

## Your Heart on Your Sleeve

John 6:1-15

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Don't you wish that you could have everything right there where you wanted it whenever you wanted it? Isn't that what technology is striving for these days? Your car can call your brother on the phone, you can set an alarm in your house or turn the lights on or off while walking the dog on the trail at Weekapaug Beach. Everything right there, right where you are.

That's if you choose to upgrade your life to be able to do things like that. To be connected at all times.

- Two weeks ago I talked about how God showers us in our lives with extravagant blessings if we but know God.
- Last week I talked about how we are sheep with a shepherd if we but know the shepherd, if we choose to be Jesus' sheep.

All of these things are dependent upon human choice in a way. Can you turn your lights on from the beach? Will you be showered with blessings? Will you have the love of the shepherd and all that comes with that love? All based on choices.

King David was the writer of Psalm 145, our first reading today. He was a man of choices, sometimes good sometimes bad. As a young man he was a sheep herder for his family, he was anointed then to be king of Israel, and he faced the giant Goliath and won the battle.

He was the one whom Samuel, the prophet and judge of Israel referred to when he said "the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be ruler over his people..." (1 Samuel 13:14) Psalm 145 was the last Psalm attributed directly to David. It is the only Psalm that refers to itself as an actual Psalm or song within the body of itself and it's the last of 9 acrostic psalms where each of the lines start with

a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is not only a song of praise but also a work of art by God's chosen King.

I love to sing the song, Holy, Holy, Holy as it says "all thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea..."

The beginning of this psalm of praise reminds me of those words. It starts:

All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you.

They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

These first 3 verses speak of that which is made by God, blessing God, as His works.

We are God's works, The Lord's creation, the fruit of God's labor.

We are a blessing to God when we thank God, when we speak of God's kingdom and of God's power. By our lives we bless God and in particular by our remaining faithful to the Lord as God remains faithful to us. This is David's truth also.

We lose sight of David for a few years in his story as he lives and learns and eventually ends up in King Saul's house, working for the king in battle and finally leading to his ascension to the throne. By the time David has written this song, he has experienced the goods and the bads in life; he has won and lost in battles, he has joined all Israel together as one nation, and he is failed mightily in his affair with Bathsheba. Reflecting back he writes in verse 14:

The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

David acknowledges here that life happens. Being with God doesn't mean that we don't fail. Failure in all things is a part of life but he knows,

through experience, that God remains, even when we do fail and that God sustains even when we are bowed down in the hardest parts of life.

Near the end of his life, when he is able to look back and reflect, an older and learned man writes how God remains close to him in his life. Verse 18: The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

Last week I told a cute dog story about Bridgette and family getting a rescue dog. Well, many people now know that the story didn't turn out so cute because the dog bit Hazel and she ended up with some stitches. It was a traumatic day to be certain.

One thing that Bridgette mentioned to me was that in all of the drama of the moment, as she rushed to help and comfort her daughter, she did the mom part like any mom would do, but after a while, in that high anxiety, she finally thought to pray with her daughter, to pray the Lord's prayer over and over again because Hazel knows that prayer well.

She said that even in the worst of those moments, connecting to God in prayer really helped calm both the frightened daughter and the panicked mother.

Bridgette said "I just wish it would be automatic for me to go to God with my problems when I have them instead of having to suffer through these things and then remembering to pray, to ask God for help".

She would like to have God with her at all times so she can place her heart in God, and wear her heart on her sleeve, always there, always in play.

Now, Bridgette didn't just come to that realization in that frightening moment. Her faith has been walking with and growing with her for years. Life and the church have been teaching her many life-lessons along the way.

This miraculous division of bread and fish to feed 5000 people in our gospel lesson today is the only story recorded in all 4 of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

When I think of Jesus on a hill I think of the feeding of the 5000 and I think of the sermon on the mount. I marry those 2 together because they are both up the mountain.

But the sermon on the mount is only recorded in Matthew 5 with no reference to bread nor fish and a similar scene without food, referred to as the sermon on the plain (because they had just come down a mountain to a level place) is recorded in Luke 6.

Jesus, in this passage today, didn't actually teach like he did with those sermons, but he certainly modeled for those with him an experience for a lifetime.

