

The prophet Samuel set up a stone marker – an Ebenezer – after the LORD routed the Philistines giving Israel a great victory. The Israelites repented of their faithlessness and sought the LORD's help. They put away their false gods and prayed for victory. The Ebenezer stone commemorated that victory, for *Thus far the LORD has helped us* (1 Sam. 7:12). Whenever the Israelites would pass by the stone, they would remember what they were capable of with God's help, and how the LORD faithfully acted on their behalf.

The hymn, *Come Thou Fount*, which we'll sing in a few moments, speaks of raising an Ebenezer. It's unusual language today, but when we refer to setting up an Ebenezer, we mean to use something physical – like a stone – to remind us of something divine or spiritual, especially God's faithfulness and goodness. Today in our worship we are symbolically raising four Ebenezers which serve to remind us of God's faithfulness and goodness to us:

Water of Baptism. When we baptized Aralynn a few minutes ago, we spoke of God's enduring faithfulness to God's people. We cited some of the times God saved God's people and brought them through the water safely. We remembered our inclusion into the family of God through water and the Spirit. And we called upon God to be faithful and good to Aralynn all the days of her life. The water, which symbolizes a cleansing from sin, is an Ebenezer highlighting the new life we have in Christ.

Bread/Cup of The Lord's Supper. A few minutes from now we will celebrate the Lord's Supper together, which reminds us that God's love and faithfulness to us have no limit. God sent an only Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, and to rise again so that we might have a new and eternal life with God. The bread and juice symbolize Christ's body broken and his blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins. The bread and juice are an Ebenezer that make real for us the restoration made possible through God's love.

Prayers for a Mission Team. During our worship we will pray for and commission the team heading to Colorado next week to help with community development. The twelve members of the team recognize that God is faithful to them, good to them, and calling to them to show that faithfulness and goodness to others. With mission trips, we are reminded of what we can do, with God's help, to establish God's kingdom on earth. Prayer is an Ebenezer linking us to the heart of God and putting us into the midst of what God is doing in this world.

Making Our Offering. No worship service is complete without an offering! Recognizing the many, many blessings we have from God, we give back so that others may know the love, goodness, and faithfulness of our God. The gifts we give are an Ebenezer, a recognition of the manifold blessings of God, who is willing to give more than we can receive.

In all these ways we remember God's faithfulness and goodness to us. But we can't go around building Ebenezers everywhere – it's not practical. Instead, we must raise an Ebenezer with our lives. We must make our lives a marker pointing people to God's goodness. By what we do and by what we say, people should remember that God is faithful. The manner in which we live our lives should be a standing stone, reminding people that God is love.

The cairn on the bulletin this morning has five stones: I chose that photo intentionally, because our lives should have five component stones, too.

- A stone of **repentance**: we must remember to turn and look to God, to align ourselves with God's kingdom-work.
- A stone of **prayer**: we ought to bring everything and everyone to God in prayer; there is nothing outside the scope of prayer.
- A stone of **effort**: God gave an only Son, the best God had for us; we can do no less than give God our best effort.

- A stone of **courage**: when adversity comes, we must rise to the challenge, remembering that God “has helped us” in the past.
- A stone of **praise**: we need to remember give God praise and thanks for God’s enduring faithfulness to us.

Raise an Ebenezer in your heart to remember how God has helped you in the past. Build a cairn with your life so that others may see God’s love and goodness and faithfulness.

Prayer: Faithful God, we desire to remain faithful to You all the days of our life. We join with others of the Christian faith who hold unswervingly to the hope we profess even as we spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Disappointments, seemingly unanswered prayers, loved ones who oppose us, spiritual lethargy, temptations and trials pull at our hearts and tempt us to look back just like the Israelites who were freed from slavery. They who greatly rejoiced at their new found freedom found themselves longing to return after the going got tough. Give us strength and firm resolve to plow through the hard soil and bumpy rocks of life all the while fixing our eyes on our eternal dwelling place as we hold unswervingly to the hope we profess in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is in His name that we pray. Amen.

Cairns and Ebenezers

Sunday, June 7, 2015

Worship in the Park, Fergus Falls, MN

1 Samuel 7:10-14



Cairns are human-built piles of stones. You find cairns in the highlands of Scotland and the mountain passes of Switzerland; on the frozen steppes of Russia and at watering holes in North Africa; near the fjords of Norway and on the plains in Canada; on the roads in Corsica and in cemeteries in South Africa; there is even a cairn at the summit of Mount Everest.

The purpose of these stacked stones varies from region to region. Some cairns are trail markers guiding hikers or bikers to safety. Some cairns represent the end of a journey, indicating the summit of a mountain. Some cairns indicate the presence of fresh water or a cache of food. Some cairns are burial markers. Some cairns marking the borders between countries. Some cairns are ceremonial altars for religious ceremonies. And some cairns exist simply to remind the builder of something or someone important.

The Israelites built something like cairns to remind them of God and God’s faithfulness to them. They called their stones Ebenezers. Unlike a cairn which is a pile of stones, an Ebenezer was a single large stone. The Israelites placed these Ebenezers at important historical sites to remember God’s victories. They raised Ebenezers at crossroads as markers. They used Ebenezers as altars for religious ceremonies.