



Theme: The Art of Salvation – Jesus in the Gospel of Luke
“Salvation in the Crowd”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber, March 12-13, 2022, at Summit Church, Durango

Luke 7:36-50

VIDEO Sermon Starter

SLIDE “Salvation in the Crowd”

For a brief time in college, I was a lifeguard. I know it seems like it might be an easy job, sitting around watching people swim, but it can be a bit stressful, especially when there is a large crowd of people that include children in the pool. There is lots of yelling and asking people to walk on the pool deck and also the need to continually keep scanning the pool, looking for people in the midst of the mass of humanity trying to keep cool and enjoy the water. I only had to jump in the pool twice to pull people out of the water, and one of them was a bit scary as the person has stopped breathing. Luckily, there was a more experienced guard on duty with me that day to take the lead.

What I remember most about that experience of how they described saving someone who was drowning. The first thing you want to do is try make eye contact with the person so they can connect with you and know that you’re there with them. You do that even before you jump in the water. Hopefully that works to just calm them down

but eventually you also jump in and come towards them, so they know they're not alone. If they are flailing around, we were taught to once again make eye contact but don't just grab them because they might grab you and pull you under. If they don't come down, you even let them begin to sink a little until they stop flailing and you can grab them on your chest and pulled them to the edge of the pool.

Over the years, I have watched lifeguards for people out of a pool, a lake, and even the ocean. Each time there seemed to be a crowd which added to the confusion and challenge of saving the person who was drowning. While it was scary at first, there also was something reassuring knowing there was a lifeguard who is trained and knew what they were doing. It makes you feel safe and reassured to know there is something, or more importantly someone, who is paying attention and wants to make sure we are safe.

Today is the second weekend of the season of Lent, the 40 days and seven Sundays before we get to Easter. We are going to journey together through the gospel of Luke, and I encourage you to use our Meditation Moments each day to read through that gospel over the next seven weeks.

SLIDE Salvation = “to be restored and made whole”

Salvation is one of the key themes in Luke's gospel and we are going to talk about what that means for our lives because through Jesus as it is offered for all people, no matter what we are going through in life. It is one of the promises of God that we can hold onto in the midst of the darkest moments. What's really powerful is that salvation in the Scriptures often revolves around breaking bread and eating together. The most important moments of Jesus' life, public ministry, and even death, happen around a table. This makes sense because salvation is really about new life, and we cannot have life without bread and sustenance.

One of the reasons we chose the Art of Salvation for the title of

this series is because art strikes us in many different ways. Whether it is art that is a painting or poetry or a movie, it is meant to grab onto our senses, and we are meant to see ourselves in the art. We are meant to be drawn in and ask ourselves some profound questions about why this story or the artwork or the music calls to us. Often times, art washes over us and we don't even have words to express how we feel. Salvation is meant to be an experience and not simply a mathematical equation that says my sins plus Jesus' sacrifice equals salvation. It is something that we hope for, and we are meant to experience it in a powerful way in this story.

What's even more powerful is that this idea of salvation becomes very real and concrete when Jesus sits and eats with people who are in desperate need of hope and grace and mercy. Today we turn to a story that is found in all four Gospels, and it's the only miracle story which we find in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, with the exception of the resurrection of Jesus. This miracle appears six times in the four Gospels because it happens twice in Matthew and Mark, where Jesus feeds a multitude with just a handful of loaves and fish. Why is this story so important in the early church that they recorded it multiple times and what does it mean for our lives today when it comes this idea of salvation?

Let's begin by recognizing where this story takes place which is in Bethsaida on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. I often try to help us understand the stories by recognizing they took place in a specific place and understanding the geography can be helpful in more fully understanding the story. Let's take a look at the map of the holy land.

VIDEO Holy Land

The area to the north is the Galilee which contains Nazareth to the left of the Sea of Galilee. This is where Jesus does most of his public ministry. To the right, which is east, is the area of Samaria. South is called Judea where we find Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. The

Mediterranean Sea to the west, on the left of the map. As we zoom and we get a picture of where Bethsaida is found on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

VIDEO Holy Land - Bethsaida

Bethsaida is at the base of the Golan Heights, and near the base of the ministry of Jesus which was in Capernaum. Jesus has his disciples get into boats to escape the crowds and they most likely stay along the shore. They intended to have a day of rest here on the mountainside overlooking the lake. The reality is that people can see the small boats moving along the shoreline in this area because it is relatively flat and there are not that many on the lake. The crowd to see Jesus and his disciples in the boat and they decide to follow along the shoreline. They want to be with Jesus. They want to hear from Jesus. They want to have their loved ones healed by Jesus. Jesus has gone to take a day of rest along with his disciples but instead thousands of people flock to their location.

