of Asia. They argued with Stephen,

Act 6:10 but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by which he spoke.

Act 6:11 So they secretly persuaded some men to allege, "We heard him speak blasphemously against Moshe and against God."

Act 6:12 They stirred up the people, as well as the elders and the Torah-teachers; so they came and arrested him and led him before the Sanhedrin.

Act 6:13 There they set up false witnesses who said, "This man never stops speaking against this holy place and against the Torah;

Act 6:14 for we have heard him say that Yeshua from Natzeret will destroy this place and will change the customs Moshe handed down to us."

Act 6:15 Everyone sitting in the Sanhedrin stared at Stephen and saw that his face looked like the face of an angel.

Act 7:1 The cohen hagadol asked, "Are these accusations true?"

Act 7:2 and Stephen said: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to Avraham avinu in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran

Act 7:3 and said to him, 'Leave your land and your family, and go into the land that I will show you.'

Act 7:4 So he left the land of the Kasdim and lived in Haran. After his father died, God made him move to this land where you are living now.

Act 7:5 He gave him no inheritance in it, not even space for one foot; yet he promised to give it to him as a possession and to his descendants after him, even though at the time he was childless.

Act 7:6 What God said to him was, 'Your descendants will be aliens in a foreign land, where they will be in slavery and oppressed for four hundred years.

Act 7:7 But I will judge the nation that enslaves them,' God said, 'and afterwards they will leave and worship me in this place.'

Act 7:8 And he gave him b'rit-milah. So he became the father of Yitz'chak and did his b'rit-milah on the eighth day, and Yitz'chak became the father of Ya`akov, and Ya`akov became the father of the Twelve Patriarchs.

Act 7:9 "Now the Patriarchs grew jealous of Yosef and sold him into slavery in Egypt. But Adonai was with him;

Act 7:10 he rescued him from all his troubles and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who appointed him chief administrator over Egypt and over all his household.

Act 7:11 Now there came a famine that caused much suffering throughout Egypt and Kena`an

Act 7:12 But when Ya`akov heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time.

Act 7:13 The second time, Yosef revealed his identity to his brothers, and Yosef's family became known to Pharaoh.

Act 7:14 Yosef then sent for his father Ya`akov and all his relatives, seventy-five people.

Act 7:15 And Ya`akov went down to Egypt; there he died, as did our other ancestors.

Act 7:16 Their bodies were removed to Sh'khem and buried in the tomb Avraham had bought from the family of Hamor in Sh'khem for a certain sum of money.

Act 7:17 "As the time drew near for the fulfillment of the promise God had made to Avraham, the number of our people in Egypt increased greatly,

Act 7:18 until there arose another king over Egypt who had no knowledge of Yosef.

Act 7:19 With cruel cunning this man forced our fathers to put their newborn babies outside their homes, so that they would not survive.

Act 7:20 "It was then that Moshe was born, and he was beautiful in God's sight. For three months he was reared in his father's house;

Act 7:21 and when he was put out of his home, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son.

Act 7:22 So Moshe was trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and became both a powerful speaker and a man of action.

Act 7:23 "But when he was forty years old, the thought came to him to visit his brothers, the people of Isra'el.

Act 7:24 On seeing one of them being mistreated, he went to his defense and took revenge by striking down the Egyptian.

Act 7:25 He supposed his brothers would understand that God was using him to rescue them, but they didn't understand.

Act 7:26 When he appeared the next day, as they were fighting, and tried to make peace between them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers! Why do you want to hurt each other?'

Act 7:27 the one who was mistreating his fellow pushed Moshe away and said, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?'

Act 7:28 Do you want to kill me, the way you killed that Egyptian yesterday?'

Act 7:29 On hearing this, Moshe fled the country and became an exile in the land of Midyan, where he had two sons.

Act 7:30 "After forty more years, an angel appeared to him in the desert near Mount Sinai in the flames of a burning thorn bush.

Act 7:31 When Moshe saw this, he was amazed at the sight; and as he approached to get a better look, there came the voice of Adonai,

Act 7:32 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya`akov.' But Moshe trembled with fear and didn't dare to look.

Act 7:33 Adonai said to him, 'Take off your sandals, because the place where you are standing is holy ground.'

Act 7:34 I have clearly seen how My people are being oppressed in Egypt, I have heard their cry, and I have come down to rescue them, and now I will send you to Egypt.'

Act 7:35 'This Moshe, whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and judge?' is the very one whom God sent as both ruler and ransom by means of the angel that appeared to him in the thorn bush.'

Act 7:36 This man led them out, performing miracles and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.

Act 7:37 This is the Moshe who said to the people of Isra'el, 'God will raise up a prophet like me from among your brothers'

Act 7:38 This is the man who was in the assembly in the wilderness, accompanied by the angel that had spoken to him at Mount Sinai and by our fathers, the man who was given living words to pass on to us.

Act 7:39 "But our fathers did not want to obey him. On the contrary, they rejected him and in their hearts turned to Egypt,

Act 7:40 saying to Aharon, 'Make us some gods to lead us; because this Moshe, who led us out of Egypt — we don't know what has become of him.'

Act 7:41 That was when they made an idol in the shape of a calf and offered a sacrifice to it and held a celebration in honor of what they had made with their own hands.

Act 7:42 So God turned away from them and gave them over to worship the stars — as has been written in the book of the prophets, 'People of Isra'el, it was not to me that you offered slaughtered animals and sacrifices for forty years in the wilderness!

Act 7:43 No, you carried the tent of Molekh and the star of your god Reifan, the idols you made so that you could worship them. Therefore, I will send you into exile beyond Bavel.'

Act 7:44 "Our fathers had the Tent of Witness in the wilderness. It had been made just as God, who spoke to Moshe, had ordered it made, according to the pattern Moshe had seen.

Act 7:45 Later on, our fathers who had received it brought it in with Y'hoshua when they took the Land away from the nations that God drove out before them. "So it was until the days of David.

Act 7:46 He enjoyed God's favor and asked if he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Ya`akov

Act 7:47 and Shlomo did build him a house.

Act 7:48 But Ha`Elyon does not live in places made by hand! As the prophet says,

Act 7:49 'Heaven is my throne,' says Adonai, 'and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house could you build for me? What kind of place could you devise for my rest?'

Act 7:50 Didn't I myself make all these things?'

Act 7:51 "Stiffnecked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You continually oppose the Ruach HaKodesh! You do the same things your fathers did!

Act 7:52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who told in advance about the coming of the Tzaddik, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers! —

Act 7:53 you! — who receive the Torah as having been delivered by angels — but do not keep it!"

Act 7:54 On hearing these things, they were cut to their hearts and ground their teeth at him.

Act 7:55 But he, full of the Ruach HaKodesh, looked up to heaven and saw God's Sh'khinah, with Yeshua standing at the right hand of God.

Act 7:56 "Look!" he exclaimed, "I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

Act 7:57 At this, they began yelling at the top of their voices, so that they wouldn't have to hear him; and with one accord, they rushed at him,

Act 7:58 threw him outside the city and began stoning him. And the witnesses laid down their coats at the feet of a young man named Sha'ul.

Act 7:59 As they were stoning him, Stephen called out to God, "Lord Yeshua! Receive my spirit!"

Act 7:60 Then he kneeled down and shouted out, "Lord! Don't hold this sin against them!" With that, he died;

Stephen knew what he believed

He knew why he believed it.

He was able to defend what he believed, in spite of the outcome.

Is Yeshua standing for you?

The One Who Sits By The Well

It was high noon and hot. Across the shimmering, parched earth a woman trudged toward the well outside town. She was alone. The other women had been to the well already. They came together in the cool of the morning to fill pots with water for the needs of the day.

It seems she was alone a lot those days. She was an outcast in her village, maybe even in her family. She'd been married five times and was living with a man who wasn't her husband. Small towns often have even smaller hearts; and very "religious people," well you know how they treat their wounded. Her reputation was shot and, no doubt, her heart was maimed. Her soul? Who knows? Maybe she felt like a woman I know who told me, I'm 28 years old and I'm all used up.

She carried a heavy pot through the heat toward that well. She carried a larger burden in her soul. She hadn't expected her life to turn out this way. Of course, none of us do. Whether her life was the result of her own bad choices or a series of bad men or just sheer bad luck, she came to the well that day with a dry and empty soul.

Like the children of Israel in Exodus 17:1-17, she lived in a dry and barren wilderness. The journey had started with such high hopes and glad songs. Most journeys do. Who starts off any chapter of life expecting to wander in the wilderness? Israel didn't. The long brutal slave days were over and they were on the march toward Adonai's promised land. But then came reality. Contrary to all their expectations, a long, difficult and dangerous journey lay between them and the promised land. In fact, most of them would die in that foreboding wilderness.

This woman at the well knew all too well that life can be like that fearsome desert. Hopes and dreams too easily fade in the heat of realities that empty the heart and parch the soul. We start so many chapters of life with high hopes too soon dashed on the rocks of reality. Our hopes and dreams seem like a mirage; they appear much better than they are.

More than anything we want our journey to be a good one. But it seems as though joy, satisfaction, happiness, call it what you may, though real, is all to temporary and seldom more than partial. Even at its best, the journey is long, difficult, and unpredictable.

Even good things, very good things, often turn to dust. Ask the Samaritan woman. Love, Adonai's greatest gift that we often use incorrectly, had broken her heart and damaged her soul. If we could just find the right person, we think, or another person, we'd be in the promised land of life. But then...reality. In fact, all of Adonai's gifts easily become heartbreaking realities. This world is a barren desert, a punishing, even lethal place to live, and we need help.

And I must say it, religion can become just a dry hole that empties the soul. I know! Rabbi and I work in ministry day in and day out. I think leading a congregation is the most satisfying work possible, but I also know full well that ministry demands, well-meaning people within the congregation, and other religious institutions can break your heart and empty your soul. That's life.

You see, we think things, or doing things, all this human stuff, can somehow satisfy the deepest part of us, our soul. We really believe that we can determine our own fulfillment. So we run from place to place, from experience to experience, from store to store, or mall to mall, from love to love, from person to person, from career to career, from one success to another, looking for something to feed our souls. And sometimes it works – for a while. But none of this human stuff, not even all the good stuff, not even all the stuff on earth put together, can form a heart in the shape of Adonai's heart. Nor will it fill a human soul with the peace of Adonai.

The Israelites asked a powerful question in Exodus 17:7. Is the Lord among us or not? Is Adonai here or not? The question wasn't about Adonai's power the previous week or the previous month. After all, they'd just walked out of Egyptian slavery under the hand of Adonai. They didn't ask, Was Adonai there? They knew the answer to the question. Rather, their question, and our question, too, is more profound. Is Adonai here, in this desert, in my life, here and now?

It's the right question because it asks another question: Can we determine our own fulfillment? In this life, on this planet, with our gifts, abilities and powers, can we feed the center spot of our own existence, our souls? Or must we look beyond ourselves to something or someone else?

At Sychar the woman who came to the well in the noontime heat got the surprise of her life. In fact, she came face to face with the barren wilderness her life had become. There, sitting at the well waiting for her, was a man – a Jewish man. Against all her expectations he spoke to her. That was shocking enough. In that world Jews avoided Samaritans like the worst kind of plague. Samaritans were considered worse than dogs, and most self-respecting Jews would not even set foot on Samaritan soil.

Her shock went even deeper. Jewish rabbis commanded men never to speak or even to greet a woman, not even their own wives in public, for fear of gossip. So to hold a conversation alone with a woman was a shocking breach of conventional morality. Later, when Yeshua's disciples showed up at the well, they seemed surprised and a bit upset that Yeshua was talking to a woman.

You know the story. Yeshua moved the conversation from the physical water in that well to the dry soul of this sad woman. He told her He had enough water to nourish her parched soul forever. To be sure, life is a long, dry, and difficult journey. She couldn't change that, and Yeshua didn't offer to change her barren world. He offered to change her. Did you get that? Yeshua did not offer to change her barren world. He offered to change her.

John 7:37-38 later records Yeshua's trip to Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles, when he stood in the temple and cried out, Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.

Like all of us, this poor woman had spent her life and energy trying to feed her soul from the outside in. She had failed to realize that she needed soul food to feed her soul. The spirit is fed by the spirit. When you think about, it, that makes sense!

In fact, that's the point of the story. Yeshua's disciples went off to the store to buy lunch, while Yeshua waited at the well for this woman to show up. By the time they got back she knew more than they did about soul food. She had drunk some of the water Yeshua offered her and raced back to town to tell everyone where to come to get a real drink of life.

