

Size Matters – How Big is Your God?

Loving God, help us to hear Your words of love this day so that we might sow seeds of love in our world. And assist us we pray – that the words of my mouth and the mediations of all our hearts are pleasing to You – our Healer, our Liberator, our Redeemer. AMEN.

Sometimes it feels difficult if not impossible to truly relate to what is happening in the Old Testament . . . or for that matter even the New Testament. Whether it is 2,000 years ago or 4,000 years ago – it can all seem like ancient history.

Unless . . . unless we see the stories less about a history lesson and more about the nature of people. Stories that provide us with insights into people's relationship with God . . . and perhaps more importantly God's relationship with people.

Yet, in order to fully gain the insights offered – we need to do something that isn't all that natural for us. We need to set aside our tendency to think ourselves better than those of ancient times.

Sure, over the centuries it could be argued that humanity has made some amazing advances . . . in science, in technology, in medicine and so much more.

Yet, I believe that how we interact with each other and how we interact with God is not necessarily much different than those of ancient times – for it appears that basic human nature hasn't really changed that much since the beginning.

For many of the same challenges expressed by those in scripture literally thousands of years ago still exist today. And many of the same joys experienced are the same as well.

When we look to scripture – when we explore the past – we shouldn't be longing to return to where we simply cannot go . . . back to the good old days. Instead, we should be exploring how we might learn from people's encounters with God in order to ensure that our connection is as strong as possible with the source of Life in the world we live in right now.

And I believe that not only scripture but the lives of those who have come before us in more recent times – have many, many lessons for us . . . if we set aside our superiority complex and open ourselves to the wisdom and love that is on display in the stories.

In today's reading from the Old Testament – we find Joshua – one of the great heroes of the Old Testament – near the end of his life. It is a life where he was spent much of his time trying to get the Israelites to be as committed to God as God is committed to them.

Joshua had taken over from Moses – who due to his lack of faith never stepped foot into the promised land. But because Joshua trusted that God was with the people. Because Joshua trusted that God would fulfill the promise. Joshua led the people into the promised land.

Yet, once there the people began to relax . . . began to feel entitled . . . started to drift away from God.

For you see – it seems to be human nature that people quickly take for granted what was once only a dream.

So, near the end of his life – Joshua is compelled to remind the people of all the good things God has done for them. In fact, the reminder goes so far as to tell the people that if they reject God – Yahweh . . . then bad things will happen.

In the verses just before today's passage, Joshua made his final plea:

'Now therefore revere the LORD and serve [God] in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt and serve the LORD. Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the

Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.' (Joshua 24:14-15)

You see the people had drifted away from God . . . back to what was comfortable . . . back to hedging their bets. It wasn't as if God had no place in their lives – it was that Yahweh had become one among many.

And is that so different from today? There are many people who have not so much rejected God as pushed God to the side . . . made God less of a priority . . . thought of God as an extra instead of an essential.

The people responded to Joshua with words that Joshua doesn't actually believe. They told Joshua:

'Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. [God] protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore, we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.' (Joshua 24:16-19)

The people said the right words, but Joshua declared that they needed to make a choice in their hearts . . . to be connected with Yahweh alone.

Why was this so important? Why did Joshua spent his final days telling the people faithfulness to Yahweh required severing the connection with any other deity that was competing with Yahweh?

I believe the reason is one we still need to hear today. Yahweh wanted the people to live fully connected to the One who had set them free, the One who had given a homeless people a home in the Promised Land, the One who had given them life.

And today God wants us to live fully connected to the One who has set us free, the One who welcomes us home, the One who gives us life.

And why is it important to be connected to the source of Life? Because all of us are called to live in our world – not be become separated from it.

In an astounding statement, Jesus declares that his followers are not called away from the world but to fully engage it. As Jesus prays on behalf of his followers, Jesus prays these words to God:

“I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” (John 17:15-18)

This statement is part of what is called the “farewell discourse” in John’s gospel. It is a retelling of some of the final thoughts of Jesus prior to his death. It declares that while Jesus’ followers don’t belong to the world – they are called to inhabit the world.

Why? Because they are called to sow the seeds of a revolution – the revolution of love.

And these words have remained just as valid for each generation of believers who has lived after the first disciples.

The renewal of the Moravian Church is traced back to August 13, 1727. Almost 300 years ago – a small group settled on the lands of Count Zinzendorf where they found safety to worship God as they found fit. From this small community some amazing things were begun.

But perhaps the most amazing – at least to me – is the fact that instead of remaining insular . . . staying a closed community to protect themselves from persecution – they heard God call them to sow seeds in the revolution of love.

Over a ten-year period starting in the early 1730s – over 70 members of the community went all over the world to share their experience of God’s love. They went to places that no one else dared to go – they literally became slaves to become God’s ambassadors of love to those enslaved and they went to remote places like Greenland and Labrador.

During the 18th century, this Moravian community and the renewed Moravian Church sent out more missionaries than all the other Protestant dominations combined.

The strategy at the beginning was to spread God's love wherever they went. To sow the seeds of revolution wherever they lived. And if there was already a Christian witness – then they simply worked to strengthen what was there.

The Moravian Church has never been a major player in terms of the number of “butts in the pews” but it has been used by God in amazing ways.

Why do I share this history today?

Because we live in a world where we are so focused on numbers – so focused on obtaining ‘critical mass’ – that we are in danger of missing the point completely.

For the only size that matters – is the size of our God. If we believe that God has called us to be revolutionaries and we believe that God is with us . . . then we are good to go.

If we believe that we have a message that the world needs to hear . . . then we need to share it. Sometimes that will be in the words we speak . . . but only after we share it in the way we live and how we treat the people we encounter each day.

Joshua's exhortation is calling to us this day. And the choice is ours to make but please remember this . . . our call is never to go it alone. For Jesus declares that the critical mass is 2 plus God.

We might be a small faith community by the world's standards . . . but God's call to us is to be a fierce community – one that support each other as we sow the seeds of revolution in the places we inhabit each day.

My prayer is that we embrace the call by sowing seeds of love everywhere we go each day trusting that God is with us as we journey along the Way.

AMEN.