

CAPITAL CONNECTIONS

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*“Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, **taken up in glory**.” (1 Tim. 3:16 NRSV)*

We started peeling away the mysterious layers of 1 Timothy 3:16 during Advent. We’ve just passed Ascension Day, May 10, and Pentecost Sunday, May 20, having arrived at the appropriate phrase for this time of year.

Paul says that Jesus was **taken up in glory**. That phrase provides at least three important concepts for us to consider. First is the glory of heaven, second, the commission of the church, and third, the return of Christ.

For forty days, from the morning of the resurrection until the day of Jesus’ ascension to heaven, “...he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs...” (Acts 1:3a NRSV)

Again, this year we’ve been enjoying a perusal of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ. We’ve looked at the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John, and the Book of Acts, each with its interesting contribution to our understanding of the resurrection. These passages also give us insight into our experience of faith, of our own failings and restoration, of the Ordinance of Christian Baptism and of the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ through his Church.

Bart Millard did a great job stirring our heavenly imaginations. *I Can Only Imagine* was the song he used to remind us that heaven is a glorious place, and the struggles of this life pale in comparison. If you haven’t seen *I Can Only Imagine*, you need to.

This world is filled with pain. When the ones who are supposed to love us fail to do so, the pain is nearly unbearable. Bart’s disappointment with his mom and dad is a heart-wrenching story of parental failure, and of God’s never-ending love. His experience of personal pain and personal faith were the genesis for that great song. He says the song “just came to him.” No doubt, suffering in our lives yields some fruit that we could never have imagined.



Because of his suffering, God allowed Bart Millard a glimpse of the glory into which Christ was received “after his suffering.” (Acts 1:3a NRSV) We don’t need to go out of our way to seek suffering, but there’s nothing we can do to avoid it. We’re born into a world of pain. Jesus’ death on the cross was his suffering for us all. He led the way into glory. One day, by faith, we will follow him there.

Between now and then we’re left to live, the good days with the bad, and to affirm what our faith teaches, ““...What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him”—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.” (1 Cor. 2:9-10 NRSV)

Imagining the glory of heaven, we picture a place different than this. If we suffer here, enduring disease, heartbreak, failure, pain and death, there "...the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." (Rev. 21:3-4 NRSV) Imagine that!

Every important doctrine inspires action. We're commissioned to serve. Imagining the glory of heaven encourages us to "fight the good fight." Heavenly hope inspires our hearty advocacy as ambassadors of Christ. That's what the commission of the Church is about.

As a new believer I was elated by my new-found faith. So much so that I said to the friends who'd witnessed to me, "This is wonderful. Why doesn't the Lord just come and take us to heaven now?" Their response was incisive. "There's work to do while we wait for Christ's return."

As I began to pray and read the Bible, I realized they'd told me the truth. Believers aren't saved simply to be extracted from the world. We're saved to serve God here and now. We can't do that on our own, so the Father has given us the Holy Spirit to empower us. The Lord Jesus said, "I will send him (*the Holy Spirit*) to you." (John 16:7b NRSV)

By God's Spirit, we're empowered. What does it mean to be empowered? That's a loaded question in post-modern American culture, but the answer for believers is that we have everything we need to do what God expects of us to do.



The Lord Jesus gave us the example. By his Spirit, we're to copy him in word and in deed. Jesus' words guide us. As we speak the gospel truth, we demonstrate the truth by our actions. Today, there is no greater demonstration of gospel truth than doing acts of kindness in the name of Jesus Christ. In word and works, our witness to faith in Christ is magnified. Miraculously others will come to believe in Christ as we have. We may even see some fruit from our labor. We may not. No matter, our faith is clearly demonstrated by kindness, and our kindness must be tied to that name above all names, Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus will return one day. That's what the angels told the apostles. "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11b NRSV)

That time is closer now than it has ever been. Who could have imagined the chaos into which our world has descended? Try as I might, it's hard to hold an optimistic view with the never-ending stream of bad news. One answer may be to turn off the television. It's not a bad idea. You may or may not choose to take that advice.

No matter what you decide about limiting your intake of negativity, here's some advice from the Lord Jesus himself. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:1-3 NRSV)

That's all we need to know. We can receive that truth in complete confidence that the one who promised is faithful. That's what believers have done for two thousand years. It's what we'll continue to do until the promise is fulfilled.

Paul's benediction is appropriate. "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (Eph. 3:20 NRSV)

Blessings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Pastor John



Sunday School:

For Summer, 2018 the Adult 1, Adult 2 and Youth classes will look a bit different! Rather than the current *Explore the Bible* material, these groups are looking into topical studies for the summer. Different teachers will teach different topics. Sunday, May 27th the team will meet to finalize the topics to be covered and dates for each. Look forward to an announcement regarding this soon!

Preschool/Children:

- July 9-13 is Capital Bible Camp (VBS). This year's theme is *Game On*, which will introduce children to Jesus and explain that only He can help them win the game of life! Mark your calendars for Family Night on July 12. Sara and Melissa encourages everyone to attend, rather you have children/grandchildren or not.
- With summer comes vacations. Staffing for nursery, preschool and children areas becomes difficult and additional volunteers will be needed. Please talk to Linda or Elaine today if you can help.
- Technology was added to the 'Green Room' and our preschoolers are loving it!
- Worship Kid Style is going great for preschool and children. Ask any child to sing you the Whoa! Song! Very catchy!

