

## From the Mountain to the Sea

[Ephesians 3:14-21](#), [John 6:1-21](#)

Today's scripture lesson from the gospel of John is probably very familiar to most. The first part is John's depiction of the only miracle found in all four gospels – the feeding of the 5,000. This was an astounding event; definitely registering as a miracle with great significance since all four gospel authors felt compelled to give their account. This seems to be the very definition of a mountain-top experience – one of the highlights of our lives. This is like that one special story that gets told and retold practically every time folks are together. I am sure the disciples felt the joy and awe of being in the presence of Jesus and witnessing first-hand the power of God. Thousands were fed from a small lunch of five barley loaves and two fish, and everyone was satisfied.

There is a small part of this account of the feeding story that could easily go unnoticed. John 6 verse 15 says that the people who had benefited from Jesus' miracle were about to take him away and make him king. The scripture says they were going to take Jesus by force in order to make him king. I find it fascinating that anyone would think they could take Jesus by force without Jesus agreeing to it, particularly after seeing the power of God at work in him. Nevertheless, Jesus sees their intention, and takes the opportunity to draw himself away from the crowd and spend some time alone.

Downtime – oh, how we all need downtime and rarely do we allow ourselves the opportunity. Even when we schedule time away from work, we may find ourselves trying to pack so much into our vacation; we need a vacation from our vacation! Yet we find numerous

examples in the Bible of how Jesus withdrew from everyday tasks to rest and meditate and pray. Often we feel that rest is a waste of time. Perhaps we feel we are not important if every minute of every day is not packed with critical tasks and decisions only we can make. One thing we can take from this passage – if the son of God needed rest and downtime, so do we. Not just rest for our physical bodies, which is important, but also rest for our souls – time to meditate and commune with God.

As the story continues, the disciples started out across the sea to Capernaum. Jesus' had not returned from his R&R so the disciples proceeded without him. It is interesting to me just how quickly the tide can change. No sooner had the disciples experienced this incredible mountain-top experience, when they were faced with another incredible challenge. As much as they may have

wanted to linger and bask in the glory of the miraculous feeding event, the next trial was waiting for them.

Our experienced fishermen found themselves in the midst of a terrible storm. How true is that for us today? No sooner do we come through some of the best experiences of our lives only to be found dealing with yet another difficult situation. Are we at the point in our Christian walk when we are just waiting for the other shoe to drop? Are we afraid to experience the joyful moments because we just know something bad is surely bound to follow? Are we sacrificing our happiness for the sake of fear?

So our fishermen found themselves fighting a storm, and Jesus was not with them. We may have felt that at times as well. Perhaps we are going through some difficult situation and we feel abandoned – like God has left us to

fend for ourselves. We are in the midst of the sea and we cannot focus on the mountain. Yet we know from other passages of this part of the story that Jesus, while still on the mountain, could most likely see the disciples from his vantage point. The disciples were not alone – Jesus continued to watch over them just as he continues to watch over us. Whether we reveling in our mountain-top experiences or in the midst of the sea, God is in control. God is watching over us.

There is a popular commercial series out there from an insurance company with the tag line, “Life comes at you fast.” The one scene I remember is a young boy who had just completed a project of building a sophisticated robot. The parents are just beaming with pride, right up until the second the robot shoots out a laser beam and begins to

destroy the garage. We then hear the tag line; “Life comes at you fast.”

Life can definitely seem that way. We have those moments that are just awesome and we want to just stay in that moment – we want Joshua to ask God to stop the sun so we can capture every nuance of that glorious moment. Think of those moments in you life. We can usually recall them without much effort. Then there are the times in our lives we would like to forget - the times when we cannot find any joy or hope or comfort; times when we truly feel God has abandoned us.

I wanted to share something from my little 4-year old cousin Serena. This past round of chemotherapy was by far the worst she had ever experienced. She spent weeks in pediatric intensive care in a drug-induced coma to keep her stable and allow her body to build up its immune system.

Also, since she is only four years old, she had to be restrained to keep her from pulling out the numerous tubes she had in all parts of her little body. Last week, they removed her breathing tube, her chest tube, and catheter. When she was able to talk, she described in great detail an angel that she said had been with her.

From Becky Lambert – Serena’s mother:

“One of the first things that Serena talked about after being extubated, was the fact that she saw an angel. It sounds like she thinks she dreamt that she saw an angel. (I tend to think that it was no dream!) After questioning her trying to figure out more details; she told me that it was a woman angel, she looked like one of our figurines at the condo, as well as the picture that we have hanging on the wall in her PICU room right now. She said it was a good angel and she was not afraid at all. Yes, I got goose bumps

and was in shock to hear all of this!... but yet not. Maybe she really did have a bed of feathers/prayers lifting her up to heaven close enough to be healed, blessed and safely returning her to us.” I believe that too – I believe God sent comfort in the form of an angel to help a little girl through an extremely trying time.

Some may say, “Why does God allow bad things to happen to God’s people?” It seems, when we accept our freedom from the bondage of slavery in sin, all should be well and we should have a clear, easy path while here on earth. In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Jesus never promised a burden-free life. Jesus promised rest for our

souls. When the storms rage in our lives, we can rest in the comfort that God is with us. We are not alone. We have not been abandoned.

Life will be filled with mountain-top and stormy sea experiences. Sometimes life will come at us way too fast. But we serve a God that can see us through all the storms of life. We serve a God that provides comfort and strength when we think we have nothing left to give. We serve a God that cares for the creation God took such precision to make. We serve a God worthy of our praise.

I would like to challenge each of us to spend some time in prayer and meditation this week. What does God want each of us to do at this phase of our personal relationship with God? What is God seeking from us as a congregation of the body of Christ? Spend part of that meditation time reading and studying the scriptures. If you

are not sure where to begin, I recommend choosing one of the gospels. Focus on Jesus' teachings and actions.

Whether you are on your own personal mountain-top experience or deep in the midst of a raging sea, God is with you. May God continue to bless and strengthen each of us to continue faithfully on our Christian walk. Amen.