

Jesus the Movement Founder

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It makes a difference to be together doesn't it.

That is not to say that the Holy Spirit has not been moving through cyberspace, and shining through our cameras and screens.

Yet, there is something that makes the faith we claim a bit easier when we can meet each in the physical world.

You know we don't need water to know that a baby is loved by God and entrusted to our community, but when the baptismal water drips down a child cheek, when we see and hear their presence, it helps make it real.

And we don't need to eat bread and drink juice for God to nourish us with grace, yet when together we taste the bread of heaven, it helps make it real.

And we don't have to be physically together in order to live as the church. And yet, when we come together in this way to behold one another, it helps make it real.

Today we are wrapping up a four week sermon series painting a portrait of Jesus by examining four of his attributes.

We started, as children returned to school, by sitting with Jesus the teacher, to see what it meant to be transformed by his wisdom.

Then, as we stretched ourselves and challenged ourselves to respond as a congregation to the sin of racism in our world today, as we began the hard work of finding our voice in this moment, we turned to Jesus the Prophet, whose words never failed to disrupt and challenge.

Last week, we met Jesus the Healer, inviting us to empathy, drawing us beside the hurting to bear their tears with them.

Finally today, Jesus the Movement Founder. Jesus was someone who did not just touch the world with his own hands and love it with his own heart, but Jesus started a movement to multiply and grow the gifts that he has poured into this world. How he has changed our hearts is not for us alone, but is for our living in service of others and of creation.

And it is so good to be able to speak of Jesus, the movement founder, while experiencing togetherness in this place.

We are here. With our chapter of Jesus' movement.

A movement that reaches back as far as that Galilean hillside, where Jesus told a hungry crowd to sit.

Maybe you have heard this story before. Jesus feeds a great crowd with meager rations. The baskets of leftovers are overflowing. The disciples can't believe it.

And—be honest—there is part of you that can't believe it either.

I mean how does this happen?

I don't know. And usually the mechanics of a miracle are better left a mystery.

But let me just try one idea...

I sometimes wonder if Jesus took those seven loaves of bread and the few small fish and handed them to the first row of that crowd. With such confidence. With such generosity. That a few folks realized, well, I don't actually have *nothing*. I do have a little bread, I suppose I don't need it all, I'll pass some along too.

I don't think it makes this any less of a miracle if suddenly people's minds in a moment turned from what they didn't have to what they did have.

I don't think it makes it any less of a miracle if their hearts in that moment turned from protecting what they needed for themselves, to wondering what others needed from them.

And so the baskets pass, row, after row, family to family, and something miraculous happens. They don't run out. The bread seems only to grow.

As people take what they need. As they add what they can.

This crowd that had nothing, realizes that they have all they need, and actually quite a bit more.

That would be Jesus the movement founder.

Whose miracle is more than what he does. His miracle is what others do because of him.

His miracle is not just his own generosity, but how his generosity inspires the generosity of others.

Not just his own heart turned out toward us, but the way he turns our hearts out toward one another and the world.

Not just that he supplies our need, but that he shows us we have all we need and more.

Today we heard a reading of this text from the Gospel of Mark. But each of the four gospels tells this story, and they each offer details the other's don't.

In Matthew's telling, we learn that this great miracle took place right after Jesus learned that his cousin John the Baptist, had been senselessly executed by King Herod. Beheaded to amuse party guests.

Word spreads of this capricious king's violence. It no doubt sent a shudder through all those who counted themselves among this movement with Jesus, and with John.

Scripture says: "When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a lonely place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns."

It is in that lonely place, that this hungry crowd arrives, following him out into the wilderness where he sought to be alone with his grief.

This whole miracle takes place in the shadow of grief.

This whole miracle takes place in the shadow of senseless death.

This whole miracle takes place in the shadow of fear, of wondering what will happen next.

And so then I think it is that much more of a miracle that hands and hearts open to one another, that much more of a miracle that the bread in the basket grows, that much more of a miracle that self-protection gives way to generosity, that isolation gives way to community, that movement is born.

And that is the movement that we are a part of.

We are a movement that can meet this moment.

We are a movement that can gather beneath the shadow of any grief and still find our hearts still turned inside out.

A movement that can meet any fear with courage. That even if we do not know where we are going, we know who is with us. And that is enough.

A movement where even if each of us feels like we don't even have what we need to get through today, today we have all we need and more.

A movement that comes together not just to have enough for ourselves, but to have such an abundance overflow, that we can turn outward and feed even those beyond our circle.

It is so good to be together in this way, because having all of us joined together in one place, in one moment, is the simplest way we have to remember this truth.

I want to invite you to look around, lock eyes with someone, take in this gathered community.

Take in this moment. May be never again take for granted the gift it is to be in one place, together. So that we can see the movement that we are part of.

So that we can be reminded, of how real, how true, this all is.

And whatever your life feels empty of, let it feel refilled.

If you have run out of courage, together we have courage to spare.

If you have run out of hope, together we have hope to spare.

If you have run out of energy, together we have energy to spare.

If you need help, you can call on these people. I know that each person here would love nothing more than to extend love and care to you.

Look, there is a lot in our world right now that is genuinely scary. There is no point in pretending its not. And there is nothing about our future that is certain right now.

Here is the miracle I pray for us.

That Christ will turn to you, to offer you a lift in grace and in love. And that he will do so with such generosity and confidence in his eyes, that you will remember every gift and grace that lies in your own heart and burn to share it with the world.

I pray that God will lift the shroud of scarcity that obscures our way, so that we can be astounded by abundance where we feared there was only emptiness.

I pray that we awaken to the memory that we are part of a movement that stretches back across the ages, and out around the world, that binds us to one another, so that the hope that has turned stale will taste like heaven again.

I would be hard pressed to think of something more miraculous than that.

And seeing you all here today, makes it real.

