

## INTENTIONALLY FAITHFUL: WITH

### Joshua 1:1-9

#### Intro

Last Sunday we started to talk about the idea of being intentionally faithful.

This week we begin the deeper dive into what that means and how we live that out by talking about 'with'.

I know: it's not exactly a well-constructed sentence, but it wasn't meant to be either. With is a word that tends to be a throw away or an inconsequential add-on in regard to how we speak.

For example, 'I'll have fries with that burger please': what are you focused on? The fries and the burger. Yes, they are connected but the focus is on the two things that are being connected as opposed to the connection itself.

However, what if that way of thinking causes us to miss the depth of meaning that is actually there?

Our two passages this morning allow us to unpack just how important with is and how it needs to be central building block to our intentional faithfulness. How do we know this? Because of who God is and how he relates to us: God is with us (as He was with Joshua and the Israelites when they crossed into the Promised Land) wherever we go. The scripture reads this way.

### **Joshua 1:1-9**

<sup>1</sup>After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, <sup>2</sup>'My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. <sup>3</sup>Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. <sup>4</sup>From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. <sup>5</sup>No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. <sup>6</sup>Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. <sup>7</sup>Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. <sup>8</sup>This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. <sup>9</sup>I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.'

### **John 11:32-44**

#### Intro

The following passage takes the supposition that God is with us and shows us how that is able to manifest itself as we relate to one another: we are meant to live with...a connection that (with God) is

able to be maintained even into forevermore. How do I mean? Follow along and be reminded of all of the ways that we need to be unbound from so that we might be able to dwell with. The scripture reads this way.

### **John 11:32-44**

<sup>32</sup>When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'<sup>33</sup>When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup>He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.'<sup>35</sup>Jesus began to weep. <sup>36</sup>So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' <sup>37</sup>But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup>Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.'<sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' <sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.'<sup>43</sup>When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' <sup>44</sup>The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

### **'Intentionally Faithful: With'**

This week had a lot of moving parts for my household.

On the home front, and I don't know if any of you knew this, but apparently there's this little thing called Halloween that's happening? And I don't know if you knew this, but my wife is creative, like really crazy creative. Put those two things together (with a Friday night middle school dance party acting as our initial driver) and what you have is Jen creating a Phantom of the Opera themed outfit and gondola (that attaches to the wheel chair) that is absolutely beautiful. I mean, it's like we took the gondola from the stage production on Broadway and modified it for our special needs (and yes, I have been told that the Phantom will be making another appearance this upcoming Wednesday night!).

On my work front, in addition to trying to get these particular thoughts together, I also led a funeral service and wedding rehearsal of Thursday, a wedding on Friday, and another funeral service yesterday morning.

Now on the surface, these different occasions may not seem like they have anything that allows them to be related (you know, beyond yours truly).

But as I thought about all of them as I was in the midst of them, I started to see the connective thread. A wedding, two funerals, and a Halloween dance: all of them abounded with...with.

I totally get that the 'with' was unique for every setting (even the two funerals). But there was a with. The with of family. The with of friends. The with of teachers. The with of classmates.

In each setting, there was a with that was prominently on display.

And from a place of faith, we shouldn't be surprised by that. If you are looking for a greater explanation than when you are about to receive, feel free to chat with Manny because he followed up with after worship last Sunday and we talked for more than a few minutes about this very topic (Little did I know that Manny asking me a question last Sunday during a Children's Message would influence me so...but it has!).

Here's what Manny and I talked about: the God whom we worship, the God who has been revealed to us, is, in and of God's-self, with. We believe in a triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. Whatever descriptors we feel most comfortable with, all of them articulate a God who is with. We may not appreciate let alone understand the mystery of this Trinitarian relationship, but I hope that you are able, from a place of faith, to acknowledge that it is true.

God is with.

And what we are able to hear through Scripture is that this relationality, this with, is something that God wants to share, develop, and grow with humanity.

