

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason Glombicki
July 9, 2017

Quick poll: “Who has heard of Goldilocks?” In the story “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” Goldilocks comes across the home of the three bears. She eats from three bowls of porridge – one is too salty, one is too sweet, and the final one is just right. Then, she finds three chairs – one is too high, one is too low, and the final one is just right. Finally, there are three beds – one is too hard, one is too soft, and the final one is... just right.

The beginning of today’s gospel reading is similar to this story. We heard Jesus say that John the Baptist was rejected for being too demanding, and Jesus was rejected for being too welcoming. As a people, we are often like Goldilocks. Our understanding of God constantly oscillates changing to make *us* comfortable. We say that God’s demeanor seems too little and too much. Somehow Jesus’ mission is “too liberal” or “too conservative.” Jesus is “too welcoming” or “not welcoming enough.” Our preferred Jesus is often the Jesus who is most like us - the Jesus who affirms what we already think, feel, and believe. We frequently want Goldilocks’ “just right” Jesus.

This “just right” Jesus looks different for each person and it’s a technique to limit God. Take a moment to think about your “just right” Jesus or the ways we try

limit God. (Take a moment to think.) There are many ways we attempt to control God consciously or unconsciously. Our beautiful stain glass windows limit our perception of God to those with light skin. We limit God's reach to all people by labeling it "too political" or "too divisive." We stifle God's work by believing that we do not have enough time, resources, money, ideas, people, and energy. We as a people consistently play Goldilocks saying "it's too extreme" or "it's not enough." We are never satisfied.

Yet, Jesus provides some aloe for our sunburn. In verse 25, Jesus said, "you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants." God is not revealed to theologians or pastors, and God is not made known to life-long Christians, adults, or the powerful, but rather God's presence is discovered by those with the fewest illusions about their own power, privilege, and pre-conceived notions. So, instead of approaching faith with set beliefs, Jesus urges us to learn from him by absorbing information like an infant.

Let's pause here for a moment. So far, we've been reminded to: 1) not to limit God and 2) be open, like an infant, to learning from Jesus. With that in mind, what might that look like for our faith journey? I think we can answer this question by looking at the scientific community. Brian McLaren argues that, in its purest form, the scientific community is more devoted to process than current facts. In other words, science values the scientific method more than the preservation of specific findings. However, the scientific community's findings are also believable. