

Pastor Colleen's Sermon of August 2, 2009

Grace, Peace and Mercy be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

One day there was a little girl named, Emma, who was playing with her paper dolls. And these were special paper dolls because they were all Bible characters. Suddenly while playing with the dolls, Emma realized that the Jesus paper doll was missing. Emma and her mother looked all over the house, but they couldn't find Jesus anywhere. So Emma and her mother went on about their day and later that afternoon, Emma came running to her mother with some good news. "Mom, I found Jesus!" declared Emma.

It turned out that Jesus was in one of her father's magazines. And Emma proudly held out her new Jesus for her mother to see. Well her mother gasped as she took the picture from Emma's hands. It seems it was a picture of a tall, bearded homeless man dressed in rags. Because of his long hair and beard, he did resemble Emma's paper-doll Jesus, so Emma decided that this was her new paper doll of Jesus.

As Emma's mother reflected on Jesus' own words about the poor and powerless, she agreed that her little girl had indeed found Jesus.

Now, listen to the opening of this morning's gospel...
"when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus."

You see, just previous to this search, the crowd had witnessed Jesus' feeding of the 5,000. They knew that this man was someone special,
Someone they wanted to be near,
Someone they wanted to see more of.
Someone they wanted to find.

And today, over 2,000 years later we are still searching for Jesus.
Rich people, poor people, young people, old people, people of every race and nationality.
We are still trying to find Jesus.

Think about your own lives,
How often when you are feeling down and out
When you are having a particularly bad day,
How often do you find yourself looking for a sign?

A sign of God's presence in that moment,
A sign that God is with you in the midst of your trouble
A sign of hope in the midst of the darkness?

For when we are on the verge of losing hope that is when we need Jesus the most.

In hospital beds, at foreclosure sales, in addiction centers,
 In the unemployment line,
 In our cars, at our jobs, in our schools,
 all over this world,
 all over this community
 and even in this place
 there are people who are quickly losing their last signs of hope.

As a matter of fact, it has been said that we can live many weeks without food,
 a few days without water,
 but not an hour without hope.

Dr. Harold Wolfe, a professor in the medical school at Cornell, did a study on the effects of hope on the human body.

And in his conclusion he said:

“When a person has hope they are capable of bearing incredible burdens and cruel punishment. But when hope is gone, people fall apart emotionally, physically and spiritually.”

Weeks without food, days without water, but not an hour without hope.

People who are on the verge of losing hope need Jesus.

And my friends, maybe you are one of these people.

These are hard times.

Some of us are concerned about our jobs.

Some are concerned about family members,

others about their own health and the health of their friends and family

Those who came searching for Jesus had seen him multiply the fishes and the loaves.

They knew he could help them with their problems.

For some of them this was the first glimmer of hope that anyone had ever given them.

Jesus cautioned them that he had not come to minister to their physical needs but to their spiritual needs.

He did not come to give them the bread that spoils, but the bread which endures unto eternal life.

And if they would eat the bread which he came to give, he promised them, the rest of life would fall into place.

People who are on the verge of losing hope need Jesus.

And we are all at one time or another part of the searching and seeking crowd.

Last week I had the privilege to travel to New Orleans with 5 of our senior high youth and 2 other adult leaders.

We went to attend the National Youth Gathering but we also went to spend part of our time there participating in a service project.

Our group was assigned to help clean up City Park.

Now City Park in New Orleans is 4 times the size of Central park in NYC.

And when Hurricane Katrina hit much of the park was covered in 6 – 8 feet of water.

And that water stood in that park for weeks.

Cleaning up the City Park was not a priority for New Orleans. So this was one of the many service projects that the Youth attending the gathering were assigned to.

Our bus filled with 42 people were assigned to clean up the part of the park called Goat Island. This was an island in the middle of the park which was covered in a forest of ragweed. Now the ragweed in New Orleans looks nothing like the ragweed up North. It stood anywhere from 3 to 10 feet tall in some places and essentially it resembled a forest of bamboo.

The stalks on the ragweed were a couple of inches around. So each of us was given a pair of "lopers" which is a hedge clipper with a long handle. And we were given the task of creating a trail onto the island and then completely around the island.

Our bus with youth from St. Louis, Wisconsin, and Colorado stood shoulder to shoulder in the 95 degree heat and humidity and we started clipping the weeds and pulling them out. We stopped every 15 minutes or so to make sure we were drinking plenty of water, We all acknowledged it was hot... maybe the hottest weather any of us had ever worked outside in...

But these youth and adults never stopped until the path had been created and a trail was clear.

When we walked up to the island it was a forest of weeds,
When we were done there was a clear path and a trail where folks could now walk on to the island and completely around.

We stood back and looked humbly at what we had accomplished.
The youth felt proud of what they had been able to do.

And the man who worked for the park said to us, this never would have been done, this quickly or this soon if we all had not volunteered to be here.

And this kind of service happened all over the city of New Orleans for 3 full days. As a matter of fact we found out that what the 38,000 youth who attended the gathering accomplished in service projects in 3 days would have taken the city of New Orleans another 3-4 years to accomplish.

People who are on the verge of hope need to find Jesus...
And I am here to tell you I saw Jesus in New Orleans last week.
I saw him in the face of every youth and adult who I traveled with,
I saw him in the sweat and hard work of those youth who I stood shoulder to shoulder with...
I saw him in the face of the people of New Orleans who over and over again thanked us for being there.
I saw him in the smiles of the Park workers who couldn't believe how quickly our projects got done.
I saw Jesus in the hearts and voices of all 38,000 people who attended that gathering.
And I see Jesus in every one of you who prayed, supported and encouraged our youth to go to this event.

When we are searching for Jesus sometimes we find him in the last place we would expect.
 Sometimes he is in the hand that holds ours when we are hurting
 Sometimes he is in the voice of the one who calls us just to say hello
 Sometimes he is in the eyes of the one who tells us they love us
 And sometimes, as that little girl Emma knew,
 He is in the face of the homeless man who stands alone on the city street corner.
 We search for Jesus every single day and sometimes we need to be open to the fact that he may
 be standing right in front of us.
 Offering us his very self...
 His very body...

Jesus told the crowd who came seeking him that they needed the bread that endured unto eternal
 life. They said to him, "Sir . . . give us this bread."

Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who
 believes in me will never be thirsty."

Is there an emptiness in your life today?
 Have you come in search of Jesus?

Well welcome to this place where I see Jesus each and every day in your faces and in your
 smiles .

Welcome and see Jesus in the face of the person sitting next to you.
 See Jesus in the embrace of the one who shares the Peace of God with you.
 Taste Jesus in the bread and wine at the table.
 See Jesus in the voices of those who will join you in singing today.

And then... take Jesus out from this place and into the world and show others how the Jesus they
 so desperately seek...

The one they are searching for and asking for...
 Show them Jesus in your actions,
 In your prayers,
 In your very presence.

Give those who have no hope the comfort they are seeking by being Christ's hands and feet in
 their lives.

Offer them a glimpse of Jesus.
 Amen

**May the peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and your
 minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen**