Pinebrooke Community Church 10 January 2024 “False Teachers” Jude 1-7

 One of the most powerful obstacles and well as our greatest asset in our spiritual journey is our *perceptual framework,* the way we see things. It is one of those things that we are most **unaware** of. When we take time in our worship to reflect on creation, conversations, and circumstances it is to enrich our perceptual framework. Where we see God revealing Himself is where we look for Him. This last week we experienced another election cycle. We tend to vote based on our perceptual framework. I remember my mother’s expression of her perceptual framework one election year when Nelson Rockefeller was running for president. More than once, I heard her say, “He’s my choice, I can just see what a strong good man he is.” She didn’t know him or certainly was not aware of many of the details of his life, he just “looked” a way that fit her perceptual framework. Consider the word “justice.” What one person sees as just another sees as unjust. When Jesus said to Thomas, *“I am the way…”* what did He mean? Was He just talking about salvation or was He talking about more than that? He did modify His statement to say, *“… no man comes to the Father except through me.”* But what else is there? For some people, how God goes about things particularly in the OT He is hardly loving. Yet, the scriptures OT and NT tells us that God is love and God is just, and God is holy among other things. When Jesus was announcing the advent of the Holy Spirit he said, *“But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth.” (Jn. 16:13).* It is this Spirit third member of the Trinity that is our teacher. We are accountable to Him; He is the Teacher both in the classroom and the laboratory. The common obstacle in our perceptual framework is when we operate on our own definition of terms, words like *love, justice, or righteousness* for instance, so we use the same words but have our own definition of them. The obstacle that we face is that when we face life, we simply see things differently from one another. When it comes to our life in Christ God alone defines the terms. So, if we are to grow and develop in our life in Christ it behooves us to learn our language by watching God speak and act. Jude introduces us to the ways of God and how God thinks. No one passage of scripture is exhaustive, but we are faced with the reality of the centrality of God in everything. So, listen or follow along in your text as I read my paraphrase of vv. 1-7.

 *“Jude is both Jesus’ and James’ little brother. You are called out ones from among men. First of all, you are beloved by the Father and secured by Jesus. My desire for you is that you experience mercy, peace, and love directly and deeply from the Father, from Jesus, and from the Spirit that now abides within you without limit. I’m writing to you out of love for you. I wanted to write to you about the glory of our salvation, but it is more necessary that I write considering the pressing circumstance that we (both you and me) are in. I need to write exhorting you to stand firm in faith, the faith we have all been given in Jesus our Messiah. We, the church, have been infiltrated by those we have been warned about in the OT prophets.* *They are ungodly people who have massaged the message of God’s grace to fit their priorities into fleshly expressions thereby denying and defaming Jesus, Master, Messiah, and Redeemer. Let me remind you of the story you know so well. Jesus, who is eternal, was there on the road out of Egypt. You remember the story. There were those who failed to believe and were destroyed. God let that generation die off. In the realm of angels there were those who rebelled against God and in the prison of their own making are awaiting the final judgment. The example of Sodom and Gomorrah illustrates how God will judge the immoral. There immorality was a sexual immorality and what happened to them and their cities is what God’s judgment looks like.*