Joshua is the new leader of the Israelites. He has been handed this mantle of responsibility and he hears from the God who has led them not only out of Egypt but through all of the years worth of wandering in the wilderness, he hears, 'Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.'

I go with you...wherever you go.

Well guess what?

That promise is for us as well! We have been called to be children of the living God and part of that reality is being able to share, develop, and grow that with, with God. We were never intended to be islands in and of ourselves. We were created (and are being recreated through Jesus sacrifice and resurrection and the subsequent leading of God's Spirit) to be with God and one another in relationship.

And that's where the intentional faithfulness picks up.

Because the reality is that so many of us would neglect that with-ness that we are meant to become a part of either because we would try and go it alone (isolating ourselves in one way or another), or we'd surround ourselves with people who are nodding agreement with what we want and what we believe (which is not the sort of with-ness that we are being led toward). All we have to do is look around at the headlines to see and hear the multitude of ways that we keep others at arms-length...and that's close enough.

No, the with-ness that we have been shown, the with-ness that we have been called to, the with-ness that we are to partake in convicts us, restores us, and empowers us up to become better.

And this with-ness that God has invited us to journey along is so strong that even after our loved ones die, even after we die, not only are we connected with God and all those who have been welcomed as sons and daughters of the Living God in all eternity, but we remain connected with those whom we were connected with in this temporal time and place.

Do you hear that? Our loved ones who have died...they are still with us...still with you.

And no, that is not meant to be a frightening statement.

Instead, that is meant to be a statement of affirmation that the promises that were made by God did not stop being fulfilled with the resurrection of Lazarus. No, that was just a precursor of the eternal glory, eternal life, eternal with that was able to be extended to us through the sacrifice of the one who raised him from the dead.

In a few minutes, after we are able to hear the names of those connected with our congregation who have died over the last 12 months, you will be invited to come forward and light a tea light to remember the people who have been a part of your life who are no longer able to be a part of your life the way that you might want because they have died.

However, allow that candle to not only be a moment to remember, but also celebrate the with-ness that, through God, you are still able to have with your loved ones. Yes, they have died, and in Jesus, not only are they made well to live eternally, but are also able to continue to be with us, imploring us to trust the promises that have been made by the God of with.

I have been reminded of that with in so many ways over the last few days. A wedding, two funerals, and a Halloween dance. There was excitement. There were tears. There was joy. There was grief. There was family. There were friends. There was connection. There was love. There were people with each other and, for so many of them, the God who has promised to be with them always.

And the reality is that if we are not intentional about sharing, developing and growing that with-ness, it will shrink, evaporating to the point that we start to think that we were never meant to be with at all.

We need to be intentionally faithful, not only, as was mentioned last week, to gather in worship, but to be in relationship with God and with one another.

And that can happen in so many ways. How do I know this? A wedding, two funerals, and a Halloween dance. Being with does not need to be clothed in religious trappings. It comes in a multitude of shapes and forms and God will go with us through all of it. Be faithful. Be intentional. Be with.

### **After Sermon Prayer**

Holy God, in and of Yourself, You are with. And from that place of relationship, You have promised to be with us wherever we go. Help us to not only trust in that promise, but also respond to Your leading, and the leading of those who have gone on before, who are imploring us to be with You, to be with each other. Lord, empower us to be intentional in our faithfulness so that no matter where we go, and no matter what we may encounter (a wedding, two funerals, or even a Halloween dance), help us to be with; with You and all those around us. Lord, empower us to be with. It is in Jesus' name that we do pray. Amen.

### **Congregational Prayer**

Holy One, we lift our hearts to you this morning, asking that you create in us clean hearts, ready to be broken for you. We lift up praises to you this day for the many blessings you have given to each of us.

We thank you for the blessings yet to come. As we gather to remember those who are physically absent from our community, we ask that our tears be dried and our mourning turned to joy. We know that those we have lost have their final rest in you and remain here with us as long as we remember their names and continue to tell their stories. May our hearts be filled with joy this day as we gather with the saints. Amen.