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What Should We Take?

We Are Disciples Series

Exodus 13:17-19

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer... God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea... And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph...

This is the 5th and final week of our 'We Are Disciples' series. We've discussed being people of the parenthesis, having a table open to all, understanding what it means to truly welcome people, and how to piece together the fragments to create wholeness. Today we discuss movement, more specifically how to put all that we've learned into action.

When you think about the word movement, what comes to mind? Perhaps the movers and the shakers, the movements they've created and the moves they had to make in order for those movements to be successful. Movements for equality such as the Civil Rights Movement and all that included; Brown vs. the Board of Education, Rosa Parks, the march from Selma, the Voting Act of 1965. We sometimes think of those big movements and all the many steps that were taken to make change a reality.

When we think about movement, we think about actions more than we think about words. We think about motions and we reflect on what is close to us and what we're currently going through. If you've recently had surgery, when I say the word movement you focus on movement to that area of surgery and if you are able to achieve those personal movement goals you've set for yourself. If you are training for a sport, you focus on the movement necessary to achieve your best. Perhaps your muscles start stretching in your mind and you can mentally feel the necessary movement for accomplishing your best. For me, I hear the word movement and think, I know movement, I feel movement all the time from this little guy dwelling inside me. He kicks and turns and elbows through his somersaults. And while I feel all those movements, I ironically also feel a lack of movement, like when I try to stand up. Movement is relative to where we are in life. But in each of these cases, movement means there is life present.

In our scripture this morning, Moses was leading the Israelites out of their bondage of slavery, out of Egypt. During this move there were no cardboard moving boxes like the one on the front of your bulletin. There were no suitcases like the ones in your closet at home. There weren't even grocery bags. Whatever

they took with them, they had to carry in their arms. When your packing is that limited, you tend to be pretty picky as to what you take with you. You only take something of high importance and of high value to you, something that will help you get to your destination. For Moses, and the Israelites, it was Joseph's bones. Those bones did not simply remind them of their journey and their history, it was a reminder to them of God's promise. They would get home. These bones were a reminder of hope on their long winding journey. And that hope is what they needed to make it home.

As I can testify, MOVE is a four-letter word at times. Moving is not easy. Take an actual move, for example. It requires boxes, packing, sorting through items, labeling. It requires help from others, muscle, and Tetris-like skills for loading a moving truck. When we make changes in our lives and decide to move, we too determine what should be left behind and what should we take with us. When we moved here this summer we had to make those decisions. What could we take with us? What did we want to take with us? What did we need to take with us? And what did we need to get rid of? I can count several trips to donation drop off locations. I can recount friends coming over to go through not only items we were donating, but foods from our refrigerator and pantry. Every time we've moved I've always been amazed at what we've accumulated. Why do we have this? Where did we get that? I don't even know what that does! Things we didn't know we possessed were suddenly objects of question, do we keep it or do we let it go? Sometimes those two questions, what should we keep? and what should we let go? are invaluable questions that reveal a lot about ourselves and where we are in the moving process.

Two Saturday's ago, here in this very building, some of you were deciding those very things for this church as you cleaned out closets and removed the cobwebs from the shelves. As you sorted through things, you asked, often out loud, does our church need this? Would this benefit our youth? Could one of our ministries use this? Who could use this, so we can give it to them? It was a beautiful sight of movement; movement by lots of different people, young and wise, of all skill sets working and moving together to serve the whole.

Our actions have to be intentional. They have to be founded and rooted in something we believe in. That doesn't mean we have answers or get things right, we won't. But it does mean that we act out of love, trusting that it will be enough. Being disciples, followers of Christ, insuring the Lord's table is always open to all who approach it, to welcome others as God welcomes us, and to keep the goal of wholeness in the forefront of our minds means we must intentionally act with love. We have to have faith that love is what changes things. Faith in loving others, just as they are. Faith that loving and caring for our community will make a difference. Faith that love changes one life at a time, that's what we need.

There are lots of studies that have been done on people and church. Simply put, most of those studies have concluded that people don't come to church anymore.

Years ago, for better or worse, people as a whole, felt morally obligated to attend church. It was what everyone did and it was expected of you. Over the last few decades that has changed. People no longer feel they need church. They no longer feel they need a broader community. This is due in part on how society views church and church-goers, as if we are a cult of hypocrites that think we have it all right. And in part due to the unfortunate message some churches force upon their congregants; messages of unworthiness, motivation by fear, and conformity and exclusivity. These are things people can do without. These are the reasons people feel they are strong enough to face life on their own and if that has been their experience, I don't blame them. If that had been my experience with church, fear, unworthiness, and uniformity, I wouldn't be here with you today. Those are things the world throws at us everyday, why would anyone intentionally seek out any more?

Truth is, my first experience with the church was love. I didn't grow up in the church and I didn't have any desire to attend church. I reluctantly went on a church retreat and despite my reluctancy, I experienced love and acceptance like I had never experienced before. People liked me just as I was. It didn't matter who my parents were or were not. It didn't matter if I had fancy clothes. It didn't matter what I could or could not physically or mentally achieve. These people loved me, without need for cause, they loved me. Love changes people. Love reaches out to people who are broken and down. Love repairs hurt and damage. Love motivates us to believe in something greater than ourselves and trust in something greater than ourselves. We love because God first loved us. And that love makes us believe and trust in this church, knowing that it is not a place of condemnation, but a place for imperfect people to gather and genuinely show love and care for each other. It's not simply a church, it's a community that builds wholeness from the fragments of our lives, where all are welcome and all are accepted just as God has welcomed us.

Let us all join the movement of love. Love so amazing and so powerful that we are continually humbled by it. Love so great that we have no choice but to trust it and build our faith upon it. Let us move toward wholeness as we move toward God's table of love.