And although the story is about a miraculous feeding, history tells us that the fish mentioned were likely no larger than a good size sardine. History also tells us the barley was used only for livestock and the poorest of the poor. This is not a meal fit for a king. This is hardly even a meal fit for a human, yet with a blessing, in the hands of God, Jesus turns it into a filling miraculous meal for 5000.

Standing on the side of the hill watching a crowd come toward him, our scripture says that Jesus knew what He needed to do. As I described last week these people had probably just walk around 10 miles from the far side of the lake to where they now stood on the side of the hill above Bethsaida.

The scene really reminds us that God does in fact use all kinds for spiritual work on earth. In an almost Three Stooges moment, Jesus says: "so what are we going to do?" Philip says: "I don't have anything, we can never make it work". And Andrew says: "oh look over here, maybe we can do something with this!" The meal that is available is infinitely small and incredibly poor, yet fit for a feast.

This is the kind of story that makes us scratch our heads. This is the kind of story which makes us wonder about the limits of the miraculous.

With this book before us we have the opportunity to wrestle with the gospel. And we could easily tend to go too far to the left, removing parts of the scripture that don't fit for us individually, or to go too far to the right, adding explanations to it or rules to its interpretation that take away from the mystery of who God is. Either way we can error.

Often, wrestling with the story and admitting that we are not sure, but allow in God's word to remain as God's word brings us closer to the Lord of our lives and the Bible. And if our lives are steeped in God, having wrestled with these words, other people will see a difference in who you are. You can never really tell how your actions might affect others.

We can do honor to the God we do know by simply living our lives in that truth.

You can go over to the Honey Dew for a donut and coffee or down to Sandy's food emporium for some fruit or over to the Dunn's Corner Market for their famous cheddar mac & cheese and in the process, strike up a conversation that leads to a friendship that eventually leads back here to the church and then with the Spirits help, leads to God, but it starts with our Christian lives.

We wear our lives as examples to the world and we identify as Christian. You don't have to be an evangelist or a minister to tell others that God is real, you really just have to live your life as a Christian life, because you really do have something amazing to talk about.

As a young sailor in training at a base in Orlando, Florida, one day I simply prayed before my meal in the mess-hall. Another sailor I had never met before came over and told me that he was impressed by the fact that I just bowed my head before my meal. I have no idea where the interaction went but I do know where it started.

Some of us are better at this kind of living than others but it's useful to remember that as Christians, we live in a very different world from others who know little to nothing of God so a little can go a long way.

The Bible is a big book with lots of words. It's something simply too big to take on all at once.

There are Biblical stories we in here all know as people of the church but others know nothing of them.

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden

Noah and the Ark

The general broad sweep of the story of Jesus' birth life and death on the cross.

If we take our understanding and church-language outside the church we can find that many know nothing of this. There's a big language difference between the us and other and this can be a barrier between the church and those we want to introduce to God.

If I talk to you about being saved - well it means something totally different to someone outside the church.

If I tell you that I'll pray for you - people who have never churched might think something's up.

We have a very different language here, but we can't let that get in the way of the amazing truth of blessings and love that come with it.

We don't, as Christians, walk around with red jackets on like Target or Lowe's employees. We cannot be spotted based on our "look" as being Christians but it sure would be nice if we could. If we could wear God on our sleeves for others to see, wouldn't that be handy?

When I was visiting with Bert and Barbara Sullivan the other day, Barbara reminded me over and over again what a jewel Dunn's Corners Church is.

Look at this summer schedule! Don't y'all know we're struggling to climb out of a pandemic? Look at this plan for the summer months! You total hit the ground running!

But Barbara's real point was so in-line with the point of this sermon. She was so on-target that it was a little spooky.

Her advice was to keep playing the strong suit. Be who you are.

Being in a group that gathers to have fun and work together and to help the community only takes building of natural human relationships. You invite, you gather, you get to know. Jesus and the Spirit will do the rest. People need God in their lives, they really do. Everywhere we look parts of this world are falling apart and some tough days may be ahead. We need each other, in relationship in the church. Invite your friends, your neighbor, your co-workers. Jesus will find a way into their hearts through you.

Although we would love to wear our hearts on our sleeves with God shining out to everyone around us, it's not that simple, but it's pretty close. The lessons of David tell us that God is always with us. The lessons of Jesus tell us that He can do miraculous things with quite literally almost nothing, with something as simple as an invitation, or a conversation, or a relationship.

God be with us in all we do in the Lord's name.

Amen