

October 1, 2022

Shabbat Shuvah

With twelve years of service through this congregation I have a library of sermons that I can go back on and review. Like a time capsule I can go back to a period in this congregation's history and see what my thoughts were at that moment in time. I tend to relate matters that are going on at the time into sermons I have shared with you.

At this time last year I was fully immersed in the Life and Torah series of sermons I was sharing with you. At the time, it was the 20th anniversary of 911 to the day. At that time I recalled what I classified as a mini return last year, when you saw a number of people returning yet nowhere near what had transpired 20 years prior.

In 2020 we were in the midst of the Covid pandemic where shutdowns were the norm. A new term had infused our lexicon "Zoom" referring to the online conference application that was embraced by millions of people as the, then at the time, necessary way to remain connected while many were living in isolation, separated from regular and I will say normal human contact and interaction. Thus this time last year was a mini return though not everyone did come back, including within this congregation. This was a discussion that occurred last evening during our erev Shabbat service. There were many heavy hearts, expressing their burdens for the vision of this congregation and the impact we have on our community.

I define community a little differently in relation to this congregation because of its uniqueness. We are not a typical congregation within a community that focuses on the people within that community. There is a great deal of mobility today and you have people traveling to a congregation outside of where they live. Yet our congregation, comprises few people who actually live in South Portland. Thus I make the distinction we are not a congregation that resides within a specific community but are a congregation of communities. Each person a representative of the community they reside in, thus establishing this congregation within their own community.

Our country is not a democracy but a constitutional republic with a representative from the community being a voice of the community. This is really no different for Kehilah Portland. You are a representative of your community coming together in this congregation and thus returning to your community as a voice for the one who's government rests upon Him...

Isa 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 9:6 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.

Rather than being His representatives, for which we are, we are actually His witnesses, We are here to testify to the very things that have been so thoroughly documented by Adonai's Word, our Scriptures.

Just as there is a standard by which an elected representative must adhere to, there is also a standard by which believers should adhere to as well. This standard is unlike the standard of man. It doesn't start with credentials but starts with something so simple, yet challenging as well.

That one primary element every believer needs to start is faith / trust.

I am talking about a type of faith / trust that goes beyond man's definition...

complete trust or confidence in someone or something.

I see this definition as being based on someone you can see specifically and something that either tangible or intangible is known and verifiable. Thus your faith is established through their presence.

Here is how Adonai defines faith / trust.

Heb 11:1 Trusting is being confident of what we hope for, convinced about things we do not see.

Heb 11:2 It was for this that Scripture attested the merit of the people of old.

Heb 11:3 By trusting, we understand that the universe was created through a spoken word of God, so that what is seen did not come into being out of existing phenomena.

True faith is trusting in the one you have never seen physically and what they have told you.

There are other means by which this faith is validated and it is through the One who has provided us His Spirit. It is through His Spirit, the very Spirit that established everything that we come to trust in the one we have not seen yet know He is more real than the world we live in.

Rom 1:20 For ever since the creation of the universe his invisible qualities—both his eternal power and his divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they can be understood from what he has made. Therefore, they have no excuse;

Rom 1:21 because, although they know who God is, they do not glorify him as God or thank him. On the contrary, they have become futile in their thinking; and their undiscerning hearts have become darkened.

Rom 1:22 Claiming to be wise, they have become fools!

Consider Sha'ul's statement to believers in Corinth who were constantly being challenged, living in a cultural center experiencing much of the world's influences. Having been introduced to something that does not equate with the culture, Sha'ul offered this contrast...

1Co 1:21 For God's wisdom ordained that the world, using its own wisdom, would not come to know him. Therefore God decided to use the "nonsense" of what we proclaim as his means of saving those who come to trust in it.

1Co 1:22 Precisely because Jews ask for signs and Greeks try to find wisdom,

1Co 1:23 we go on proclaiming a Messiah executed on a stake as a criminal! To Jews this is an obstacle, and to Greeks it is nonsense;

1Co 1:24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, this same Messiah is God's power and God's wisdom!

1Co 1:25 For God's "nonsense" is wiser than humanity's "wisdom." And God's "weakness" is stronger than humanity's "strength."

I could go on and on about the confounding ways of God that we as his creation are challenged by, even the strongest of believers. We have experienced a great deal in the last two years for which we have witnessed, both as a Kingdom and as a congregation, a falling away that I believe to be part of what Sha'ul identifies to his letter to believers in Thessalonica...

2Th 2:3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way. For the Day will not come until after the Apostasy has come and the man who separates himself from Torah has been revealed, the one destined for doom.

Yet you are here, attached to a congregation that continues, even in the face of this challenge. Challenges you experience on a daily basis, some more persistent than others, though no less real to you.

At this time last year I had shared with you the four steps of T'shuvah and believe it is important to share them again. Actually, they should be a prominent aspect of our lives on a regular basis. As I had just shared with you, I believe Sha'ul experienced his own very real challenges as a believer in Messiah yet did not go into detail about what those struggles of his were.

