

**Devotions – November 9-15, 2014**

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**Sunday, November 9**

Text: Genesis 27:3-4

**“Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me, and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.”**

This passage, spoken by aged and nearly blind Isaac to his son Esau, is a touching passage that ends up totally ruined by that schemer Jacob (at the behest of his mother, Rebekah). Here is an intimate moment between father and son that is botched by – as Scripture later shows us – the Lord’s divine plan and will. What does this have to do with anything in particular? Well, the hunting season is upon us! And Isaac, after all, did want some “delicious food,” did he not?

The upcoming hunting season (well, rifle season to be particular) is a cause of joy for some and a cause of concern and consternation for others. As a pastor, I too have mixed feelings on the upcoming hunting season. It’s not because of the animals that will be harvested; it’s mainly because of the “fun” that some have at camp. Hunting time for some – at least I’ve been told – is more about getting away from responsibilities, family, kids, wives, etc., than actually hunting deer to provide food for one’s kith and kin. On the other hand, this could be a great opportunity for ministry in our churches – hunting in godly, holy ways with godly, holy people. In particular, this could be a great opportunity to reach out to the guys in our churches – both young and old, the Jacobs and Esaus and Isaacs in our congregations.

*Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for all that you provide from your gracious hand. Help us to not take for granted the opportunities to provide for ourselves and families. Help us to use recreation time in ways that please you. Help us to accompany others in showing that all time and all activities can be a blessed and holy time when we keep your will and your ways in the forefront of our hearts and minds. Amen.*



**Monday, November 10**

Text: Acts 10:13-15

**“And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter, kill and eat...What God has made clean, to not call common.”**

While growing up I certainly came across what I perceived as “unclean” food: venison, elk, moose, bear, and the like. These entrees are not what big city folk are used to. Chicken, beef, and pork were fine and as long as I didn’t see how they were raised or butchered, the easier it was to eat. Those other animals? No way, they were wild and hunted! One of the things I’ve made a point in talking about with my kids is where the meat we eat comes from. Those animals have to be killed. The life God gave them is something we take away in order for our bodies to be nourished. It’s put things in different perspective for my daughter who, now 10 years old, is flirting with becoming a vegetarian. The best hunters too, I’ve found, highly regard the sacredness of life in the deer, partridge, pheasant, etc., they hunt. They won’t kill what they won’t eat. Life is precious, not to be wasted, nor wantonly exterminated for fun. Those who treat God’s creatures in such a way – as mere target practice – and show no respect for the life in them show contempt for God himself.

*Let us pray: God of life, in you we live, and move, and have our being. The life you give to the rest of your creation is blessed and sacred in its own way too. You have called us to be stewards and care for your world. Help those of us who hunt to not only remember this fact, but also to impart this on the new generations. Help those of us who eat meat, yet don’t hunt, realize the sacrifice on many of our plates and so thank You because of the life they had is now shared with us. Amen.*



**Tuesday, November 11**

Text: Proverbs 12:10

**“Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.”**

Perhaps one of the most profound moments during the various deer hunting seasons – aside from finding the deer you’ve been waiting hours and days and perhaps years for – is dressing the deer after the kill. It must be done with great care, not only so that bile doesn’t taint the meat, but also because you’re emptying the body of all that gave it life before: heart, lungs, kidney, liver, intestines, and so on. To some it may just be rubbish to be left in the woods for scavenging animals. But to others, these organs represent something more profound – the intricate internal design of God who gave it life. Of course, some may think that this is over-thinking something that is quite unimportant. However, to have regard for the life of a beast not only means in how we treat things while living, but also in how we care for its remains after life has been taken.

*Let us pray: Loving Creator, we know that all life is a gift; both human and animal. With reverence and respect we care for your world, for your creatures, for one another. Give us such an admiration for all that has been brought to life that when life is taken from one of your*

*creatures during hunting season – a deer, waterfowl, or anything else – that we treat it's remains with dignity and in thanksgiving for their life that now sustains ours. Amen.*



**Wednesday, November 12**

Text: Proverbs 6:5

**“Save yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the hand of the fowler.”**

Animals can teach us a lot about ourselves. Aesop did such a thing in his fables and Solomon often mentions examples from the created world which can instruct and guide what we do, how we do things, why we do things, and so on. Biblical proverbs, like the one mentioned just above, give us such an occasion to receive metaphorical and moral instruction. Deer, much like their distant cousins the gazelle, can be an elusive creature – always showing up on camera at camp, but not showing up when they ought to. So, too, can be an honest person in control of another's money – the point of this particular proverb. Solomon speaks to his “son” in order to impart this practical wisdom about faithful use of another's finances and the desire to see the neighbor pay off their debts. This avenue of ministry – faithful finances and financial coaching is perhaps another untapped potential ministry for many of our churches.

