

Freely Give
Pastor Ben Heimach-Snipes
June 18th, 2017

Sermon Texts:

Genesis 18:1-15
Matthew 9:35-10:8

Goodmorning! My name is Ben and I am the pastor of Morgan Park Presbyterian Church.

Last week in the service, we read about Jesus returning to the disciples in Galilee after his Easter resurrection to commission his disciples to share the good news with all nations. That was the last act of Jesus in Matthew's narrative of his ministry. Today we are going to rewind in Matthew's narrative - to the moment that Jesus first becomes headline news in the small Roman colony of Palestine. We will continue to study this journey of Jesus and his disciples from now through November. In this time we will dive into each detail of his miracles, his message of love and grace, and his words on how to live in right relationship with God that will make him a threat to the systems of power and lead to his death.

Along this journey with Jesus we will also learn about the journey of his ancestors, Abraham and his descendants, that were chosen to live in special covenant with God. These are the stories of our faith that inform our own journey with God. We start this season of storytelling now because, as a church, we follow the lectionary calendar. Along with Christians all over the globe, we read the same scripture passages, week after week, as a tool to discern together how to journey with God in this moment. While this time between Pentecost and Advent is called Ordinary Time, there is nothing ordinary about the stories we will hear or the journey of this congregation. We are living in anything but ordinary times and so I encourage you to open your ears that you may here God's message in a new way as we seek God's call together for this time.

Let us pray: Lord God, let the words of your servant's mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

As a child, my mother cooked most of the meals for my family. But as we grew up and left the house, my father started to take on cooking the evening meal as a hobby. He started watching cooking shows including "Diners, Drivins and Dives" and as a chemist perhaps his favorite was Good Eats with Alton Brown which explained each cooking process down to the molecular level. When he became a high school chemistry teacher, his students eagerly awaited experimenting how to make cheese during his special cooking unit.

So when I started dating my wife Abbi and we started eating a vegan plant based diet, my dad took on the challenge of creating a special meal for us when we came to visit. He found vegan recipe websites and ordered special cookbooks. He became an expert on vegan cooking, but while this was a lifestyle choice for us, this was a gift of hospitality for my dad.

Freely Give

Pastor Ben Heimach-Snipes

June 18th, 2017

After years of this, it is now comforting to eat with my parents for Thanksgiving where I know that beside the traditional Thanksgiving turkey there will be another dish, equally as elegant and delicious, waiting for me.

Now this excitement for cooking did not just appear one day, but it was nurtured in my dad as a child growing up on a farm in Indiana. His father and brothers managed the farm while his mother went to town to work for a local business. His mother came home around dinner time, so it became his responsibility, along with his brothers and father, to prepare dinner. Preparing a meal became a gift of hospitality passed down through his family that I too have inherited.

In our reading from Genesis, Abraham provided hospitality to three travelers even though he did not know they were actually God. Did he do this out of custom or some inherited family practice? Or was this a deeper spiritual practice that allowed him to celebrate each person that he met? As we read last week in the creation narrative, every person is created in the image of God and therefore we encounter the image of God in each person that we encounter. By providing hospitality and love to another human being we are acknowledging the image of God in them.

By providing hospitality to these strangers, Abraham also acknowledges his own humanity and risks vulnerability. Without knowing the travelers, he treats them as he would treat the divine, making them comfortable and engaging them in honest and open conversation. It is in this place of comfort and honesty that one of the visitors starts sharing what he knows about his hosts. Feeling at home, he explains that Abraham and Sarah were going to have a child saying, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son."

Abraham had already been visited by God twice to share this same news, and yet, Abraham and Sarah tried to fulfill God's promise on their own. Because Sarah was not able to get pregnant, they tried to fulfill God's promise by having a child through Sarah's slave, Hagar. That child, named Ishmael, was blessed by God, but not because he was the intended child of Abraham and Sarah. Their human made plans created conflict in the family and disrespected the divine image in Hagar and Ishmael.

Abraham's guest reveals that in fact there was another way. The miracle of a child would come to them naturally when Sarah was over 90 years old! Something that I, like Sarah and Abraham, struggle to believe or understand. The conversation with these visitors led to a realization of God's covenant with Sarah and Abraham that seemed laughable at best when they were on their own. But they had brought God's word and God's blessing into their house by being hospitable. God was with them and a miracle was possible.

Might this hospitality and humility be what Jesus hopes his disciples will encounter when venturing out into new communities? In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus has already been proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God and providing miraculous healings for

Freely Give

Pastor Ben Heimach-Snipes

June 18th, 2017

everyone with an illness. It is the overwhelming response of the crowds that came to greet him that caused Jesus to send out his new disciples to share God's word and miracle healings as well.

"When Jesus saw the crowds gathering, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Jesus wanted to reach everyone who was seeking him out, so he gave authority to his disciples to visit new communities with his healing word and healing touch. He instructed his disciples to find shelter and hospitality with the strangers they would meet just as Abraham's visitors did.

I find our identity in these stories of hospitality. Jesus identifies his hosts as harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Can you relate? We work hard trying to make ends meet and find space for our loved ones, and still we struggle to maintain healthy relationships, to express our needs, to find freedom to be ourselves. We are lost sheep. And Jesus expects those lost sheep to provide hospitality to him and his disciples as they freely give their gifts of the spirit.

Jesus says to his disciples, "You received without payment; give without payment." Their ministry is not an exchange of goods and services, but rather a gifting, a lifting up, a celebration of each person they encounter. What if we had the capacity to love and care for each person that comes to us as they did?

Let's imagine for a minute what that would look like on the receiving end. What if each person that you encountered from your childhood to now treated you with the respect and love due to you as someone made in God's image. What if all you had ever experienced from family members, neighbors, and strangers was love and hospitality? What kind of inheritance would that be?

Without our inherited pain and brokenness, we might be able to freely give in ways we cannot imagine today. We might be able to provide hospitality to strangers that are equally created in God's image. Maybe it would be better. But we don't need this utopian upbringing to be opened to God's love and act of hospitality. We can start anew each day seeking to live out hospitality for God's creation.

What might God receive from harassed and helpless lost sheep? What gifts of hospitality have you inherited from your parents, your family, your spiritual practices, your God?

This week is the anniversary of many moments of trauma in our national story. It has been one year since an attacker killed 49 people in the LGBTQ community at the Pulse night club in Orlando. It has been two years since nine African Americans were gunned down during their bible study at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston, South Carolina. And just this week our own city has experienced more violence, including shots fired into a

Freely Give

Pastor Ben Heimach-Snipes

June 18th, 2017

crowd of children at a school picnic at Warren Elementary School in the Pill Hill neighborhood. Two young girls were hit with bullets during the confusion and survived.

Dakayla, one of the girls shot at the picnic, experienced this violence and yet maintains hope that she can live her life in freedom. Despite the attack she isn't afraid to play outside. "She's going to go back to playing sports," said her older sister. "She'll heal." What could give this young teenager such courage, such hope to continue living and continue loving those around her? Perhaps she has received the gifts of hospitality from someone along her journey.

Perhaps she has received the gift of healing and hope.

What gifts have you received? What gifts are yours to give?

Jesus has witnessed us - harassed and helpless, broken and afraid. And each day there are miracles. Miracles of healing and miracles of hospitality. As we have received, may we freely give.

Amen