

Sermon for Sunday, August 5, 2018

“What are you really hungry for?”

This past week during VBS our students engaged four stories from the bible that talk about God’s heroes—now when we talk about heroes we’re not talking about people who were born on a different planet and poses super human strength, or people who were bitten by radioactive spiders and can create webs and climb buildings, or people who’s genes have mutated and now they can teleport...no...the heroes we learned about during VBS were heroes because, they were regular people just like you and me who God chose to work through to do incredible things.

So for those of you who were not at VBS here’s a quick recap--on Monday we learned about Miriam—how she watched her brother, Moses as their mother placed him in a basket, then set that basket in the Nile River. Miriam followed Moses as he floated down the river, was scooped up by Pharaohs daughter and then through Miriam’s quick thinking, she was able to bring Moses’ mom to Pharaohs daughter so she could help nurse him. It was through Miriam that God worked to save Moses life.

On Tuesday we learned about Moses—how God called him through the burning bush, and even though Moses was more than a little reluctant about going and standing up to Pharaoh, Moses went, because God promised to be with him—and through Moses—God brought the Israelites out of slavery and into the promised land.

On Wednesday, we learned about how Jesus and the disciples were in a boat, Jesus was so tired he fell asleep—when a big storm came, the disciples were afraid—so they woke Jesus up, saying “don’t you even care, we’re going to die!” Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and calmed the waves—leaving the disciples with the question—who is this, that even the wind and the waves obey?

Finally on Thursday we learned about a little boy who offered up five loaves and two fish—and how when Jesus took, blessed, broke and gave those loaves to the crowd, suddenly everyone was inspired to share—so that 5,000 men, along with women and children were fed with more than enough to go around.

It’s fitting that today, our New Testament story picks up where we left off in VBS—because after the crowd was fed, the story continues. But before we can launch into today’s story—it’s important to note that in John’s gospel—the author made a point to tell sign stories—a sign story is where Jesus does something miraculous like turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, Calming the storm, healing a man at the pool of Bethesda, Raising Lazarus from the dead or feeding the five thousand. Each one of these sign stories isn’t about the sign itself but the truth it reveals about who Jesus was and is and the reality of God’s presence in our world right here and now. But while this was the intent of the sign stories—it’s easy to say that it didn’t always go according to plan.

So in today’s story, after feeding 5,000 -John 6.14-15 says that “when the people saw the sign that Jesus had done, they began to say, ‘This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.’” When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”

Easy to say—that the sign story—which was meant to point to who Jesus was and is, didn’t go according to plan so, Jesus had to high tale it out of there, because the crowd saw something in Jesus—something that reminded them of leaders from the pages of their sacred text—like Moses in the wilderness, where manna, bread, had come from heaven--and suddenly the crowds hope of having a king seemed to be within their grasp.

But this wasn’t what Jesus had in mind...so slipping away, he went across the lake. But the crowd wouldn’t let him go that easily. When they caught up to him they attempted to act nonchalant “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus, choosing to get right to the point says “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves....”

Busted...Jesus saw right through them...He knew that the crowd had gotten a taste of who, he really was and is, and they wanted more. Not more in the sense of more Jesus but they wanted more signs—they wanted the bread, because the bread was the proof—the proof of who Jesus was and that God’s presence really was there, right there, in front of them—it’s as though the crowd was saying “give us the stuff that makes us believe that you are who you say you are”

Jesus responds, this is my paraphrase—that bread—that physical tangible stuff only points to who I am—but you’ll eat it and be hungry again—but what I offer is better than that bunny bread you’re after—you’re looking for the quick fix, but I offer the real thing.” This sounds a little too familiar.

I don’t know about you but I can see myself in that crowd...because when I really look at my life—I’m all about wanting a quick fix—I want to order my starbucks on my phone and have my coffee waiting for me when I walk in the store. I want to order a book on amazon and have it show up in the same day, I want to take the test and have the results immediately. I want to read a book and have the answers, I want to work out once and be in shape, I want to take a pill and be better....And if we’re honest—this sounds a lot like how we treat God. We want to read the bible and fully understand what it means, we want a clear answer on how to live our lives in a way that reflects God’s love, we want to work for justice and see tangible results, we want to pray for healing once and watch someone be suddenly and instantly restored...When we’re honest, we want signs...Like the crowd we want the bread we can see, touch, taste, sink our teeth into and be fed by..Like the crowd we chase after Jesus asking for a sign, hoping to hold on to what we have discovered and who we trust God to be.

But Jesus doesn’t play our game... Instead of offering a little more bread that will satisfy for a split second, Jesus offers us something more. Face to face with the crowd Jesus let them in on a secret “the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” The crowd responded “Sir, give us this bread always!” Jesus said “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” This sounds beautiful...but this is also where Jesus is so maddeningly frustrating...because--WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? What does it mean that Jesus is the bread of life?

I have to be honest, I’ve been wrestling with this, and I don’t think there’s clear-cut answer—but I wonder if it might help to reframe the question...What does it mean for Jesus to be our source of life? Not the source of life in the sense of “all we have to do is pray and we’ll never have to eat anything ever again” but a source of life in the sense that all of who we are, our identity as God’s beloved children, our physical and spiritual lives here on earth and the hope of life after this world in God’s presence is grounded in the love, grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ...not in the miracles and signs he performed—but in who Jesus revealed God to be through those signs.

While the crowd chased after Jesus hoping for more bread, and a king like the one from days of old—Jesus offered them something else, an invitation to a relationship with God. In true relationship form, we can’t always predict how someone is going to show up.. I think back to the stories of our heroes from VBS... It seems safe to say, that when Moses’ mother laid her son in a basket and set that basket in the river—and as Miriam watched her brother float down the Nile and into the arms of Pharaohs daughter —they didn’t know how the story would end—this wasn’t part of their plan, but God remained faithful, and gave Miriam the ability to think quickly on her feet and help rescue Moses

As Moses stood in front of the burning bush, he listed all the reasons why he was not the right person to stand before Pharaoh and demand justice, he had a list a mile long-but God promised to be present, and remained faithful. As the disciples strained at the oars of the boat, and were filled with fear by the wind and the waves—as they cried out to their Rabbi asleep in the boat—I think it’s safe to say, they never expected Jesus to wake up, rebuke the wind and the waves and to have the sea suddenly become still...

These stories remind us, that God doesn’t always show up the way we expect or even ask, because God invites us into a relationship-a relationship filled with a promise of faithful presence.

This isn’t a story or even a sermon that ties itself into a nice neat bow—because this is a story of God inviting us to look deeply at what it is we really need... Are we hungry for the things that will satisfy us for a little bit but will leave us hungry in the end—or are we hungry for the bread of life—the one who doesn’t offer a quick fix but deep, abiding faithful presence—the bread of life, who we can’t predict what it will look like or how it will take form in this world, but who has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. The bread of life, who shows up in surprising ways, who nourishes and sustains us, each and every day. What do you really need?

In the name of the Father, and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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