*Let us pray: Gracious Lord, you teach us in many ways: In your word, in our day to day experiences, from the minds and lips of those who have gone before us. Help us to be like a deer, like a gazelle, and flee from the love of money and the temptation to take advantage of another person while they are barely scraping by. You generously love us; help us to generously love others. Amen.*



**Thursday, November 13**

Text: Genesis 21:20

**“And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow.”**

Hunting often is passed on from father to son, parent to child. The reason why I never hunted was because my father never hunted. And my father never hunted because his father, my grandpa, went hunting once and couldn't bear the thought of killing a deer. After firing a shotgun and a .410 a few times, my hand still trembles with the thought of what these bullets can do. It goes without saying, I am no expert with a bow (or a gun) like Ishmael was. Nevertheless, the Lord promises to be with and protect Ishmael and his mother Hagar – people on the periphery of the covenant promises but not included in the covenant itself.

Perhaps a connection we can make to Ishmael is the importance of vocation – doing our best at what we do well. I enjoy hunting, but I know I won't ever be really good at it, perhaps that's why I'm a pastor! (Though I must say, some of my predecessors were avid outdoorsman – the late Peter Andersen and Lance Roberts were much more accustomed to the way of life in the “Yoop” than I!) I'd much rather read in my study than walk through brush and swamp for game and so I tend to enjoy and do more of the things I have a passion for. I just hope to be an “expert” someday. Perhaps another connection we can make with this passage is the importance of connecting with other folks on the periphery – like Ishmael and Hagar. Hunters tend to be male – a significant demographic missing from many of our churches. Who might be other folks in our communities that are on the periphery? People in nursing homes? People struggling with mental health issues? We all could possibly pinpoint those who are “on the outs.” How do we help them connect, if they haven't yet, with a gracious Lord who lived, died, and wants to love them?

*Let us pray: Lord of mercy, you present us with opportunities to succeed as individuals, opportunities to grow and hone our skills. You also present us with opportunities – as individuals and as your Church – to reach out, to care, to love, to walk along side of. Empower us to do such things fearlessly, with tact, with empathy, with understanding. Amen.*



## Friday, November 14

Text: Genesis 10:8-9

**“Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord.”**

Nimrod, the mighty hunter, is also attributed as being of the kingdom of Babel – that ancient civilization which sought to reach the heavens in order to “...make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4). There is the inherent danger in hunting (and fishing) to do what is inherently dangerous in us all – to exalt ourselves and to think more highly of what we have done or can do. The same sort of logic applies in sports, school activities, and so on. “The fish was THIS big, I swear!” “I saw a 12-pointer but let ‘em go ‘cuz there’s a bigger one out there I’ve seen.” “Well you should see my kid in action; I can’t believe how amazing and talented they are!” Another way of putting it is by being honest with our propensity to tell tall tales and think we’re better than we really are. Or to sum it up in one word: Pride. Proverbs 27:2 states the following: “Let *another* praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.”

As we ourselves or our loved ones get ready to enjoy “Deer Day” today, let’s enjoy this time with humility and with thankfulness. Up here in the Yoop many people get to enjoy the day off and gallivant in the woods to, we hope, hunt deer. Other people can’t because they’re working a

second job, or they have to put overtime in because of an unexpected expense, or because they've already been working far too much and need to be with family, or because they simply cannot afford owning a gun and the other expense – processing the deer itself. No doubt our children will enjoy the day off; but not everyone will.

*Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we do need that reminder to be humble and we pray your Word and your servants would be the bearers of that message when we need to hear it. All we have is from you. All we are is because of you. All that we can be is thanks to your presence in our lives. Create in us new hearts, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within us. Amen.*



**Saturday, November 15**

Text: Jeremiah 16:16

**“Behold, I am sending for many fishers, declares the Lord, and they shall catch them. And afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks.”**

The prophet Jeremiah preached forcefully the Law and the Gospel, threats of divine retribution for persistent sin and promises of divine healing and restoration. In this section of Jeremiah we hear both. The “fishers” and “hunters” are either looking for Israel for the purpose of divine judgment or looking for Israel to bring them back home – it’s a bit difficult to tell from the context, though it appears to be more about judgment than being found and brought home.

But what if it was more about being hunted by God? What kind of image of God does that bring to mind? We are these wild, restless creatures intent on going our own way, doing our own thing, prancing around as if we have naught a care in the world. But before we know, we’ve been found, caught in God’s crosshairs. Not even the clefts of the rocks can hide us from the Lord Almighty. No amount of camouflage can conceal us from the Lord’s gaze. The Lord speaks through Jeremiah (16:17) – “They are not hidden from me, nor is their iniquity concealed from my eyes.” Or perhaps we can consider our pastors as the “hunters” the Lord is using to find, catch, trap, and target those who are wandering, lost, and caught deep in the mire of sin?

*Let us pray: Lord God, you know who are yours and who are still on the loose, waiting to be found. Use us, your servants, to be always aware of your unstoppable will to reclaim a world gone wrong. And forgives us, your servants, when we wander from the narrow road that leads to eternal life. Amen.*

