

When God Isn't Who You Thought He Would Be

What Are You Looking For?

John 6

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During this Easter season, we are exploring the story of Jesus through the experience of people who were looking for Jesus.

And we are asking ourselves, as Jesus often asked, *What are you looking for?*

This week, we are spending our time looking at a story from John 6 where a group of people are looking for Jesus, and at first, they like what they find, but it doesn't take long for them to change their minds.

The story begins in an unassuming way. With Jesus providing a meal for people to eat together. But it leads us straight into one of **Jesus' most bold and provocative claims** and that's where we are headed today.

So let's dive right in to the story.

Timeline of the story

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Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

Just like it is today for us - Passover is next weekend. And this is significant in the story because the writer, John, is letting us know this story occurred at the same time of year two years before Jesus would take the place as the Passover sacrifice. And that is important in this story.

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5When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, **“Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”**

6He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

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7Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

8Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up,

9“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

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10Jesus said, **“Have the people sit down.”**There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there).

11Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

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12When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, **“Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.”**

13So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

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14After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

15Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

What is Jesus doing here? Seems simple enough. He is feeding hungry people.

But it's also deeper than that.

Jesus meets a physical need to draw attention to a spiritual need.

- He is inviting them to a meal, to a conversation, to a relationship.
- He is inviting them to look for, to hunger for something MORE than food.
- But at least in the beginning, that's not what they wanted.
- They were impressed by his ability to feed them and heal them.
- They saw these as signs he was a political king.
- That's what THEY were looking for.

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So what are YOU looking for?

Maybe more importantly, WHO are you looking for?

Well, what are most of us looking for?

The Hebrew people who followed Jesus were looking for: Provision (food), health (healing, security (making Jesus king, proximity to power)

We are looking for the people, the connections, the possessions to help us feel secure.

Many of us are looking for a full belly, to have our needs met, to feel safe

And we often come to Jesus because he seems to be able to give us what we need and want.

The prayers we pray most often tell us a lot about how we see Jesus and what we are looking for.

MY STORY:

There was a time after we had been married for a couple years where I was praying a lot for a baby.

Very physical prayers about a very physical and bodily request.

It seemed like my body wasn't working though.

I prayed many brave and desperate prayers.

It took about a year the first time, two years the second time but God answered my prayers.

It happened twice like that for me, both my kids came after much waiting and praying.

Me looking for God to meet a need and act in a physical way on my behalf.

But not every motherhood prayer I've prayed has been answered.

So what are YOU looking for when you look for God?

What do you expect him to do for you?

Who do you expect him to be?

Our story continues the next morning, when the people Jesus fed find him on their other side of the lake.

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When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

They're trying to keep it chill: "So...when did you get here?"

Jesus is onto them, knows they want something from him.

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26 Jesus replied, "Truly, truly, I tell you, it is not because you saw these signs that you are looking for Me, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

27 Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval."

Jesus is immediately inviting them to look deeper, beyond the temporary meeting of physical needs. Don't just work for food and stuff that is here today and gone tomorrow. Work for what will last, work for real life.

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Then they inquired, “What must we do to perform the works of God?”

29 Jesus replied, “The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent.”

30 So they asked Him, “What sign then will You perform, so that we may see it and believe You? What will You do? **(didn't he just perform a sign?)**

31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ d”

It's back to the food again. They are like, hey, you have to be at least as good as Moses at providing us with lunch.

But notice that Jesus does not give into their prompting to prove himself.

He doesn't do miracles on command - he has nothing to prove.

He wants to show them who he is really is, what he has for them.

Jesus again draws them to the bigger story, the deeper invitation to eternal life.

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32 Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

33 For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

34 “Sir,” they said, “give us this bread at all times.”

They still think it's about bread.

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35 Jesus answered, “***I am*** the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never hunger, and whoever believes in Me will never thirst.

36 But as I stated, you have seen Me and still you do not believe.

You see me, but still you do not hunger for me - you do not come to me.

You're not actually looking for ME.

40 For it is My Father's will that everyone who **looks to the Son and believes** in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

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41 At this, the Jews began to grumble about Jesus because He had said, “***I am the bread that came down from heaven.***”

42 They were asking, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?

How then can He say, ‘***I have come down from heaven?***’”

But Jesus doesn't back down.

SLIDE:

48 I am the bread of life. **49** Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died.

51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And this bread, which I will give for the life of the world, is My flesh. **(my body, my life.)**

52At this, the Jews began to argue among themselves, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"

Once again, Jesus does not pull back but continues to invite them to look deeper. And he gets graphic.

53So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, you have no life in you.

54Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Jesus has been building up to this, calling himself the Bread of Life. But until now, it seemed like a metaphor until he started talking about his physical body.

