

Can we go back to the Bread of Life?

The scriptures for the fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost were very difficult for me this week and I really did not know which direction that I wanted to go and more importantly what I thought that you, the congregation needed to hear.

The daily lectionary readings were what helped me decide where I was going to land. In case you are unaware or forget, I do the daily readings for the church and upload them to our YouTube Channel. The Monday – Wednesday readings reflect on what we leaned into on Sunday and then Thursday – Saturday prepares us for Sunday.

Thus, the last three days, I have been wrestling with the story of Moses in Exodus 32 – 34 and that story lays the foundation of what we hear about today. Moses was unhappy with the direction that the people were going and he had let his anger out on the people. So, the stage has been set for the sermon that we heard in the First Reading.

At times, when I am examining scripture, I like to look for word pairings and reoccurrences and we have that in Deuteronomy chapter four. There are two words that are paired up in this passage. Those two words are Israel and hear. These two words then are paired up four other times in the book of Deuteronomy. So, we must pay attention to the words, the themes that are developed out of them and the meanings behind them.

Then, at times, we can easily blitz through a reading. When we blitz through them, we do not catch the themes and maybe the deeper meanings of the words that we “hear” with the English language. By chance, did you see what I did on that last sentence? Anyways, hear includes emotion and a decision to act. When we take a look at the sermon that Moses is giving and them listening in; the assumption is that the teaching will evoke action. The action is “do them”. The action that they do then shapes their group identity. It is who makes them – them. I think that we, at Bay View, are still shaping our identity and the direction that we can choose to go is limitless.

As I “mauled” on an action item, not specifically for Bay View, but the text in general, I was drawn to the action that is found in our second reading. In our second reading, we heard James sharing the following:

Be Quick to Listen, Slow to Speak and Slow to Anger. Eugene Peterson puts a small spin on it in his translation and translates it as the following:

*Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear.*

In reality, there is a beautiful 3-point sermon in those nine words and three action steps. But, before I take us into James, for a brief moment, there is still some items that I want us to lean into from the Deuteronomy passage that I think is important for us to understand and implement here at Bay View Lutheran Church.

The passage that we just heard is anticipating the words that are going to come in chapter six. I hope the words of chapter six are familiar to you; listen to them deeply.

*3 Listen obediently, Israel. Do what you're told so that you'll have a good life, a life of abundance and bounty, just as God promised, in a land abounding in milk and honey.*

*4 Attention, Israel! God, our God! God the one and only!*

*5 Love God, your God, with your whole heart: love him with all that's in you, love him with all you've got!*

*6-9 Write these commandments that I've given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder; inscribe them on the doorposts of your homes and on your city gates.*

I think the Deuteronomy passage ended up grabbing me the most this week because there are two events that are occurring in my life.

The first is that I am in the Moses Project and the second is that children and youth ministries are about to kick up in high gear in the next few weeks and I am excited about the possibilities that lay ahead of us.

In the Moses project, one of my new book assignments for this next module is called: *"In My Grandmother's House: Black Women, Faith, and the Stories We Inherit"*

I want to share the full description of the book with you. One, I think that you will find it fascinating and maybe want to grab it and secondly; it ties in directly with Deuteronomy 6 where we see the plea to share the story with everyone; especially our families.

*The church mothers who raised Yolanda Pierce, dean of Howard University School of Divinity, were busily focused on her survival. In a world hostile to Black women's bodies and spirits, they had to be. Born on a former cotton plantation and having fled the terrors of the South, Pierce's grandmother raised her in the faith inherited from those who were enslaved. Now, in the pages of In My Grandmother's House, Pierce reckons with that tradition, building an everyday womanist theology rooted in liberating scriptures, experiences in the Black church, and truths from Black women's lives. Pierce tells stories that center the experiences of those living on the underside of history, teasing out the tensions of race, spirituality, trauma, freedom, resistance, and memory.*

*A grandmother's theology carries wisdom strong enough for future generations. The Divine has been showing up at the kitchen tables of Black women for a long time. It's time to get to know that God.*

The second is our children and youth ministry at the church. In Deuteronomy and in Yolanda's book; we see the importance of story-telling and passing on those stories to the next generation.

Friends, we have a rich history at Bay View. The future can be extremely bright. Moses has laid out a pathway for humans to flourish in the midst of hazards and risks.