

“As in the days of old, God lead God’s people”

Isaiah 63: 7-14

This Sunday, we are concluding our Summer Series. Over the last few months, we have taken a look at some stories from Genesis. Through these stories, we have seen how God has continued to work in this world to bring healing and wholeness. By taking a look at a few familiar stories, we have reclaimed how these stories shape us and form us as the people of God. As I said at the beginning of this series, the purpose of looking back at these foundational stories was for us as people of faith to remember that it is hard for us know where we are going if we don’t remember where we have been.

And so, we close our series on Genesis with a text from Isaiah....Yes, you heard me right. Isaiah. Now before everyone starts wondering if I have gone crazy, there is always a method to my madness. I chose this specific text from Isaiah because it is a great summary of our faith story as the people of God.

This piece from Isaiah is part of a wider context that is known as a communal lament. The nation of Israel has exile on its mind. This lament was written during a dark and troubled part of Israelite’s history. And in the midst of this darkness, in the midst of this trouble, there was one question that kept coming to everyone’s mind: “Where was God?” Where was God while their world was

falling apart? Where was God when it seemed like everything was lost? Where was God?

The answer to this question could be found in Israel's stories of their faith. The answer to this question of Where was God can also be found in the stories of our own faith journey as well. God was there, just like in the days of old, leading God's people, guiding God's people. God had been there in the past for God's people and once again, God would be there again for the people of God. Just like in the days of old.

Here in this time when the people were worrying about the exile, when they were worrying about what the future would hold for them, they soon began to remember. They remembered the days of old. They remembered God's promises. Story after story, filled their mind. Story after story filled their hearts. They remembered the promises of God. They remembered that God has always lead God's people.

Even while the question of where was God still on their lips, the people remembered that the same God who saved their ancestors in the past, the same God who brought their ancestors to the promise land, was the same God who remained faithful, even when the people did not. Their God was the same God who saved God's people in the past and was capable of saving them again this time. Just like in the days of old, God would still lead God's people. No matter how dark it may

seem, no matter how troubled they may be, God would always be there for the people of God.

Think back to all the stories we lifted up and talked about this summer:

Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph.... At the heart of each and every one of these stories is the experience, is the knowledge, is the understanding regarding God's continued faithfulness to the people of God. Time and time again, even when humankind breaks the covenantal relationship, God remains faithful to God's people. God never leaves them alone. God was always there. And God would be there now.

What we learn as we take a look at these stories from the past, as we take a look at these stories from Genesis is that God was not and is not known for God's power. God was not and is not known for God's demands. God was not and is not known for God's perfection.

Just like in the days of old, God was and is still known to us for God's faithfulness. God was and is still remembered for God's steadfast love. This is what the stories of Genesis tell us. This is what the stories of our faith tell us. Every time we read these foundational stories for us as people of faith, we

remember. We remember God working all along to bring healing and wholeness to God's creation. We remember God was always there, leading God's people. Just like in the days of old.

I know I am not telling us anything we don't know already. We've all experienced God's faithfulness. We've all experienced God's love in our lives. We wouldn't be sitting here otherwise.

So what's the big deal? Why do I keep going over it again and again? Week after week? Month after month? Year after year?

I'm sure we are all ready to shout-"We get it! God is faithful. God's steadfast love endures.

But you see, I don't think we do get it. I don't think we fully understand the depths of God's faithfulness, the depths of God's love for us. I don't know if we truly grasp the significance this understanding, this knowledge has on our faith. I don't think we truly understand what it means to be the people that God calls us to be, the people that God created us to be.

Because if we did, this world would be filled with hope and grace rather than filled with stories of people killing each other. Our world would be a place of acceptance and love rather than a place of greed and power. If we truly understood what it meant to be the people of God, named and claimed as God's own beloved,

our world would know to treat all of God's creation with respect and awe rather than seeing it as a commodity to be used and abused.

Here's why I say this. I want everyone to take a look at verse 8. "Surely they are my people, sons who will not deal falsely"

In this verse, God is speaking. With these very words, we get a glimpse into God's own heart. We get a glimpse into God's own intention. We get a glimpse into God's understanding of our relationship together as Creator and creature.

"Surely, they are my people, sons who will not deal falsely"

I have to tell you, that as I read verse 8 this past week and juxtaposed it with all the stories that fill our world, stories of violence and hurt, stories of hate and brokenness, stories of deception and betrayal, as I read verse 8, knowing what all was going on in our world today, my first reaction was, "God, how naïve can you really be? Haven't we as humankind proven to you that we can't be trusted? Haven't we proven to you that we are always going to look out for number one, regardless of who we hurt along the way?"

In reading verse 8 and knowing just what exactly is going on in our world, I just wanted to say, "God, really, really—you entered into a covenantal relationship with us, a relationship that binds us together with you, a relationship based on faithfulness and love—God, you really entered into this agreement, thinking we would not deal falsely with you or with one another? God, Come one! How naïve

can you really be? Surely, you know better than that! You created us! You've been with us from the beginning! God, surely, you know better than that. How could you know us and not expect us to deal falsely with you and with one another? God, what in the world were you thinking?

You see, once again, as I read verse 8, I am reminded of another thing that stood out to me during our summer series. All those stories from Genesis show us just how far humankind would go and did go to deal falsely with one another and with God.

Sure, These stories in Genesis tell us yes of God's faithfulness but they also tell us something else. They tell us that in return for God's faithfulness, since the very beginning of time, all we have given back to God in return for God's faithfulness and steadfast love is rebellion and betrayal. Not once, not twice, but time and time again.

Think back to all the stories we talked about this summer:

Adam and Eve-God gave them everything and they ate the one fruit God told them not to eat.

Noah: God saved Noah and his family and what's one of the first things he does when he gets off the boat? Gets drunk and curses his son.

Abraham: God gives him a promise that he will be the father of many nations and what does Abraham do? He jeopardizes that promise by giving Sarah to another man, not once but twice!

Jacob-Don't even get me started on him. Let's just say his middle names were rebellion and betrayal.

Time and time again, in return for God's faithfulness, all humankind has given back to God is rebellion and betrayal. Sometimes I really do wonder why does God put up with us? Why does God care about us? Why doesn't God just smite us all and start over?

Then I read verses 9: "In all their trouble, God was troubled. And the angel of God's presence saved them. In his love and in his pity, he redeemed them. He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

Ah! That's why! Now I remember. For some reason...thanks be to God, God loves us more than we can imagine. For some reason, even at our worst, God's grace fills our lives. For some reason, God has claimed us and named us as God's own beloved children. For some reason, God has remained faithful to us.

We read these stories and we remember. We remember God's love. We remember God's grace. We remember God's mercy.

That's why we gather for worship. That's why we give thanks to our God. That's why we remember and look forward with hope. We can look forward to a time when all of God's creation can live together in peace and harmony. We can look forward to a time when all of God's creation is reconciled. We tell these stories, our foundational stories of faith and we remember God's promises. We can look forward with hope because of God's faithfulness, because of God's love.

In God's love God lifted us up. God carried us just like God did in the days of old. We remember because of God's faithfulness, we know, we know God still continues to carry us as ones named and claimed as God's own beloved children.

You see that's the foundation of our faith. The whole story of Israel's faith, the whole story of our faith is a story of God's willingness to guide God's people, to lead God's people. Our story is a story of God's willingness to lift up Israel, to lift us up and do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. And God does it all in love. Because that is just the very character, the very nature of our God.

Think about it: Time and time again, even when God sets God's own self up for profound hurt, God remains always faithful. God's steadfast love endures. That

is truly humbling news. That is truly life giving news. To know that we are just that important to God. To know that the healing and reconciling work of the Kingdom of God is just that important to God. To know that because all of creation is just that important to God, God continues to face the hurt, to face the disappoint, to know that God faced the cross because---God is faithful. Because God's steadfast love endures.

Wow! So what do we do with this life changing, this life transforming knowledge?

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Maybe just maybe it is time we realize that God does all this for us so we will remember... and reclaim our identity as beloved children of God in the hopes that we will begin to start treating each other as all created in the image of God.

Maybe just maybe it is time we realize that God does all this, face the hurt, face the disappoint, time after time God faces the brokenness, so that we will

remember...and understand that God will always lead God's people just like in the days of old.

You see, We tell these stories from Genesis, we tell these stories from our own faith journey to remember and be reminded that as God lead God's people, God has never acted alone. God has always acted with and through faithful human beings, working together to bring healing and hope for all creation. God has always called the people of God into partnership so that the work of God's Kingdom may be done.

Just think back to all the stories we talked about:

Adam and Eve-After the Garden, they settled down and had a son named Seth which means "God appointed for me another".

Noah: after the flood, God re-established God's covenant with God's people.

Abraham: With the birth of Isaac, God proved God's faithfulness and began the plan to bless all the nations of the earth through Isaac and Ismael.

Jacob: After wrestling with God, Jacob began a journey of transformation, a journey on which God continued to lead him and guide him.

Jesus Christ-after the cross, when all hope seemed lost, God raised Jesus from the tomb, showing the world that love will always overcome the darkness.

Time and time again, God has stayed faithful to God's people. Time and time again, God's steadfast love has endured. Just like in the days of old, the same holds true today. God is faithful. God's steadfast love endures. God will always guide God's people toward healing and wholeness.

Always, always remember this. And in doing so, may we become the people God created us and calls us to be, a people of love, a people of faith, a people of peace, and and...a people of hope. Thanks be to God! Amen.