



Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church  
Sunday July 25, 2021  
"So that nothing may be lost"  
Amy Kim Kyremes-Parks

Scripture from the Jesus Storybook Bible

There is a lot going on in this story. Jesus has been seen- speaking up, healing and offering liberation. This is one of the times in the Bible where we can say Jesus had gone viral. Jesus was the ultimate influencer and was not playing by the rules expected. Knowing what was ahead and the pressure that he was under to "perform," Jesus is trying to make some space. What a better place than the desert-the wilderness. The place where God continually showed up in the Old Testament.

But here is the thing... the people follow him.

They can't get enough of this man who offers healing, restoration and nourishment in ways they had not experienced. Without provisions they follow. They don't want to lose sight of him. Jesus must be overwhelmed with the response while simultaneously recognizing that the people's need was great.

Ever been there? Surrounded by people, things, pressures, expectations put on you by yourself and your perceptions of others? People asking you to solve problems?

Or, you are hoping someone can help your situation, ease your struggles, give you a hand, help you to heal and there is a block? Emotionally, Physically, Mentally?

Or you are sure there are clear conclusions to a problem, or there was never a problem and people are trying to change- and yet there are people convinced there is another possibility or more room for discussion? You are frustrated and over it....

Jesus, the disciples and this group of followers are at a crossroads. There is so much on the line and yet everyone is not entirely on the same page. They are together and yet they need to figure out what to do with where they find themselves. On top of this, they find themselves without provisions.

I'd like you to listen to this song Crossroads by Tracy Chapman while reading through the lyrics. What stirs in you? What words emerge? How do you identify with this song and the moment we find Jesus, the disciples and followers in?

**Crossroads -Tracy Chapman video/lyrics 4:11**

All you folks think you own my life  
But you never made any sacrifice  
Demons they are on my trail

I'm standing at the crossroads of the hell  
I look to the left I look to the right  
There're hands that grab me on every side  
Mmh, mmh  
Mmh, mmh  
All you folks think I got my price  
At which I'll sell all that is mine  
You think money rules when all else fails  
Go sell your soul and keep your shell  
I'm trying to protect what I keep inside  
All the reasons why I live my life  
Mmh, mmh  
Mmh, mmh  
Some say the devil be a mystical thing  
I say the devil he a walking man  
He a fool he a liar conjurer and a thief  
He try to tell you what you want  
Try to tell you what you need  
Mmh, mmh  
Mmh, mmh  
Standing at the point  
The road it cross you down  
What is at your back  
Which way do you turn  
Who will come to find you first  
Your devils or your gods  
Mmh  
All you folks think you run my life  
Say I should be willing to compromise  
I say all you demons go back to hell  
I'll save my soul, save myself  
Mmh, mmh  
Mmh, mmh  
Save my soul, save myself  
Save my soul, save myself  
Save my soul, save myself  
Save my soul, save myself

Take a deep breath. I want to invite you to share in the chat what rose up for you....

What stirs in you? What words emerge? How do you identify with this song and the moment we find Jesus, the disciples and followers in?

Thank you for sharing. All of these feelings are here. There are more than 5000 people because- well patriarchy- remember the writers of the text were men and at the time men were who were counted. There had to be women and children that were with the men, their family and friends, drawn into the liberation of Jesus. So, the reality is that there were probably twice as many there if not more.

We are there. The people who know they need more and want more. Jesus sees this.

A child enters and offers what he has, unsure of what difference it can make.

Jesus takes it, blesses it and then uses it to bless the people.... giving them more than enough with some leftover. This is what God does, has done and continues to do in the midst of the wilderness- make sure there is enough.

These followers of Jesus are part of our lineage. Our ancestors- their DNA is in us somewhere. This ancestry includes constantly living in the tension of belief and unbelief. Fear and doubt that creeps in along the way and yet we follow. This ancestry kept going, kept wanting more. Unsure of what it would mean but sensing that it was what would liberate. Not just for them as individuals, but liberate a people. For all of us.

There are times I catch myself in the midst of reading a passage, singing a hymn, finding space in nature or looking into the eyes of my children that my being is overwhelmed. In these moments there is a recognition that these moments are tied to those who came before me. Those whose life was lived in light of me. The ancestors knew there was a need for life and liberation of the people, of you and me, our children and our children's children that depended on them. They kept on in the midst of hardship and discomfort to insure we would experience this love that liberates and moves in abundance far beyond our imaginations.

Getting to know this community in the midst of this pandemic has been unconventional but such a wonderful unfolding of connection. I have now been a part of this family of faith for nine-ish months and yet the only time I have worshipped in the sanctuary with this congregation was years ago when I was in town for a Montreat Youth Conference planning meeting. Dear friends and colleagues, Aimee and Bill Buchannan were serving here as pastors and they had invited me to worship. Over their years of ministry I learned more about GCPC and the ways this congregation was showing up and transforming.