Adult Classes

- Bible Study for Life material is going well for Adult classes 4-6
- Visitation is moving along
- Socials are being organized Look for additional info in the weeks to come about the new approach for Adult 1, 2 and Youth (see start of article).

Youth Ministries:

- Anna Stell and Pastor John have done a wonderful job of working with our youth. Ten went to the Student Conference and are still talking about things they learned.
- Hopefully this summer, Virginia Barker and Bryan Haws will be able to go with our youth to camp, which is August 13 -17.
- Thursday night group attendance averages 8-10. The new 6th graders will be introduced to the group at the End of the Year BBQ at Bob's house.
- Continue to pray for additional support for the youth on Thursday nights.

--Linda Warberg, Sunday School Director



The Book I Want To Write

I have a title; I just don't have the rest of the book. Here's where I need your help.

The title: "There Is a Lad Here."

The book will be biblical fiction, based on John 6:8-9: "Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother spoke up. 'There is a lad here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many?'"

Jesus is sitting on the far shore of the Sea of Galilee with His disciples. A great crowd has followed Him. Jesus speaks to Philip and asks, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" (But... "He already had in mind what He was going to do.")

I want to know about the lad.

Here is how YOU can help by sending me ideas for my book:

- 1) Does Jesus know the lad is there?
- 2) Where does the lad come from?
- 3) What is his family like? Siblings? A widowed mother? A cruel/kind father?
- 4) What is the lad's name? How old is he? What does he do for fun?
- 5) Why does he have five barley loaves and two fish?
- 6) Did his mother give him this lunch for a special reason? Was he to share it with a sibling who was tending sheep?
- 7) Is this meal of five loaves and two fish an ordinary, everyday lunch for this time?
- 8) Has he heard of Jesus before this time?
- 9) How did Andrew know about the lad? Did he stumble across him? Did the lad go up to Andrew and say, "I have five barley loaves and two fish; I would like to share"?
- 10) How does the lad feel about sharing his food?
- 11) Does he have family among the crowd?
- 12) What happens *after* the crowd is fed from this small lad's lunch?
- 13) What does the lad *think* of the occurrence?
- 14) If his mother is still at home, how does he explain to her what happened?
- 15) If he has siblings, do they laugh at his story and accuse him of making up the story, or are they impressed and said they missed the miracle?
- 16) Where does the lad go from here?
- 17) When he becomes an adult, is he connected in any way to the disciples' work?
- 18) What happens to the twelve baskets of leftovers? Are they given to the lad?
- 19) It is this very evening – after the feeding of the 5,000 (men ... many more if we add women and children) – that the disciples go to the lake, get into the boat and head across the lake to Capernaum. Might the lad have followed them and snuck onto the boat?
- 20) The next day the crowd that had stayed after the miracle realized that Jesus must have crossed the lake to Capernaum, so they went in search of Him. Was the lad with them?

Thanks for helping me with my book. Please send responses/ideas to me at eeckersey@me.com.

Not At All!

God is *not* like us, but with nothing else to compare Him to, we have a hard time not viewing God in terms of what we know. As a child I was told Jesus loved me. The best love I knew was the way my parents loved me, so that was my childish understanding of God.

But at some point, we must grow beyond that limited view and realize God is unique, one-of-a-kind, different from. Do you ever struggle to see God as He really is?

A recent Sunday School lesson, then a devotion, started me down a path seeking the myriad ways God is *not* like us.

God is not fair and doesn't try to be! How many times have you responded to a child's complaint with, "life isn't fair", and yet, we have all, at one time or another, wished it was. The term "fair and square" refers to a strict adherence to established rules. Since God created the world and everything in it, He gets to establish the rules. According to His rules, the penalty for failing to perfectly keep His law, is death. If God was *just* fair, that's where it would end. But God more than fair, He is full of grace and mercy, so Jesus paid the penalty for my sin. And that really wasn't fair. That was grace!

God doesn't compromise. Humans value this ability because when each party gives a little, it's reasonable, cooperative; it helps us get things done. We expect rational people to be able to compromise. But with God, it's His way or nothing.

God doesn't change. Change in this world is inevitable. Without it there would be no growth, mentally or physically, but God doesn't change or need to, and that's why we can rely on promises He made millennia ago. The way God dealt with Adam and Eve, the God who chose to use Moses, the God who forgave David... still acts, speaks, and expects the same things. God is reliable, steadfast, faithful, so I can *know* He won't change His mind about my salvation or anything He has ever promised.

God isn't limited... in anyway, in any situation. When we express surprise at God's provision or intervention it says we were expecting something less. If we really believed in His un-limitedness (and His absolute love for us), fear would be non-existent because fear is the little voice of doubt that questions either His ability or His love.

The last item (so far) on my list of ways God is not like us, is that **God doesn't give up**—ever! We can all be side-tracked or discouraged given the right circumstances. That's human. But one of the 2018 VBS devotionals, made the point that the Good Shepherd doesn't just go after small, sweet shivering lambs, but the "muleheaded, cantankerous sheep who run from the Shepherd" as well, and He won't give up until they (we) are all in the fold where we belong.

What a relief!

--Diane Fowler