Would I call this a program we are to follow in a similar manner by which other groups may use 12 steps, probably not. This is more than a program. It is a

process by which Adonai reveals to us for the purpose of drawing closer to Him.

We are afforded a period of time on the calendar, 40 days that our focus is on that which separates us from Adonai – our transgressions. It was 40 days Yeshua was in the wilderness with the Adversary, being challenged by his temptations. It is 40 days that we focus on our transgressions that are a result of the Adversary's temptations and our own nature.

Yeshua did not need 40 days to focus on His own shortcomings, for there was none to be found. Yet it was 40 days He would deal with the very things we did not have the power to endure on our own. Sha'ul shares this reality with his Roman audience...

Rom 3:19 Moreover, we know that whatever the Torah says, it says to those living within the framework of the Torah, in order that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world be shown to deserve God's adverse judgment.

Rom 3:20 For in his sight no one alive will be considered righteous on the ground of legalistic observance of Torah commands, because what Torah really does is show people how sinful they are.

Any good writer will infuse themselves into their writing, thus conveying a dynamic that is both real and authentic. I believe Sha'ul is no different in this aspect. He incorporates aspects of his own experiences to the readers of his letters that Adonai inspired him to include for the purpose of being relatable. Many see Sha'ul as this pillar of faith, strong in every way, yet what he shares offers more insight into his own struggles, even as a believer. Even as the one who has been so instrumental in transmitting the message of Adonai's Kingdom to the world. Consider his own experience in Romans 7 after he conveys...

Rom 7:12 So the Torah is holy; that is, the commandment is holy, just and good.

Yet making this rather stark observation...

Rom 7:13 Then did something good become for me the source of death? Heaven forbid! Rather, it was sin working death in me through something good, so that sin might be clearly exposed as sin, so that sin through the commandment might come to be experienced as sinful beyond measure.

We are introduced to our old nature, that which still exists in believers who are filled with the Ruach ha Kodesh. Our body is the battlefield for an internal war between our old nature and our new nature.

I believe what Sha'ul shares next is his own personal struggle, not some abstract

example. Though we don't know the specifics of Sha'ul's struggles I believe them to be very real and thus a daily challenge. Why else would he write...

1Co 15:28 Now when everything has been subjected to the Son, then he will subject himself to God, who subjected everything to him; so that God may be everything in everyone.

1Co 15:29 Were it otherwise, what would the people accomplish who are immersed on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not actually raised, why are people immersed for them?

1Co 15:30 For that matter, we ourselves—why do we keep facing danger hour by hour?

1Co 15:31 Brothers, by the right to be proud which the Messiah Yeshua our Lord gives me, I solemnly tell you that I die every day.

A death in the old nature is to occur every day inside us. Yet listen to these words Sha'ul conveys to his audience in Rome.

Rom 7:14 For we know that the Torah is of the Spirit; but as for me, I am bound to the old nature, sold to sin as a slave.

Rom 7:15 I don't understand my own behavior—I don't do what I want to do; instead, I do the very thing I hate!

Sha'ul is not conveying something done in the past, but that which occurs in the present. A daily struggle.

Rom 7:16 Now if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am agreeing that the Torah is good.

Rom 7:17 But now it is no longer "the real me" doing it, but the sin housed inside me.

Rom 7:18 For I know that there is nothing good housed inside me—that is, inside my old nature. I can want what is good, but I can't do it!

Rom 7:19 For I don't do the good I want; instead, the evil that I don't want is what I do!

Rom 7:20 But if I am doing what "the real me" doesn't want, it is no longer "the real me" doing it but the sin housed inside me.

Rom 7:21 So I find it to be the rule, a kind of perverse "torah," that although I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me!

Rom 7:22 For in my inner self I completely agree with God's Torah;

Rom 7:23 but in my various parts, I see a different "torah," one that battles with the Torah in my mind and makes me a prisoner of sin's "torah," which is operating in my various parts.

Rom 7:24 What a miserable creature I am! Who will rescue me from this body bound for death?

Rom 7:25 Thanks be to God [, *he will!*]—through Yeshua the Messiah, our Lord! To sum up: with my mind, I am a slave of God's Torah; but with my old nature, I am a slave of sin's "Torah."

I believe it is his own experience along with the inspiration through the Ruach to capture these experiences in letter form and transmit them to the various congregations in order to address the issues of believers in those communities. The powerful thing about Scripture is that the wisdom housed in these words with the author being Adonai, our Lord, is that we can garner that wisdom for our own challenges.

Sha'ul was well versed in Torah both from the traditional perspective for which he addresses those who have perverted Torah by adding to it. He is also the expert of the time as Torah relates to the believer in Messiah, both Jew and Goy. There is no one better equipped to speak on such matters in that time than Sha'ul. Yet he experienced his own struggles. We see the impact on Sha'ul as it pertains to this struggle...

Rom 7:24 What a miserable creature I am! Who will rescue me from this body bound for death?

Can you relate to Sha'ul here?

Sha'ul is one of many in Scripture to experience their own struggles, thus making those we read about relatable. Whether it is...

