

Sunday August 22, 2021

Scriptural Lesson: 1 Kings 8: 1,6,10-11, 22-30, 41-43

Sermon Series: Holy Momentum Part 1

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

We are beginning a new sermon series entitled Holy Momentum.

- So just a reminder, the idea behind this sermon series is that now that we have spent a considerable amount of time talking about holy movement; I.e. moving out of our comfort zones, or moving out of our boxes/bubbles; into a place of intentional reconciling work; now we are going to spend some time on naming what this looks like in detail.
- So my preaching hope and goal, is to begin laying down a foundation for how you and I might begin the process of building momentum,

keeping our momentum and sustaining our momentum for the work that lies ahead.

- And so just to reiterate from last week, to ensure that you and I are on the same page as far as what I mean by Holy Momentum; momentum defined is a product of the mass of a particle and its velocity.
- Momentum is a vector quantity; meaning it has both magnitude and direction.
- Isaac Newton's second law of motion states that the time rate of change of momentum is equal to the force acting on the particle.
- So when I am using the term Holy Momentum, what I am essentially trying to plant within all of us, is a mustard seed of increasing forward motion.
- So last week we spent some time in talking about how to build momentum, using the story

of Solomon; who is now taking the reigns of his father David's leadership; with the task of leading Israel;

- I named from Solomon's story, that how you and I begin to build momentum, is that it starts essentially with our mindset;
- For when you and I step out of our boxes, bubbles or comfort zones, this is a very scary thing to do;
- Furthermore, what typically determines our next steps and how firm they are when our feet hits the ground, is what is going on in our mind;
- For typically if we are fearful of what lies ahead, our steps may be tentative...
- If we feel unclear of what lies ahead, our steps may be a little shaky...
- For Solomon, he had a lot of aspirations to be successful in his leadership;

- He was also determined to do just as good as a job if not better than his dad;
- As a side note to the parents and parent figures; this is not a bad thing for our children to want to strive to do better in my eyes;
- For part of parenting is to teach our children to want better, to strive to do better and not make the same mistake that we might have done;
- Hence the old adage, “do as I say...not as I do..” Hello Somebody!
- So this is what I am seeing going on with Solomon, who was a skillful and ambitious leader, who recognized that humility would serve him greater than being arrogant or prideful in his leadership;
- And so how Solomon began to build his momentum started with his mindset;

- And through Solomon's actions, he teaches us that if you and I wish to get our head in the game the right way...
- If you and I wish to have a firm and clear direction on how to move forward;
- Then it starts with opening up a conversation with the Great Almighty, who will show us how to navigate in the work that lies ahead..
- And so that is what Solomon does;
- In my biblical imagination, Solomon goes into his prayer closet and he opens up a conversation with God, where he could have asked God for anything in the world; fame, success, political power and more;
- What Solomon asks for instead was for a Spirit of discernment....Solomon asks for wisdom;
- A prayer request that moved the Holy One so much so, that God said, not only will I grant you

that, but I will also grant you the desires of your heart; strong leadership, political favor and more!

- Which then allowed Solomon to begin to move outside of his comfort zone, with a sense of purpose and direction and dare I say even confidence.
- Fast-forwarding to our scriptural lesson this week, if you have followed these sermon series from earlier, many should take note that now the priests are carrying the Ark of God again;
- Proving that Solomon is already leading a little more wiser than his daddy, who thought it would be best to put the Ark of God on a new cart which would be unstable; and then in a shelter that God never asked David to build;

- For we also learn as we journeyed with David weeks ago in his conversation with God, by way of the prophet Nathan; that God preferred to be in the moving tabernacle, so that the Ark of God could always be with the people;
- So the first celebration of Solomon that I am giving him a metaphorical high five on, is that his discernment process, led him to make sure that the Ark of God was with him and the priests and carried by the people again.
- Which helps me then to move into my second goal that I am ready to dive into; and that is what it looks like after we build the momentum; our main focus will be on **keeping the momentum** in our work.
- So part of how you and I begin to keep the momentum, is by staying connected with God in

prayer; hence what we are witnessing unfold in our passage of scripture right now.

- So the work that lied ahead for Solomon was to establish a temple for the people, to be able to pray, worship and seek forgiveness from God for their sins.
- So Solomon's dedicatory prayer, which many scholars have agreed was prepared beforehand, with careful thought, begins with thanksgiving to God for God's faithfulness toward David.
- Next, the emphasis falls upon the faithful obedience of Israel.
- Then follows supplication for the temple, that it might fulfill the purpose for which it was built, namely, that here people may pray and God may forgive.

- **The other part of how I see keeping the momentum unfolds, that I believe is uncanny for us and the future of the Church, resides in an acknowledgement that Solomon makes towards the end of our lesson today;**
- Solomon in verse 41 as he is wrapping up his prayer, says something pretty profound that will inform the future of our church and many other churches;
- Solomon says, vs 41-“Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name...

42 --for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm--when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house,

43 then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that

all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.

- You see Church as I attempt to unpack the revelation that I am seeing in these few verses; I would like to begin with an old adage that my husband always says to me, as I transition this story to our story; a collective story where first United Methodist Church of Lincoln NE strives to be a community centered, focused and driven community seeking to share God's affirming love to everyone.
- We are a Reconciling Congregation whose story reflects a statement of diversity and love for all and to be inclusive to all persons regardless of education, ability, economic status, gender, race, ethnic group, age or sexual orientation;

- But the saying that my husband would always tell me, as it pertains to the leadership that I am striving to plant a mustard seed of reconciling love in; **Is build it and they will come....**
- A little fun fact about this phrase that you may be interested in hearing, is that the phrase “build it and they will come; according to Wikipedia says it's a misquote from the 1989 movie Field of Dreams. It says the actual words are from a voice in the head of hero Ray Kinsella; a novelist who wrote Shoeless Joe, which was adapted into the movie “Field of Dreams; which told him several times, **“If you build it, he will come.”**¹
- So what is going on in Solomon’s leadership, that I think really informs the future of our church, is this acknowledgment that once this

temple is built in all of its glory, others will come and guess what....**they will not all be Israelites...**

- The text calls the “others” foreigners; which sadly in our world today has become a political/emotional trigger for a lot of us;
- Especially with the very disheartening pictures of the people in Afghanistan, climbing onto the plane as our American troops and any other groups that had any affiliation with the US mission in Afghanistan makes their way home;
- A situation and a history that is so complex, that I am still trying to make heads or tails of it all;
- For this would require years of Middle Eastern studies; studies that I am not versed in; so hear me clearly, this is not me creating political division.

- However, what I can name, is the grief and terror that is gripping my heart, at the thought of the oppression that the women and children in particular, are enduring and will have to endure;
- My heart is disturbed, at how many lives will sadly be at risk and tragically killed, for the freedom that many of us here in the US get to have;
- So this world event is a very unfortunate situation where an answer is not easily detectable, nor fault I can confidently name.
- Getting back to our text though, Solomon expresses an awareness that foreigners will most likely come into this temple;
- Foreigners in the biblical sense, refers to anybody who was from another ethnic group but had chosen to live with the Jews in Israel — no

matter what category they might represent in today's terms.

- And so at this level of awareness, Solomon not only prays for the foreigners...but even welcomes them to dwell in the temple with them.
- All because Solomon's leadership in my eyes, is embodying this same concept...**build it and they will come.**
- Now Church if you are still with me....for it's time to start connecting the dots here;
- When the First United Methodist Church of Lincoln NE, worked especially hard in becoming a Reconciling community in the 80s and then under my leadership, we then invested in our sign on our lawn that says "All Are Welcome Here" with the rainbow flower;

- But even prior to this move, all of our peacemaking workshops and small groups and our social justice emphasis and the appointment of an African American male clergy years ago and now you have this youngish African American female woman with a loud booming voice and wardrobe to match; partnered with a young Associate Pastor with tattoos and enough energy that makes me tired even thinking about her!
- I can safely name and claim that like Solomon, we have built a sanctuary, that extends itself out to our northeast neighborhood of Lincoln NE;
- A blue-collar, lower income neighborhood rich with diversity and more;
- **We have built** an on-line presence with inclusive messages week to week...

- **We have built** a worship space that says, “All are Welcome...” through our worship, in our small groups, in our staff and more.
- **As a result, we are beginning to experience** the fruits of all of our labor that started 30 years ago or more....
- And look at us now...if we are not becoming the epitome of the adage, “**build it and they will come....**”; I don’t know what could be a better example of this statement coming to life...
- For we Church are beginning to look like the neighborhood that surrounds us;
- We are literally becoming that rainbow out on our lawn;
- **A rainbow that symbolizes** LGBTQ pride and safety,
- **A rainbow that symbolizes** racial harmony,

- **A rainbow that symbolizes** different hues and backgrounds and belief systems and socioeconomic status and more.
- **A rainbow where** sometimes the colors may fade into one another;
- **A Rainbow where sometimes** it may feel as if the colors may even be competing at times;
- **A Rainbow that can mean** many different things to many different people...
- **A rainbow that still** may be a place that all of us are not quite sure how to take in all of this brilliance and magnificence;
- But Solomon's prayer teaches us in my opinion how you and I really keep the momentum in this work of reconciliation;
- Not only do we pray for the "foreigners..." that will come...

- We must create a space where as we continue building this temple together;
- We let all who come know, that they are welcome to dwell in this space....
- **Build it and they will come....**
- Let the Church say Amen!

Sunday August 22, 2021

First Lesson: 1 Kings 8: 1,6,10-11, 22-30, 41-43

Gospel Lesson: John 6: 56-69

Sermon Series: Holy Momentum Part 2

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- I learned from Solomon's story, that how you and I begin to build momentum, is that it starts essentially with our mindset.
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- For Solomon, he had a lot of aspirations to be successful in his leadership.
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- But Solomon's prayer teaches us in my opinion, how you and I really keep the momentum in this work of reconciliation.
- Not only do we pray for the "foreigners..." that will come,
- We must create a space where as we continue building this temple together;
- We let all who come, know that they are welcome to dwell in this space.

- **And where our gospel comes into play; I am inviting us to zone in on the latter part of this gospel for just a moment;**
- The disciples other than the twelve were literally offended by all of the flesh and blood talk;
- For Jesus said, **My flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed (v. 55). He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life (v. 54).**
- Some of the disciples were grossed out by this teaching;
- Others turned away, for they couldn't stomach the thought of what Jesus was asking of them;
- Some of his disciples were offended altogether;
- Furthermore, to this day there is disagreement across the Lord's Table, as far as what is really happening with the elements of the Supper.
- Does the bread literally become Jesus's body?

- Does the cup literally become Jesus's blood?
- Is this what turned the disciples off from Jesus message?
- Is this why some of them decided that they could follow Him no more?
- In the Methodist tradition, the elements of the Lord's Supper, that is similar to what is being named in this passage, is symbolic of Jesus love and grace for all people.
- So applying this level of understanding to this gospel; that what Jesus is naming; is that **all** are invited to have eternal life,
- I wonder, if what could have made some of the disciples uncomfortable, was that metaphorically speaking; **the rainbow was including in this declaration of all** that Jesus was making.
- Verse 67 of our gospel leaves us all with a sobering and risky question that Jesus asks to the original

12 disciples who remained after the others had left;
a sobering question that will inform if we are still
going **to keep our momentum** or will our progress
be stalled;

- Jesus asked them "Do you also wish to go away?"
- The 12 disciples remained....
- The prayer is that we will still remain in this very
difficult work...
- But I will leave us all with this question to
continue to explore;
- When the rainbow shows up..... do you also
wish to go away?
- Let the Church Say Amen.