VIDEO Bethsaida

I have taken several groups to this region and there are two locations that people believe are where this miracle takes place. The one the state of Israel calls Bethsaida is this first one in the video. One you have been to this location with me where you find these old ruins on the hillside. You can see the Sea of Galilee in the area to the right is where the crowds may have gathered to eat. We chose this piece of artwork to depict this scene.

GRAPHIC Feeding the Multitude Painting

GRAPHIC Stole

GRAPHIC Chalice and Plate

I have a stole from this region, and we have this beautiful chalice and plate which also depict this story. Let's remember what is happening in Luke's gospel at this point. The disciples have been sent

out 2 x 2 to minister in the name of Jesus and they have come back after preaching and teaching and they are exhausted, longing for some alone time with their master. Jesus has just found out that his friend, cousin, and companion, John the Baptist, has been beheaded. Jesus is experiencing grief. Here is what we read it says in Mark's gospel chapter 6.

BIBLE

³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then Jesus said, "Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile." He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn't even have time to eat.

³² So they left by boat for a quiet place, where they could be alone.

The idea is that they will have a day off together. Have you ever felt burned out or exhausted? Have you ever needed a mental health day because you have given everything you have, and you just need a break? Whether you give everything to your work or to your kids or some other task, we all get worn out and this is what the disciples and Jesus are feeling at this moment. They come to this place to be quiet and get away and they find thousands of people waiting. How do you think their feeling?

I'm guessing the disciples were frustrated. "Seriously, we can't even get one day by ourselves?" Yet Jesus reaction this way according to Mark's gospel in the next verse.

BIBLE

³⁴ Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Luke tells us that he welcomed them, spoke to them about God's

kingdom, and healed the sick. Some might read this text and think that Jesus didn't have very good boundaries because he didn't just send people away. He could've just told people he was off that day and wasn't available to help. Instead, we find something very familiar about Jesus in the story. Jesus is always paying attention to the interruptions. This is one of the first things we learn about salvation in a crowd.

SLIDE Salvation in the interruptions

In this story, Jesus offered salvation in the interruptions as he brings bread and life to the crowd. My guess is that if each of us look at our lives we would discover that some of the most powerful moment happened during times when we were interrupted. Much of the most important moments in the ministry of Jesus are interruptions, just like the woman last week who we learned interrupted dinner at the religious leader's home to wash the feet of Jesus.

I want to suggest the same thing is true in our lives, that some of the most powerful moment happened in the interruptions. I know I have often had a plan for a day that just hasn't worked out because something else comes up. Sometimes, I need to be more disciplined. But I also have learned that it's in those moments I need to listen and pay attention. I was in a zoom meeting this past week that was pretty important and there was a knock on my office door. I hesitated and was a bit frustrated, but I hit the mute button and turned off my video and went to the door and it was my daughter who happened to be in the building and simply wanted a hug. I needed that hug more than zoom meeting!

I went back to zoom meeting, and then my phone rang. Most of the time I turn off the ringer, but I have forgotten. I pushed mute and turned off the video again on the Zoom call and answered the phone and it was a good friend and colleague in crisis with one of their kids. We ended up talking and praying over the phone and it ended up being one of those holy moments as we connected later in the day again to

follow up, and they talked about how helpful it was to talk with a familiar voice and take a deep breath and not to something stupid.

I want to be clear that I'm not saying we should turn off our phone or leave every meeting when something else pops up, but sometimes we do need to pay attention. I also think it's okay to recognize we do have limits and we can't always be available. It's a balancing act. What I have realized is that some things which I thought were important just aren't, and if I pay attention, it is in those holy moments where God does great work. We see this in the life of Jesus, where some of his most important teachings and miraculous work is done when he is pulled away from other plans.

I recognize that for myself I need to build in margin when I go to the store or out to eat because there is invariably someone who stopped me and says, "I was hoping to talk to about..." I was in the grocery store the other day and ended up praying in front of the sushi bar with someone who doesn't go to our church, but I know from working with in the community. I knew that was where God needed me in that moment, and I have discovered this is how God often works in the world and in our lives. I would encourage each of us to pay attention for how God might be working in the people who come across our path.

I was visiting recently with one of our members who shared a powerful story about noticing someone in their office with red eyes, like to be crying. They were late for a meeting, but they stopped and looked them in the eyes and asked them if they were okay. They broke down and began to sob, telling their coworker about family in Ukraine who they had heard from in several days. They prayed together in a quiet corner of their office and the personhood stopped said that during the prayer you could feel the Holy Spirit as the sobbing began to ease, and shallow breathing turned to deep breaths. As they were reflecting on that moment, they said it was the most important things they had done that day. Are we paying attention?

Let's experience this story through the art of film with the Lumo Project's imagining of this story from Luke 9.