Meanwhile the disciples were worried about Yeshua's reputation and his lunch – in that order. They'd walked up on a life-transformation and all they saw was a possible scandal, a loaf of bread and their next ministry assignment. While they talked about their next meal, the woman was back in Sychar telling everyone about living water.

The disciples' souls were dulled by common realities. Yeshua had to tell them He had some bread they couldn't even imagine. He'd just led a soul-starved woman to new life.

The story ends wonderfully. Yeshua is having His “bread” talk with the disciples when, wonder of wonders, a whole chorus of people from Sychar, friends of this woman, come running from town crying out, This is the Messiah of the world. They believed in Yeshua for five minutes and already had a better sense of the soul than the twelve disciples. They knew from experience that the human soul must be fed from the inside out.

I don't know what wilderness experience you bring to synagogue today. I do know we are part of a long, difficult, and dangerous journey. And I know the deep and desperate hunger that is too often part of the journey.

The good news I bring you today is....There is One who sits by the well waiting for you. He joins us on the journey, every dry and dusty step of it; and offers us food and drink for our souls. The woman at the well came face to face, not just with the wilderness reality of her sad journey but, miracles of miracles, with the One who transforms every life open to Him. He is the One sent from Adonai to make the desert pace in your soul blossom like a rose. The woman at the well believed. Do you?

When Mother Teresa was lecturing at an American university, she told of her work among the poor of Calcutta where she brought love, joy, and hope to the sad and hopeless. During the question and answer session that followed a young man studying to be a social worker thanked her for her talk and the transforming work she and her community contributed to the poor of Calcutta and the world.

But, he continued, I am bothered by your constant references to Jesus. We live in a pluralistic, even secular world. I want to do the work you do, but I don't want to do it with Jesus.

How old are you? Mother Teresa asked. Twenty-one, the student answered. I am seventy-six, Mother Teresa said. When you are as old as I am and have done what I have done, you come and tell me how you've done this work without Jesus.

Romans 5:1-11 helps us understand the power and mystery of this life-transforming water that springs up in the soul. Here Sha'ul says those who trust in Messiah know the peace of Adonai in their soul, have access to the amazing free and unmerited favor of Adonai, and live in hope. What bigger and better words are there in any human language? Indeed, peace, hope, and favor are the living water that springs up in the Believer's soul.

Why? Because, as Sha'ul declares, Adonai pours out his love in our hearts. There's the source of living water for your soul. Here is the foundation of the moral universe and the center of the Believer's faith. We've made a desert of this world and our own lives. It hurts us, and we hurt each other. The end of it all is a shriveled soul and darkness.

But Adonai, rich in mercy and boundless in compassion, pours out His love in our hearts. That is the issue in life and in death. Will we receive the love of Adonai?

But there's more. Yeshua led the woman from living water in her soul to living worship in the house of Adonai. She left the well a lone believer in the Messiah and came back with a congregation full of singing people. By its very nature faith is communal. After all, our faith is about the love of Adonai poured out in us. You can't have love by yourself. Love takes more than one person – It takes people.

The love of Adonai puts on skin and lives in our midst. First Yeshua. Now Believers. The congregation at its most basic is a community of people trying to drink out of the well of Adonai's love. Naturally, the love of Adonai spills out of our hearts and splashes on each other. Adonai's love is real, personal, and able to be felt. It is made visible in the people of God.

Down the journey of my life, from a little church in Ellsworth, Maine, to this congregation, Adonai's people have laid hands on my soul and I'll never be the same. If you think about it, that's your story too. We're a bunch of Adonai's children on a journey led by His Ruach who pours out Adonai's love in our hearts. The journey is long and difficult, even painful. But it is good. Because of the One who sits by the well, and He's waiting.

We must recognize that most of our human strategies for quenching our thirst are centered in what is fleeting or passing away in a temporal world.

Ultimately then, when we face the various pressures of life, part of our pain and suffering comes from the fact we are seeking to live independently of Adonai and because we are looking to the wrong things for our happiness, or for what only Adonai Himself can give. The great purpose for the upward focus is to learn to be more like Messiah and that means learning to live more and more dependently on Adonai and less dependently on the details of life.

So the next time you partake of kiddish, to eat of the bread and drink of the cup, may it remind you that He alone can quench the thirst of your souls.