- Moshe and his constant struggles with his own faith
- Yeshayahu being of unclean lips
- Yiremyehu and his constant struggle with depression

Adonai provides us with those who had real experiences that we are able to relate to and thus be not only comforted but exhorted and empowered even in our struggles.

The 4 Steps of Repentance

T'shuvah is actually a process of self-evaluation and self-improvement. The Rambam counts four primary steps to the ***t'shuva*** process:

1. Recognize and discontinue the improper action.

If I were to associate a song to this first step it would be "Stop In The Name of Love" That is the love of Adonai.

How do we identify these improper actions? Torah

Rom 7:7 Therefore, what are we to say? That the Torah is sinful? Heaven forbid! Rather, the function of the Torah was that without it, I would not have known what sin is. For example, I would not have become conscious of what greed is if the Torah had not said, "Thou shalt not covet."

This is where you have to put on your study hats and search Torah to find if anything you are doing is against Adonai. Keeping in mind, you are not alone in this pursuit. You have Adonai's Torah written on your heart having embraced Yeshua and therefore the promises of the New Covenant. One of those promises being the Ruach Ha Kodesh residing in you.

2. Verbally confess the action, thus giving the action a concrete form in your own mind.

This doesn't have to be done to an individual though it would make you accountable, yet your confession would be to Adonai.

Psa 32:3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away because of my groaning all day long;

Psa 32:4 day and night your hand was heavy on me; the sap in me dried up as in a summer drought. (Selah)

Psa 32:5 When I acknowledged my sin to you, when I stopped concealing my guilt, and said, "I will confess my offenses to Adonai"; then you, you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Selah)

3. Regret the action. Evaluate the negative impact this action may have had on yourself or on others. In other words, weigh the cost of your transgression and the impact it has had on your life and those in your life.

David confesses to Adonai...

Psa 51:4 Wash me completely from my guilt, and cleanse me from my sin.

Psa 51:5 For I know my crimes, my sin confronts me all the time.

Psa 51:6 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil from your perspective; so that you are right in accusing me and justified in passing sentence.

4. Determine never to repeat the action. This is where the rubber meets the road. Picture a better way to handle it. There are two different types of transgressions: those between a person and God and those between one person and another.

Part of this time between Yom T'ruah and Yom Kippur is to reconcile with anyone you have had issues with. This practice is not foreign or absent within the New Covenant writings...

Mat 5:23 So if you are offering your gift at the Temple altar and you remember there that your brother has something against you,

Mat 5:24 leave your gift where it is by the altar, and go, make peace with your brother. Then come back and offer your gift.

So, these are the steps for T'shuvah, for repenting and returning to Adonai. Likely more involved than you originally thought, yet not unreasonable or impossible to accomplish.

Thus, on this Shabbat Shuvah, let us be reminded further of the importance of this time and the potential impact it can have, not only on you as an individual but on those who's lives are connected to you. Each passage a representation of this season and that which Adonai desires from us and will do on our behalf.

Hos 14:2 Return, Isra'el, to Adonai your God, for your guilt has made you stumble.

Hos 14:3 Take words with you, and return to Adonai; say to him, "Forgive all guilt, and accept what is good; we will pay instead of bulls [*the offerings of*] our lips.

Hos 14:4 Ashur will not save us, we will not ride on horses, and we will no longer call what we made with our hands our gods. For it is only in you that the fatherless can find mercy."

Hos 14:5 "I will heal their disloyalty, I will love them freely; for my anger has turned from him.

Hos 14:6 I will be like dew to Isra'el; he will blossom like a lily and strike roots like the L'vanon.

Hos 14:7 His branches will spread out, his beauty be like an olive tree and his fragrance like the L'vanon.

Hos 14:8 Again they will live in his shade and raise grain; they will blossom like a vine, and its aroma will be like the wine of the L'vanon.

Hos 14:9 Efrayim [*will say*], 'What have I to do any more with idols?' And I, I answer and affirm him; I am like a fresh, green cypress tree; your fruitfulness comes from me."

Hos 14:10 Let the wise understand these things, and let the discerning know them. For the ways of Adonai are straight, And the righteous walk in them, but in them sinners stumble.

Mic 7:18 Who is a God like you, pardoning the sin and overlooking the crimes of the remnant of his heritage? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in grace.

Mic 7:19 He will again have compassion on us, he will subdue our iniquities. You will throw all their sins into the depths of the sea.

Mic 7:20 You will show truth to Ya`akov and grace to Avraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors since days of long ago.

Joe 2:15 "Blow the shofar in Tziyon! Proclaim a holy fast, call for a solemn assembly."

Joe 2:16 Gather the people; consecrate the congregation; assemble the leaders; gather the children, even infants sucking at the breast; let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride the bridal chamber.

Joe 2:17 Let the cohanim, who serve Adonai, stand weeping between the vestibule and the altar. Let them say, "Spare your people, Adonai! Don't expose your heritage to mockery, or make them a byword among the Goyim. Why should the peoples say, 'Where is their God?' "

We are approaching the time of that fast, Yom Kippur for which there is more to be shared and that will happen on Tuesday evening October 4th during our Yom Kippur service.