VIDEO Lumo Project – Luke 9

There is another profound moment in the story after Jesus has taught them about the kingdom of God and healed many in the crowd who were sick. Jesus brings salvation, wholeness, healing, through teaching and by touching those who are wounded. I'm guessing the disciples have wanted to say this all day to Jesus. "Can we just have some alone time, finally!" Maybe they are concerned about the people and having enough to eat, because it is a two hour walk from this area of Bethsaida to Capernaum where there is food. They really want Jesus to send them away, but they don't get a reply they are hoping for. Let's say these words together.

BIBLE

¹³ But Jesus said, "You feed them."

5000 men means there were probably 15 to 20,000 people you included the women and the children. That's more than the city of Durango proper! It's hard to imagine how this miracle actually looked in first. Did bread just magically keep appearing in the basket? Did the fish spawn new fish somehow? Some scholars suggest there was a different kind of miracle that happened and that some people in the crowd actually planned to be away that night. While the men didn't plan, the women with them must thought ahead! Some of them did bring food but they were going to keep it to themselves. Instead, they saw Jesus and the disciples giving themselves away and whatever they had, and they heard the words of Jesus telling them to feed people. Suddenly, their hearts are changed, and they open up their picnic baskets and decide to give away what they had. That generosity grows and those who live in Bethsaida run back to town and bring more food.

My sense is that there is something miraculous happening as well as something happened in the hearts of the people who gathered in the

crowd, who were willing to share. After they all had given what they had, there were 12 baskets left over. This is a powerful story about allowing God to take what we have and use it to be able to bless others. Somehow, everyone is satisfied when we are willing to recognize that salvation is offered to everyone who gathers with Jesus.

SLIDE Salvation it is a communal event

Here is a powerful gospel truth that we find repeatedly in the gospels. Salvation is a communal event. Whether it is Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding, offering salvation to both the religious leaders who think they are holy and sinners who know they are broken, or Jesus offering forgiveness on the cross to those who put him there and the thief, Jesus comes to bring salvation and wholeness to every single person in the crowd. Not only that, but we are also going to be a part of bringing that reality into the world. This is why Jesus tells the disciples, “You feed them.”

Danniebelle Hall wrote a gospel hymn in the 1970s that you may have heard called, “Ordinary People.”

SLIDES

**God uses ordinary people
He chooses people,
just like me and you
who are willing
to do as he commands
God uses people that will give him all
no matter how small
your all may seem to you
because little becomes much
as you place it in the master's hands

Just like that little lad
who gave Jesus all he had
How the multitude was fed**

**with a fish and loaves of bread
What you have may not seem much
but when you yield it to the touch
of the Master's loving hand
then you will understand
how your life could never be the same**

This past week I have received word from a number of folks we know who are serving in Ukraine, giving all that they have. We shared with you last week that we are working to support Dasha and Joe Reimers who are in Ukraine. Joe's father Dennis is the chaplain at our jail here look like County. Dasha is Ukrainian and her family is in Mariupol. Joe and Tasha have been working near Lviv to find shelter for orphans and refugees. Dasha's father Oleg is staying in the basement of their church in Mariupol helping mostly the elderly and widows who can't escape the shelling. They have found a spring for water and enough food for a few weeks. Dasha and Joe have been on CNN and also a local station in Denver recently, and I thought it would be powerful to hear directly from them about their experience.

VIDEO Joe and Dasha

I am in awe of their courage in the courage of many who are serving still in Ukraine to care for those who are most at risk. I know it is hard for us to imagine and are sheltered and cloistered Durango, but I think even in these moments we are asked more than ever to feed God's people by not only are offerings but our prayers. I love hearing about Joe's former college friends helping to support them, and I think many of us have been doing that and will continue to do that.

More than 20 years ago, members of this congregation were part of a group that helped begin the Manna soup kitchen, sharing what little they had to bring bread and life. While we have been able to serve there is often as we use to during the pandemic, we will need to be rebuilding our teams that are serving their and caring for those who

have little to nothing. Whether it is halfway across the world in Ukraine or down the street in our soup kitchen, this story begs the question of us.

SLIDE Are we willing to part of salvation in the crowd?

Are we willing to take what little we have and bring it to Jesus to be blessed and used it to bring about the Kingdom of God? Are we paying attention? During the season of Lent, we are called to go deeper and ask these probing questions as we read the stories. We often fast or give something up during the season, and the prophet Isaiah wrote 600 years before Jesus about what God was looking for when it comes to fasting or giving up in Isaiah 53.

