

Mountains, Valleys and Caves: Jesus on the Mount at Galilee

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John 6:1-15

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If you ever go to Israel, you'll understand why Jesus preferred the Sea of Galilee to Jerusalem. The "Holy Land" is far more than rocks and sand. While it is about the size of New Jersey, those who have been to Israel often say it reminds them of California—a coastal plain, a mountain ridge that creates a desert, and a northern area that is plush and fertile. The Sea of Galilee is the largest freshwater lake in the Middle East though it is not a large area, about 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. In the northwestern part of the lake is where Jesus performed this amazing miracle. The Feeding of 5,000 was truly a mountaintop experience. Jesus put Philip on the spot. The disciple who got second billing, Andrew (Peter's brother), always seemed to be bringing people to Jesus. This time it was a little boy. Some say this miracle is their favorite of all (other than the Resurrection, of course). Jesus wasn't finished with the miraculous, either. Next, He walked on the water and calmed a storm.

However, John 6 tells the rest of the story. The great victory turned south the next day when many of "His disciples" left Him. His sayings were too difficult. Some just wanted the goodies but truly weren't interested in following Him. They were fickle followers. Their departure is a classic case of, "Lower your expectations; raise your commitment." APPLICATION: Our theme this week is **discipleship**. Write out your definition of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus: Jesus said the mission of the church was to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. Are you a disciple? Why? How are you helping others follow Jesus? When in your discipleship have you felt like you were on a mountaintop, multitude-feeding, water-walking experience; and when have you felt confused and thought of dropping out? Disciples have mountains, valleys and sometimes caves.

The gospels only record a few of Jesus' miracles. The Feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle found in all four gospels except for the Resurrection. After this story, Jesus walks on the Sea of Galilee.

I've spoken to you previously about the "**Wesleyan Quadrilateral**" (scripture, tradition, reason, and experience - there are cards of them in the pew). While all are essential, John Wesley said, "I am a man of one book." He meant scripture was the foundational and governing authority of his life. What the church has taught for 2,000 years is also crucial.

Thomas Jefferson was alive during Wesley's lifetime. He did not believe the miracles recorded in the Bible were true. So, he cut them out of his own version of the Bible ("Thomas Jefferson Bible"). The miracle of feeding the 5,000 with five barley loaves and two sardines is not in his book because reason was foundational for Jefferson. Reason says a miracle is impossible. Other skeptics must explain what happened, so they say Jesus gave a great speech

and motivated the crowd into sharing their sack lunches. Nor did he really walk on the water, He just knew where the rocks were.

We recited **The Apostles Creed**. Many UM pastors do not use it in their worship services because they do not believe some or any of it. A prominent UM pastor used to say the only thing he believed about the Creed were the first two words: "I believe." He didn't believe in the virgin birth, that Jesus was crucified for our sins, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, or will come again. Others claim that Jesus had a twin or that He wasn't really dead, but "swooned" on the cross. They threw His body in the cave and He came back to life, rolled the stone away, overpowered the guards, and this man, the expert Roman soldiers had crucified, convinced His disciples that He was resurrected. When I went through the ordination process a UM pastor on the District Committee asked me how I could believe that the God of the OT is the same as the God of the NT. He told others he thought the UMC would eventually become Unitarian and would approve. I sat next to a clergy and when the Bishop said to turn in your Bibles to Ephesians she said, "I don't like Paul." She doesn't accept most of the teachings of the New Testament. An Asbury member told me the minister of his previous church said he, the minister, is either an agnostic or an atheist. Another Asbury member told me when she told her uncle, a prominent UMC pastor, that she had given her life to Christ he told her, "You'll get over it." A prominent pastor says, "The Bible should be put into 3 buckets – what has been and should always be scripture; what was useful but is no longer good; what should never have been included in the Bible." My question – who decides? When I'm freed from the teachings of the New Testament, I can do my own thing.

We've begun our disaffiliation process because we feel others have left our doctrine. We believe the Apostles Creed is true. Many on the progressive side disagree do not. There are two paths. One holds to the historic teachings and practice of the New Testament. The other says we don't need that any longer. It's old-fashioned and out of date. They see the church a place to address social injustice as they define that to be, not to preach the gospel. **John Wesley: "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out."**

How is this happening? Many colleges and universities have faculties who do not agree with the tenets of the Christian faith and are teaching our kids perspectives that do not align with scripture and tradition. It also has been happening in seminaries for many years. When young people attend higher education but are not sufficiently grounded in their faith, they can become easy prey for those who want to de-convert them.

3 things:

- 1.) We are all sinners. Nobody is exempt. We all need Jesus. This is the message of the church.
- 2.) We have no right to hate other sinners. Jesus didn't. Everyone is made in the image of God.
- 3.) Emotionally mature people stay connected with others while disagreeing. Because I disagree with you on some matter does not mean I hate you.

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After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" ¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Jesus begins chapter 6 on a mountain. Everyone loves the miracle worker There's some drama, too. He asks Philip, a local boy from Bethsaida, what they should do. Philip points out the problem but doesn't have a solution. Andrew is a connector who is always finding people and bringing them to Jesus (including his brother, Peter). He offers a solution, though it seems insignificant. He brings a poor boy with 5 biscuits and two sardines. Jesus takes charge. This is a miracle. The crowd wanted to make Jesus their king so He could get rid of the hated Romans. Jesus refused. He withdrew. Then is the 2nd miracle – He walked on water. Matthew's gospel tells us this is when Peter walked on water, too. Again, another miracle.

At the end of John 6, people complained that not only would Jesus not become their king, but also his teachings were too hard. He did not meet their expectations. Many withdrew and no longer followed Him. Jesus turned to His disciples and asked if they would leave, too. John 6:68-69 ***Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."*** Jesus went from a mountaintop experience to a massive abandonment. His claims were unpopular with the culture. Everyone, even Jesus, has mountains, valleys, and caves.

An influential book is "Failure of Nerve." Rabbi Edwin Friedman uses the term "**self-differentiation**." This is when we have clarity about our life goals, and we can separate our thoughts from our feelings. Feelings are God-given, but often get us in trouble. If we follow our feelings, will probably put us on an emotional roller coaster. We must make good decisions even though we may feel differently. Another book describes it in terms of an elephant and a rider. The little rider of reason tries valiantly to control the elephant of feelings, but he has little control. "I just want to feel happy" is something people say all the time, and then they do the wrong things.

Friedman says, "*Show me a struggling organization and I'll show you a 'nice guy' at the top.*" The "nice guy" wants to be liked/popular, so they won't make the tough call. They want everyone to be "happy." Appeasement is a short-term strategy.

Jesus was the most self-differentiated person who ever lived. He would tell you the truth, but he did it with love. He stayed emotionally connected. In this story, He could have just gone along with the crowd and been a "Yes man," but instead He stood up for truth. How did Jesus feel when many of his "disciples" left Him? He could not have felt happy about it. But Jesus wasn't primarily concerned about making people happy. He was here to do God's will.

To be a disciple means we recognize what Peter said, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.*"

We are all Disciples of something or someone. We can follow the skepticism of T.J. He was brilliant in a lot of ways – and a total washout in a lot of other ways. I wouldn't pay a dime for his Bible. On the other hand, the One who crucified, dead, and buried Jesus, who God raised from the dead, has ascended into heaven. Disciples who follow Jesus, and Help Others Follow Jesus, too, will have the words of eternal life. He is the Holy One of God. We get to choose who we will follow. This is your invitation to follow the one who is the Living Water and the Bread of Life.