 Jude begins like so many other epistles, but it was no formality. It was no “dear John.” From the first stroke of his pen Jude has something to say. He reminds those to whom he writes that they have been called from out of among humankind. They have been called to Him. Jude’s heart is that they would know mercy, peace, and love with overflowing abundance. Jude isn’t an apostle of Jesus, but in fact he is Jesus’ brother. James is also Jesus’ brother (and not Big James of The Chosen fame) and became the bishop of the Jerusalem Church. This James is also the author of the epistle. Until the resurrection they were just Jesus’ brothers and frankly didn’t understand who He was. But given the resurrection came to faith in Jesus for who He was and is, so much more than just their brother. We can say that for Jude his eyes were opened and his perceptual framework changed. He identifies himself as a servant of Jesus and therefore his little letter belongs in the Cannon of Scripture. Jude addresses his readers as called, loved, and kept. It is like an identity statement that we can draw from. To be called is to be summoned by God which we realize only after we respond. As believers, they/we have been called out of darkness into God’s wonderful light. One day they/we will be summoned to the judgment seat of Christ to report on what they/we have become and how they/we have responded to what we have been given to do. The fact that his readers are reminded that they are loved by the Father is the most important thing for them/us to realize. There is nothing they/we can do that will remove the Father’s love because His unconditional love is about Him, not us. But we always get to choose to follow Him or not. He doesn’t love us for our righteousness. He loves us because that is the way He is, and it is very personal love. The final fact in this greeting is that they/we are kept by Jesus. It is not God’s intent to lose any of those whom He called to be His own. Can any who has been called walk away? It seems that both for Peter and for Jude the false teachers aren’t among the called because they prove that through their rebellion, or indeed they have walked away as the judgment for them is destruction. But moving on, Jude’s opening prayer for his audience is that they might know the mercy, peace, and love of Christ. These are gifts of divine grace that Jude prays for are that they might receive in abundance. Mercy picks us up when we are in the wrong and carries us to God’s loving presence. Peace is the wholeness that can only be found in the conscious presence of Almighty God. And love is the constant wishing our good that comes from the heart of Jesus. When we walk in the atmosphere of mercy, peace, and love we can breathe it in deeply. Jude’s intention had been to write joyfully about the salvation we have in Jesus, but the circumstance in which his audience was suffering required strong words of support from him as they needed strengthening. The exhortation to contend for the faith is an athletic metaphor encouraging them to be spiritually fit, challenging them to prepare for the spiritual challenges that they faced. Sometimes the circumstances of life require a determined costly struggle to maintain our faith. This is like an autumn statement to prepare for the winters of life. Our literary mentor encourages us with, “Each individual believer has the dual responsibility of maintaining the unadulterated truth and of carefully handing it on to others.” (p. 238). What has been going on with these false teachers is that like a lawyer in a courtroom they have been insinuating their version of the evidence into the minds of judge and jury. These teachers self-assert their perspective in a condescending self-referenced way. In Jude’s context the false teachers had managed to get into the church. I’m sure it is still true. He describes them three ways: godless with no reverence for God, they leave the relationship with God out of account, and they despise God’s laws. But divine justice will catch up with them just as it did in the OT. (p. 241). These people don’t see themselves as godless or see themselves as the enemies of the church. Instead, they see themselves as free thinkers, a spiritual elite, and unencumbered by owning lordship to anyone (unteachable because “they know all they need to know”). The various ways God exercises justice led to the demise of those who did not believe. The continuous blessing of God depends on the continuous reliance on Him. Jude reminds his audience of the Exodus story. When faced with crossing over to the Promised Land, most balked at trusting God so they got to wait in the desert until their generation of faithlessness died off. The second warning regards the sin and fate of the fallen angels. Led by Lucifer, they became disgruntled with their positions of authority (remember Ps. 8). They deserted their place with God to further their own ends. Pride and lust ruined the angels that fell. Their justice was to keep them in darkness bound with everlasting chains. The third warning was in God’s justice rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns. They were condemned and burned to the ground because their inhabitants engaged in flagrant immorality. These false teachers in Jude’s context betray a decadence that pervades their whole lives. Physically they have become immoral. Intellectually, they have grown arrogant. Spiritually they defy God. What is certain is that they will bring judgment onto themselves, and their punishment is eternal fire. What then do we have? Let me suggest this at least. It behooves us to prepare ourselves in living life well by embracing the truth of God’s Word, OT and NT. Reject what is not true no matter how long you have believed it. Our spiritual progress involves changing the way that we think. We tend to do consistently what we think. (Mom) What the scriptures teach is what is true! We can ignore it and will then experience the consequences or believe it and act on it and experience the fruit of obedience (Ps. 1:6, “… the Lord watches over the way of the righteous….). Just because it seems like those who do wrong are getting away with it, don’t be fooled (Ps. 37). God is a just judge and He is a patient judge, and He gives space for repentance. And finally remember, you and I are who He says we are; beloved by God, called to Him, and kept secure in Him. No one can pluck us out of His hand. The key to living honestly and facing ourselves in truth is realizing our belovedness. Our efforts to be liked or loved is a sham. We already have what our hearts need. Once we experience our belovedness in Him we are free to face ourselves in truth. Our belovedness in Him is the root of life.