

Youth Sunday: Where the Wild Things Are

April 23, 2017

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Well, good morning! I am so glad you've joined us for Youth Sunday at Messiah Church. My name is Sami Tierney, and I'm the Director of Youth and Family Ministries here. I work with our middle school and high school youth – youth groups, Sunday school, Confirmation, and summer missions opportunities like STORM Camp and the high school mission trip.

When Pastor Steve first asked me to put together a Youth Sunday, I was quick to agree... and then wondered just what I'd gotten myself into.

What you've seen today – and what's coming in the message here, all came from ideas from the youth. They signed up to serve in the areas they're serving today – as greeters, ushers, and coffee hour hosts (and they decided we'd have cake for breakfast). They chose the music, they're leading the worship. They wanted to see the ATM rapped, they wanted to include video games, they wanted to do skits – and they chose the theme for the message: Animals of the Bible. And they voted on the title for today's sermon, "Where the Wild Things Are"

In an effort to involve more youth, and do skits, like they wanted to – we're presenting five different scripture stories through these video skits about Animals of the Bible. Between the videos, Luke and I will share some teaching about what ties these stories together. They're really stories of God's relationship with all living things – animals and humans alike – from broken trust to establishing covenants – we see it all in the stories being told today.

So, without further introduction –
LET THE WILD RUMPUS START!

VIDEO 1: THE SERPENT

Today's first story is one of the most notorious animals in the Bible: The Serpent, Adam, and Eve. The serpent is a cunning character, inviting Eve into all knowledge and understanding of Good and Evil. With one bite from the fruit from the tree, Eve and Adam can be like God, knowing Good and Evil.

The chance to be like God... what an opportunity... why wouldn't Eve take a bite of that beautiful thing dangled before her...?

And with that, a promise between God and man was broken. Because Eve was tempted, because the serpent made her an offer she couldn't refuse – God's relationship with man was forever changed.

Because of this, man understood sin and disobedience to God. And we get to a point where God decides to wipe out all of creation.

Genesis 6:5-8 says

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with

them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Then we get to the Sunday School story of animals two-by-two on the ark – as we do so often in life, we breeze past the pain and destruction and desolation and loneliness that happens before the beautiful moment of the rainbow.

VIDEO 2: THE DOVE

And yet, in that beautiful moment of the rainbow, God establishes a covenant with his people – and all living things. This is the first covenant God establishes with his creation. And the dove becomes a symbol of peace – and is present when God is amidst his people, in the New Testament, the dove is the embodiment of the Holy Spirit.

The Dove is a huge thing for me – it represents hope. When I don’t have anything – and when I look at my own story – knowing I’m part of God’s story, part of God’s plan – it’s so important to me to cluing to this hope. So, the dove as a symbol of that is really meaningful to me personally.

Like Noah’s trust of God’s plan – through destruction and loss – we get, in this story, a promise from God and a hope to cling to.

God continues to develop his relationship with his people – sending prophets to voice his message and desire for Goodness and right living. People continue to disregard and disobey God’ commands.

VIDEO 3: THE WHALE

God is clearly concerned about his people, and since he promised to not destroy all of creation again, he’s got to send a messenger on his behalf. Except, his messenger doesn’t want the responsibility. So, he bolts.

I relate to Jonah. Sometimes, I don’t want the responsibility of caring for God’s people. Sharing with them a better way of living. Helping them orient their minds and hearts toward God...

So Jonah’s all like “peace out” and God’s all like, “oh no you didn’t” and then he’s thrown into the sea and swallowed by a whale. Or big fish. Or whatever. It’s disgusting. The smell in there alone... I can’t even imagine.

Jonah’s story is basically the story of the Israelites – God’s chosen people: Disobey God – Repent – God Forgives – Repeat.

It’s also our story, isn’t it? We fall short of God’s vision and design for our lives, we run away from his commandments, we repent, God forgives, and we do it all again. All day. Every day. We aspire to holiness, but we fall short. And God is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love” (Jonah 4:2)

Jonah is responsible for the conversion of heart – and action – of the people of Nineveh. All because he was given time – in the belly of the whale – to think, repent, and trust in God’s design.

We fast-forward a few hundred years to the story of Jesus – the new covenant between God and his people. A story marked by a dove and divine pronouncement. The one who was tested by the serpent in the desert and prevailed. The one who turned the hearts of many to God.