Fast-forward in time - my mom came back from a conference at Montreat and she could not stop talking about Rev. Marcia Mount Shoop who led a group with songs that stay with her to this day. Marcia and I happened to connect through service to the National church at General Assemblies and then more directly during a conference at Montreat. We were on a panel during an anti-racism conference. There was a moment in silent reflection when I was moved to place my hand on Marcia's shoulder and she held my hand. In this moment a seed was planted for this day, this time and this moment.

The gathering-in of this congregation represents the same kind of abundance we hear about in this story. Each of us being drawn in by the Spirit beckoning us into a relationship with the Holy Liberator.

Some of us have called GCPC home since birth, able to recall the triumphs and tribulations of this community of faith and have been first hand witness to the power of this community. Others have discovered this community through the intentional partnerships this congregation has worked so hard to establish and grow. Your interaction with these partnerships caused curiosity and a movement toward active investment.

Many of us have had a sordid relationship with religion and those that abuse its power and authority. We have participated and invested in communities of faith while feeling a bit like goldilocks and not finding a fit that was just right. After some time, Grace Covenant showed up on our radar and the community spoke to a longing you had been trying to answer.

Some may have never been a part of a church until experiencing this one.

Now we have folks who are a part of us that would take a cross country road trip for us to connect physically but through the miracle of algorithms and electricity you have found this community of faith.

Siblings, we are a congregation of abundant leftovers and nothing that has brought us to this point is going to be wasted.

We have been drawn in and liberated by this love that takes what is here and serves up a feast. GCPC, God is using us to do more than we ever imagined we could do or experience alone. Together the Spirit leads us toward mutual liberation so that all of us can live into abundance.

This is good news!

But we know it as simple and yet so much harder than that.

Liberation is ours which means we have to be a part of liberating in order for our own to be sustained. Letting go of what was for what could be. Thanking God for the provisions, looking at what we have and making sure everyone can be fed.

So why do we get stuck in scarcity? More than ever we take in the lie that bigger is better, more is more and we have to make sure we are not left without. We are intelligent people but when it comes to scarcity and abundance we have been conditioned to make sure our personal needs take precedence while pushing away our inborn instinct toward interdependence. We have bought into the colonizing culture that puts priority on self while ignoring our need for others and the abundance that is rich in the recognition of what we are together... The erasure of interdependence is literally killing us.

As a congregation, GCPC has a legacy of making sure we are doing all we can to make sure nothing is wasted. Not food, not resources, not people, not space. This is evident every day in and outside the church building. It has taken a collaborative response and discomfort. Yes, discomfort. It is so easy to talk about the beauty of this congregation and its legacy and in order for us to keep it up we have to recognize that the path to get there has and will cause us discomfort.

I am so thankful for the paid and unpaid leadership of this church. The commitment I have witnessed to abundance for all has been palpable, so has the emotional, mental and embodied wrestling that is being done in order to faithfully do this work. It is a blessing filled with agitation. Faith- it is a blessing filled with agitation. One moment you find yourself listening to a powerful speaker and healer among a crowd of people and the next thing you know you are in the desert and not quite sure how to sustain yourself and others. But, when you look around there is an undeniable pull toward making sure we all make it through.

### **Kintsugi -SLIDE**

Here you see a piece of Kintsugi pottery. Kintsugi-Poetically translated to “golden joinery,” *Kintsugi*, or *Kintsukuroi*, is the centuries-old Japanese art of fixing broken pottery. Rather than rejoin ceramic pieces with a camouflaged adhesive, the Kintsugi technique employs a special tree sap lacquer dusted with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. Once completed, beautiful seams of gold glint in the conspicuous cracks of ceramic wares, giving a one-of-a-kind appearance to each “repaired” piece.

For me, this artform is one of the closest tangible symbols of how I have experienced the life of faith and that of the church community. It is a place where the broken are gathered, fragments are gathered, placed together and find strength in the repair and binding. Ultimately the broken pieces are mended in a way that is far more beautiful than the original and there are stories upon stories that had a hand in the repair. Nothing is lost.

Grace Covenant, how do we still say grounded in the midst of it all?

We work through the discomfort toward abundant liberation for all together. We take what we have and what we have experienced and make sure there is more than enough to sustain us all as we journey ahead.

Finally, I would be remiss to not point out that Jesus pulled out all the stops in this miraculous story. A child and their offering is a conduit of this abundance for all. We have to recognize that in our shepherding of them we are also saving ourselves for generations to come- just like our ancestors.

GCPC, we have a legacy of liberatory love to build on. Are you in? Let's make sure nothing is wasted. Amen.