BIBLE

- ⁶ **“No, this is the kind of fasting I want:
Free those who are wrongly imprisoned;
 lighten the burden of those who work for you.
Let the oppressed go free,
 and remove the chains that bind people.**
- ⁷ **Share your food with the hungry,
 and give shelter to the homeless.
Give clothes to those who need them,
 and do not hide from relatives who need your help.**
- ⁸ **“Then your salvation will come like the dawn,
 and your wounds will quickly heal.
Your godliness will lead you forward,
 and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind.**
- ⁹ **Then when you call, the Lord will answer.
 ‘Yes, I am here,’ he will quickly reply.**

We do these things, and we find that God shows up in the midst of them. Though I do hear God whispering in my heart, I’ve never had God show up like a winged angel to rescue me when things are tough. Instead, God has shown up in my life through other people. This is how

salvation works. Because of what God has done in our lives, and our willingness to follow him like the disciples, even when we would rather have Jesus all to ourselves, we respond by bringing what God has given to us to serve others. We find that blessing returns to us when we are in need and as Jesus said in Luke 6.

BIBLE

³⁷ “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full — pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.”

It's powerful and interesting that Jesus is talking about not just our resources but are judgments our willingness to forgive and how we look at others, once again begging this question. Are we paying attention? Even in the crowd were a tendency is to judge other people around us or not offer forgiveness when we wanted to be about us, are we paying attention? Do we realize that how we act and react will impact the crowd around us, just like it did those thousands of people gathered with Jesus on a hillside in Bethsaida?

I see this miracle happen here all the time not only with those of you who serve at Manna but those of you bringing food for our Native Hope ministry. I see it happen daily in our office when people come in and need help with rent or food or utilities, and especially gas money these days. I watch members of this church step into places of serving that have stretched them and change them so not only have they blessed others, but they have been blessed.

I received an email a few weeks back that was a blast from my past. It was a young woman named Shelley who came to youth group when she was in seventh grade when I was serving as a youth pastor in

Colorado Springs. She was invited by a friend and in the process of connecting with our group we found out that she was being sexually assaulted by family living in her home. We got social services involved and were able to have her removed and she went to a foster home who continue to bring her to church and youth group. She came very close to one of our sponsors who led her Sunday school class and took her under her wing. She emailed me because she wanted to get in touch with that woman and tell her how much she had changed her life just by being willing to sit and talk. You see that you sponsor had also come out of the family of abuse and she took that experience and was able to walk with Shelley through her trauma. I remember her telling me that it was healing her as much as it was Shelley.

Shelley wanted to thank that you sponsor because she was now a doctor who specialized in working with young girls and boys who were dealing with physical and emotional trauma. She realized it was now her turn to take the bread and the fish and share them with others who were hungry.

SLIDE “You feed them.”

Through this miraculous story of the feeding of the 5000 which was more like 20,000 is a message to us today, reminding not just disciples, but each of us that we have something to give no matter our place in the crowd. We are invited to feed others and offer them this gift of salvation that we have received. I want to be clear that we don't do the saving, but we can certainly introduce others to the healing that we have found in Christ.

Luke tells us at the end of this story that everyone in the crowd was satisfied and there were 12 baskets full of food left over, one for each of the disciples. They gave up what little they had, and they had more than enough at the end, and everyone was satisfied. Many of you have discovered this as you have volunteered and served others, that you have more than enough at the end.

The early church remembered this story because it was a foreshadowing of Jesus taking the bread at the Last Supper, breaking it, giving it to his disciples, and saying to them, “This is my life. I am the bread of life. Those who come to me will never be hungry again.” Every time we receive the bread of life, we are meant to feel like we are a part of that crowd that was fed that day and miraculous fashion. We are reminded that Jesus feeds us, longs to fill us, longs to make us whole and bring us salvation. Then, Jesus invites us to feed others and to share the good news. Let’s pray.

SLIDE Prayer

Gracious God, at times we are weary, tired, preoccupied, and even burned out. We don’t want to give anybody anything else. We’ve given all we can, and we need quiet time alone with you. Even in those times, help us to pay attention, and have compassion. Help us to take care of ourselves so that we can serve when the moment comes along. May we listen for your call. Help us to hear your words today again, “You feed them.” Direct our hearts to share the gifts, abilities, and resources you have given to us so that we might bless others, and in those moments find ourselves satisfied. May we be made whole by your salvation and then share that experience with whatever crowd we find ourselves in. Lord, as you fed the multitudes bread and fish, feed our hearts with the bread of life, knowing that we will never be hungry again. We pray these things in your holy name. Amen.

March 12-13 Order

1. Ely welcomes people and says, **“Today we are going journey through the gospel of Luke, seeking to understand this idea of salvation and what it means for our lives.”**
2. Two Songs
3. Jeff welcomes and invites people to wave and be seated.
4. Announcements by Jeff (Check News Section on Website)
 - a. Alpha
 - b. Family Service Night on Friday
5. Invite congregation to prepare their hearts for the message.
6. Sermon
7. Prayer
8. Closing song
9. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
10. Offering SLIDE and Focus (Caring for Children)
11. Care Ministers (If any are present)
12. Prayer Quilt (If any)
13. Closing Prayer