

A FISH STORY

WE HAVE HEARD MANY “FISH” STORIES FROM THE BIBLE. WHO CAN NAME ONE?

(Remember Noah and the big fish that many called a whale, feeding the five thousand with the fishes and the loaves, parables of the kingdom and fish, fathers and fish, the calling of the twelve which involved fish, and the “fishers” of men reference?) Each one of these stories had meaning beyond what we read, and that is why we need not to just to read the Bible, but **we need to study the Bible!**

First glance – why is this story here in between the revelation of his betrayal and death, grieving the disciples followed by His words on childlike faith, concern for the lost and forgiveness? A fish story, now, why? Really it has a strong relationship to the words of Jesus that follow. If we study the words, a larger picture is painted for us that helps us live the life that God desires. **Living that life calls us to have a higher standard than others – “to do the right thing, going beyond our duty and demonstrate to others that good example”.**

Our responses could be “others don’t do it why do I have to”? Sounds familiar, we have likely spoke it as a child or heard from a child in protest. But remember the words of Jesus after this fish story – about *childlike faith not childish faith*. Speaking of childish behavior, how many people has the church lost because of the behavior members have displayed to others or to those they love.

Later in chapter 18 Jesus speaks of forgiveness, **do we wallow in our hurt or do we forgive as Jesus taught, even from the cross?** Now we can begin to draw up the excuses in our minds that “Jesus just won’t buy them and we know it!” These godly principles, like *forgiveness* are not just empty words, they have power and God knows but do we?!!!! We know it is the right thing to do but we hesitate, why – “the unknown, losing control, we don’t know exactly what the outcome will be and that scares us??”

A student going into a test goes in more confidently because they studied and know the material! Well it is the very same for us and the Bible. **If we don’t study and prepare to use what we have learned in the tests of life we are going to fail the tests that come our way.** However, unlike the school test where the answer is wrong or right according to the teacher, God grants us grace and we can get up and move forward hopefully having learned something!

Look at the Bible since the fall in the garden and the broken relationship man had with God the rest of the Bible is God initiative to restore that relationship culminating with sending his only Son to die on a cross for our sins and rise from the dead becoming our, you, me and everybody out there,

Savior and **if we allow him, Lord of our life. When we are called to be His disciple we are called to do the right thing because it is the right thing to do.**

Galatians 5:13 is one of my favorites and sums it up -- this is the message translation *“it is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life.* Just make sure that you don’t use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that’s how freedom grows. **For everything we know about God’s Word is summed up in a single sentence: “love others as you love yourself”--that is the right thing to do but it goes beyond any legal obligation we have or rules to follow. It is a higher moral call for us as disciples. That is today’s story’s meaning.**

Jesus belongs to a kingdom that brings freedom, but in order not to offend anyone he told Peter they would pay the temple tax. As Galatians says, **it is not about doing anything you want to do but to serve and love others.** I know in today’s world you can’t turn around without someone being offended by something, but the words used here were used in a special way. It was not as our language uses it to insult or annoy. It meant to put a stumbling block in the way of another. **Jesus in this story will pay the tax because it is a good example of the right thing to do.**

Centennial has long existed since 1876 and people of the early congregation, I believe, did the right things after all we still carry on some of their traditions. Some Sundays in the winter I am sure it was not very warm in here or in summer was hot with no AC. But faithfully they came to church to worship God and be thankful for their life!

A while back I went through classes to become a member and heard the requirements of belonging to participate in the life of the church, give and the last which struck me like a bolt of lightning – “we expect you to attend church at least 50 percent of the time really”??? That’s the “right” thing to do?

The Methodist Church has lost on average church attendance 68,000 which is enough to close all the churches in Iowa! Our average age is 60 and over 50 percent of our people are between 66-80!

What does that have to do with today’s story? We are called to do the right thing. Now I have heard the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different outcomes. So if we want to continue to decline and within x years close this church and disappoint all who came before us, then we better improve what we have, innovate and use the tools we have available, change or die and close the doors!!!

Now I can guess there are some who say “we done it this way for over a 100 years”. Well I believe those who came before us may not recognize the church they worshipped in and I am not talking just about the lights and the AC!

Just like today’s story we have to do the right thing not just sit in fellowship or committee or council or anywhere and complain about the situation. If someone asks you where do you go to church would you give us a glowing recommendation or send them elsewhere? Look around, we are it. **If anyone is going to get this church moving forward it is we who are here and the power of prayer and the Holy Spirit.** After all, it is His Church, we are His disciples and we can with much power accomplish things we could never imagine.

Story about boy and 9000, well in Nigeria.

There was a story a speaker, Adam Hamilton, told at Annual Conference-- he is the Pastor of Church of the Resurrection. He was asked about helping another minister tour his church from a first time visitor’s view. Well, he pulled up in the parking lot and saw the grass had not been cut for a week and a half, dogs had gotten into the garbage and was all over the lawn for starters. Inside he asked to go to the nursery. Once in the nursery he sniffed the air and it smelled of mold and old diapers. The toys had dirt on them; one Barbie had its head ripped off. Onward and upward, they went up to the Narthex, it was cluttered, the windows were covered curtains when a member many years ago made them with bumblebees on them and pompons the whole fellowship hall looked old and tired.

Well you say, Pastor these things shouldn’t matter it’s the people. But how do we take care of this place where we worship God the almighty? It is a form of stewardship. Adam went over and picked up a Bulletin-- in it were listed things such as Bible study in the FFR and a meeting was in the FFH while Fellowship was in the RFD.

He came back for their service, the greeters were talking to friends while holding a cup of coffee and never noticed them. No one ever came up and greeted his wife and him. Finally finding Fellowship in the RFD they got coffee and goodies and sat down, no one came to their table!

Would you come back to this church? Was this church really committed to welcoming and making a home for new people?

Do we have a picture in our minds of who we are and that maybe the way we were? We can speak volumes and platitudes but do our actions speak even louder?

A question – **do you know everyone that is sitting in this church this morning? If not, why not?** Bill Hibbles wrote a book called “**Walking Across the Room**”. It is a book on Evangelism like you have never read before. Evangelism can be simply getting up and walking across a room and saying hello. It is not easy to look at ourselves and admit we can do better. It is easier to remain in our comfort zone talking with friends or

Family, then it is to walk across the room and talk to someone new or that we have not bothered ever to learn more about. **People walk through our door because they want to connect – are you, are we a bridge or a wall? The right thing is to be that bridge.**

I received two notes from members of the Church of the Resurrection saying they were praying for me and our church while I was at Annual Conference and will pray for me and our church through June. That really moved me. What really startled me? Likely one of those notes was from a former prostitute!!! Now a member of Resurrection connected—“**relationships**” that is what is this all about – not you, not me, but them out there and those who visit us to connect them to Jesus.

“To be a caring family of disciples who know Christ and makes Christ known in our community and around the world”

That’s OUR Mission Statement. It should be reflected in everything we do and everyone who is in this faith community of Centennial UMC. A fish story, yes, but if we study it, the story has so much more to say.

Pray with me. Lord, help us to be faithful to you and to each other, to reach out to the visitor and the un- connected beyond these walls of this church. Grant us grace that we my love You and each other as well as the visitor among us.

Amen.