But it just got a weird, a little intense, at first glance. Jesus is referencing the meal he fed them yesterday, where he broke and divided the bread and everyone there had plenty to eat.

But he's also referencing his death, how similarly his body would be broken and through his death and resurrection, he would give life to the world.

In Luke 22, as Jesus is sitting down to the Last Supper with his disciples, he says something similar.

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And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

The Last Supper was Jesus bringing together this experience and understanding of Jesus as the Bread of Life, and what it would cost him to offer this.

But not everyone could understand.

Not everyone then or now is *looking* for eternal life.

Many times, we are looking for something simpler, something more comfortable, more digestible.

And when Jesus shows up in a way that we do not understand, in a way that creates discomfort or disappoints us, how we respond says a lot about us.

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60 On hearing [his teaching], many of His disciples said, “This is a difficult teaching. Who can accept it?”

61 Aware that His disciples were grumbling about this teaching, Jesus asked them, “Does this offend you? The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

64 However, there are some of you who do not believe.”

66 From that time on many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him.

But notice the contrast.

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67 So Jesus asked the Twelve, “Do you want to leave too?”

68 Simon Peter replied, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life.

69 We believe and know that You are the Holy One of God.**f**”

Question:

So what do we do when we turn to God, and we don't get what we are looking for?

How do we respond when Jesus is no longer who we thought he was?

Jesus' way is to meet us where we are.

He engages us in the physical, by meeting our physical needs, our relational needs, the stuff of here and now.

This is where most of us start with him.

But he wants to move us also toward spiritual hunger, to the longing and looking for what will last, for what is eternal.

MAJOR POINT:

Often when our relationship with God is built around him meeting our physical and existential needs and desires, we don't know what to do with him when we encounter a situation where he no longer gives us what we ask.

The people Jesus fed returned to him because he fed them the first time.

They wanted a fresh meal and a new king.

Jesus fed them once and then pointed them to himself, to the Bread of Life.

And they walked away.

They weren't looking for that.

In my story:

God was gracious to us, and we had two children.

And we expected to have more.

We prayed.

Our kids prayed.

I bought clothing for a third child to demonstrate my faith.

I did everything I did before and more.

But no child came.

For a long time, I felt let down by God.

- .I felt angry and resentful.**
- .At times, I tuned God out.**
- .But I kept coming back.**

Eventually, I decided to wrestle with God about this issue where he was disappointing me.

Because when I didn't get what I wanted, I still had God.

I still knew that despite my disappointment and sadness, he was still there,

And I was trying to make sense of that.

**When I did choose to wrestle with God, he showed me some things that spoke to me deeply,
Reminded me how he had been good to me in the midst of the disappointment and my resentment about it.**

Through that process, Jesus invited me to move past the desire for something physical and to find him there, to find life.

But I had a choice in that process, because God wasn't answering my prayer how I wanted.

Jesus was somebody different for me that third time around.

**I was offended. I was disappointed. I was angry.
But eventually I chose to wrestle with God about it.**

**Who is God to you when you don't get you want?
What you thought you needed? What you expected?**

**In that moment, and that moment is coming, which
follower of Jesus will you be?**

Will you choose to stay or will you walk away?

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**In Matthew 11: 6, Jesus says, "Blessed is the one who
is not offended because of me."**

The Greek word for offended is "skandalisthe"- to be
offended, also means to stumble, to fall away.

Our offense isn't just a harmless emotion.

When we let offense toward God and others fester, it **can
cause us to stumble, to sin, to fall away** from our
relationship from God and others

**The invitation Jesus puts before us is to stay hungry
for him**, to look past the thing we want him to do for us in
the natural world and see who he is and what he is
offering us.

The invitation is to wrestle with God.

When God is not answering your prayers as you
expected, you can do what some of Jesus' followers did.
You can say, "Give me a sign.

Show me that you're God by solving my problem, by fixing
my health or my relationship or helping me get something I
want."

You can attempt to hold Jesus hostage to your demands.

But you will miss out on Jesus himself.

Or we can wrestle with God and hear him out, as our forefathers and mothers did:

- Abraham
- Jacob, who was renamed Israel
- Hannah
- Many others

Will you say like Peter,
"Lord, where else can I go? You alone have the words of life."

In fact, Israel means *one who wrestles with God*.

As Christians, to wrestle with God is our inheritance.

So I want to end today by inviting us all to this sacred wrestling match.

To stay engaged and connected, eye to eye with this God who is not at all what you expected.

But he is - I promise - so much better.

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For our Next Steps this week:

Ask Holy Spirit to show you where you are disappointed or offended at God and instead of walking away, decide to engage and wrestle with God around that issue.

Worship team come on up. Let's pray together.