

MERIDIAN STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**My Summer With Jesus: Hunger Pains**

Luke 3:23

Nielson Media Research has found that half a million people aged 55 and over have adult children living with them. This represents an increase of over 50,000 during the last two years. My son Connor and I have a standing joke that when he turns 18 I'm putting his luggage in the driveway. We laugh and trade barbs back and forth. It's our way of affirming that given his circumstances our home is his home for as long as he wants. But there are many parents with adult children living at home (permanently it seems) who inwardly hold the hope that they will sooner rather than later strike out on their own. A recent movie, a romantic comedy starring Sarah Jessica Parker and Mathew McConaughey named Failure to Launch, highlighted this dilemma with a storyline of parents hiring a beautiful young women to convince their son to move out of the house.

This came to mind while reading today's scripture passage mentioning that Jesus "*was about thirty years old when he began his work.*" In his time as in ours being an adult living at home in his parent's house was the exception rather than the rule. In my mind's eye I can see Mary being understanding and patient, trusting that the day will come when her son will make his mark. But Joseph could have been the impatient father pressing his son to make a decision. "What's it going to be? Are you going to become a carpenter or an evangelist? It's time to get on and move on."

These are just mind games I've played while reading the Gospel of Luke. That Gospel was one of my beach books during summer vacation and this time around it was read from the standpoint of considering the element of the human in Jesus rather than the element of the divine. For some people the way to Christ is best paved by seeing how human, how like us he was, what everyday issues he faced in the day to day business of living that mirrors our own. And from that perspective, I've come up with a series of five stories or episodes in his life that when seen from the level of our humanness may have something to say to us and our faith journey.

To give a quick recap of the opening chapters of Luke's Gospel we get to follow the drama of Jesus' cousin John the Baptist, then get a description of Christ's birth and childhood, finally concluding with a long genealogy of his bloodline going all the way back to Adam. It isn't until chapter four that we get the first description of what Jesus does as an adult venturing out on his own. What he encountered may be surprisingly similar to what we've experienced along the way.

Our lectionary lesson described what that first event was. Jesus goes out into the desert. Before making a radical change in life, before assuming a new responsibility, before making a final decision about the direction he will take, the desert becomes his place to hash everything out. Apparently there are some things he needs to come to terms with

or lay to rest. We are told *"He ate nothing during those days,"* and that the devil playing off his hunger said, *"Since you're God's Son, command this stone to turn into a loaf of bread"* Jesus responds by saying, *"It takes more than bread to really live."*

And isn't that true? We are all fortunate to have choices that go beyond what has been considered the sustaining source of nourishment for most of recorded history...bread. For our fourth of July barbeque we weren't fretting over whether there would be food to put on the table, we were faced with the decision of chicken, steak, or ribs on the grill and what kind of sauce to use. For us and our appetites it's never been about sustaining, it's been about savoring, flavoring, and embellishing.

As Jesus is contemplating his life direction he knows that he is blessed with an opportunity to do more than get involved with what will only sustain, he has the luxury of pursuing what will flavor life for he knows it takes more than bread to really live...really live. He isn't going to let the devil or inner demons convince him to settle for what will do nothing more than sustain or allow him to get by. In other words he doesn't succumb to the temptation to be satisfied with something less.

And that can be similar to our inner struggle as well when we have our own "in the desert moments." Will we take what will do nothing more than sustain or will we take the stance that believes we are capable of more and have within reach the resources to secure what will allow us to do more.

This is why I think the devil or those inner demons pursued Jesus with the second temptation or the issue of needing to be put to rest. With all the kingdoms of the world displayed before him Jesus is told, *"They're yours in their entire splendor to serve your pleasure. Worship me and they are yours."* If we believe we can do more, then there is an issue with how we will manage our power. Will we use it for good or ill...for building God's kingdom or our own? The desire for power is an insidious hunger.

I was saddened to learn yesterday that Jim Morris will step down in April as executive director of the World Food Program. He is someone who has definitely learned how to overcome the wrong kind of hungers while addressing the right. That hunger for power was certainly channeled in the proper direction. This home grown Hoosier and Indianapolis native has been head of the largest food aid organization in the world since 2002, responding to the needs of millions of people in dozens of countries. In terms of child hunger Morris has said, *"I will never be able to get these thoughts off my mind."* Even before his tenure at the WFP Morris was leading great institutions like the Lilly Endowment with resources to do great and worthy things.

An editorial in the Indianapolis Star ended with these words; *"He deserves thanks from the world, and this city. Well done, faithful servant."* In comparison we might ask, "What can little-old-me do?" But the point of the example set by Morris isn't the place but the person. It was his little-old-me attitude that enabled him to still do great things. People will always respond to that kind of genuineness. In his desert reflection Jesus came to

terms with how he would use his talents and for whom. He suppressed his hunger to put himself first and nourished the world as a result. Like Jesus and Morris so can we.

The last temptation or inner demon Jesus faced follows from the first two. If we believe we are capable of more and then add a little hunger for power, the next appetite that the Bible story identifies needing to be satisfied or suppressed is the feeling of invincibility and immortality...the thought that we are somehow excluded from the world's pain and trouble...the thought that a guardian angel is working to keep us from all harm and misfortune. A credit card company is currently running an advertisement showing a lax guardian angel with his charge. He gets sun burnt, hit in the head with a flying newspaper, scorched by scalding coffee, and stung by jellyfish...you know, the kind of things any responsible guardian angel would protect us from. To Jesus the devil or those inner demons after taking him to the top of the Temple says, *"If you are the Son of God, jump. It's written, isn't it, that he has placed you in the care of angels to protect you; they will catch you; you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone."* But he doesn't succumb and neither should we.

Maybe this temptation is stronger when we are younger, twenty or thirty and about to start our work. As we grow older we certainly come to realize that we aren't invincible after all and that what has happened to us has touched every other person who has ever lived on this planet.

In our current endeavor or ones we're considering when we "get to work" the hungers Jesus encountered may very well be ones we experience as well. Will we settle for what will sustain or go for more? How will we manage the hunger for power? Will we manage the temptation to think we are among the elite and the special? Jesus the man managed to keep them all in perspective and we are told he *"returned to Galilee determined and nourished by the Spirit."*

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