At this point in the story, Jesus has been crucified and resurrected – the disciples have gone back to what they knew how to do before Jesus turned their worlds upside down – fishing.

VIDEO 4: THE FISH

Fish have been part of the story of Jesus and his followers from the start. Jesus finds this ragtag group of fishermen –and calls them to be his disciples and they're like **shrug** "Yeah, okay."

But after all this mess goes down and Jesus is killed and then the body is missing, these guys return to what they know in a life before Jesus.

We do this too. When we're running, like Jonah did, we go back to a life we knew before Jesus turned everything upside down. We go back to what we know, back to what's familiar.

So, Jesus shows up in a way that's familiar. We've literally seen this exchange before – at the beginning of Luke's Gospel. In *that* story, Jesus calls the disciples and informs them that they will be fishers of men. In *this* story, the disciples have been walking with Jesus for three years, have seen miracles (also involving fish... and people being raised from the dead...) and here they've gone back to being fishermen... of...fish.

What must've they felt when they realized what was happening? What do we feel when we realize what's happening? When we see Christ before us – calling us to himself?

VIDEO 5: THE SHEEP

And here, we become part of the story – with Jesus as the good shepherd, we are his sheep. We are his flock. He knows each of us, we are called by name. We are His.

We know this story as the one where Jesus reinstates Peter, asking him three times of his Love, echoing Peter's three denials.

But this is also the part where we – disciples here today – see ourselves in the story. Jesus' commandment to his disciples is to feed and care for his sheep. To be attentive to the needs of the flock. To regard each other as followers of Christ.

Wheewh. That's quite a story. From disobedience and broken promises to repentance and new covenants – these stories of animals of the Bible really illustrate some major plot points in the story of God and God's people. Always turning us to himself.

Luke: Sami, why'd we call this "Where the Wild Things Are"... I mean, I know it describes our youth group, but ...

Sami: We really just borrowed the title for this message with no regard to the story, but the more I've developed it, the truer it seems to form. The story *Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak follows this pattern of rebellion, running away, repentance and forgiveness – as Max fights with his mother and is sent to bed without supper, so he runs away to tame and become king of all the Wild Things. They play and raise a ruckus, which is brought to an end by Max's

smelling of something familiar, his dinner waiting for him back home. We disobey, raise a ruckus, repent, and are forgiven.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of April 23, 2017

Weekly Prayer: Lord of all creation, you have given us this day of beauty, full of your handiwork. Open our eyes wide to see your Spirit's artistry in all that happens. Open our hearts to the surprising ways of your creative goodness. Then grant us grace to reflect your glory, through the transforming power of Christ, who beckons us into life abundant. Amen.

Monday, April 24

Scripture: Genesis 3:1-13; 1 Corinthians 10:13

Now the serpent was craftier than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, God will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Observation: Adam and Eve and the Serpent. This is one of the most notorious stories in the Bible. The serpent is a cunning character, inviting Eve into all knowledge and understanding of Good and Evil. With one bite from the fruit from the tree, Eve and Adam can be like God, knowing Good and Evil. The chance to be like God. What an opportunity! Why wouldn't Eve take a bite of that beautiful thing dangled before her? And with that, a promise between God and man was broken. Because Eve was tempted, because the serpent made her an offer she couldn't refuse, God's relationship with humankind was forever changed.

Application: Every day we are tempted. So, how can we resist temptation? First we must realize that being tempted is not a sin. We have not sinned until we give in to that temptation. In order to resist temptation we must pray for the wisdom to recognize the temptation and the strength to resist it. Sometimes we have to run, literally, in the opposite direction to escape it.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I know that everyone is tempted every day. I pray for the wisdom to recognize the people and situations that get me into trouble. Help me to run from what I know is wrong and to surround myself with people who love you so that they will encourage me to do what is pleasing to you. Amen.

Tuesday, April 25

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:22

Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Observation: These are some of the final words of instruction and encouragement that Paul wrote to his beloved brother in Christ, Timothy. He was warning him to flee anything that produced evil thoughts. Sometimes running away can be seen as a cowardly act but wise people realize that removing themselves physically from temptation can sometimes be the most courageous, and challenging, act of all.

Application: Do you have a recurring temptation that is difficult to resist? Look for ways to remove yourself from that situation.

Prayer: Lord, I want to live a life that reflects your love in all that I do. Help me to pursue your righteousness, faith, love and peace. Most importantly, create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me. Amen.

Wednesday, April 26

Scripture: Genesis 9:8-17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth." So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

Observation: In that beautiful moment of the rainbow, God established a covenant with his people and all living things. The dove became a symbol of peace and is present when God is amidst God's people. We see it again in the New Testament. The dove is the embodiment of the Holy Spirit. God continues to develop his relationship with people sending prophets to voice his message and desire for goodness and right living.

Application: Just as God instructed, for many years Noah built a huge boat on dry land. He was faithful, patient and obedient and yet mocked and ridiculed by his peers but he was totally committed! Noah obeyed and God was faithful. What life lesson can we learn from Noah? God does not promise us a carefree life but God does promise to care for us in spite of and in the midst of our troubles. What do you do when trouble presents itself? Is your first response to trust God?

Prayer: Dear God, help me to trust you always, not just when times are good but also in times of disappointments, worry and doubt. Today, I recommit my life to you. Make me the person you want me to be so that others may come to know your grace, power and love. Amen.

Thursday, April 27

Scripture: Jonah 1:1, 3:1

The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah ran away from the Lord.

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh.

Observation: God called the prophet Jonah to take the gospel to the cruelest society known to humankind and Israel's most dreaded enemy, Assyria. When he heard this, he ran in the opposite direction, right into the belly of a whale, where he had time to think, repent and eventually obey. Jonah's story is a profound illustration of God's mercy and grace. As you read the story of Jonah, can you see the full picture of God's love and compassion and realize that no one (Jonah or the people of Assyria) is beyond redemption?

Application: We are not called to limit our energies and attention on people who look and act like us. God wants us to proclaim the message of love and salvation to the entire world. Are there new people to whom God may be calling you to share the good news and saving message of a new life in Jesus Christ?

Prayer: Today, we pray part of Jonah's prayer of thanksgiving. Dear Lord, when my life is ebbing away, I will remember you and my prayer will rise to you. Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that should be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord. Amen.

Friday, April 28

Scripture: John 21:1-12, Matthew 11:28

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you've just caught." Simon Peter got up and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three of them. Yet the net hadn't torn, even with so many fish. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples could bring themselves to ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.

Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest.

Observation: With Jesus crucified and resurrected, the disciples were confused and scared so they returned to something familiar, something comfortable they knew how to do before Jesus turned their worlds upside down – fishing. If we're honest, just like the disciples and Jonah, when we're running scared we do this too. We go back to a life we knew before Jesus. We go back to the familiar. Yet, Jesus shows up in ways that are familiar. What must the disciples have felt when they realized what was happening? What do we feel when we realize what's happening, Christ showing up before us, in a comfortable and familiar way calling us to him?

Application: Jesus is present in our lives at all times but often our energies and worries direct our attention elsewhere and we don't see Jesus. When we try to carry our burdens alone, they are heavy. When times are hard, let us remember that Jesus said, "Come to me all who are heavy with burden and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Prayer: Lord God, how is it that you reveal yourself to the simple and not to the wise? In my ignorance and haste, be my wisdom. In my blindness, be my vision. In my weakness, be my strength. In my agitation, be my peace. Lift my burden, Lord. Teach me your humility and humbleness of heart and give rest to my soul. Amen.

Saturday, April 29

Scripture: John 21:15-19

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Observation: Before his crucifixion, Peter denied Jesus three times. Here, three times, Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to remove the cloud of doubt surrounding his love for Jesus. Through this, Peter's occupation was changed from fisherman to evangelist once and for all. And here is also the part of the story where we can see ourselves in the story. Jesus' commandment to his disciples is to feed and care for his sheep, to be attentive to the needs of the flock, to regard each other as followers of Christ.

Application: At times, we might be uncertain and even fearful of our future but what if we knew God was in control? How differently would we live our lives if we allowed ourselves to live with full abandon knowing God is in control?

Prayer: Lord, I am reminded that my worship to you should flow into service to others. I do love you and delight to share this love in prayer and song. But you have said: if you love me, feed your sheep. So, today I worship you with all my heart, soul, mind and strength and may I also love those whom you love. Let my love for you spillover in service to others. Amen.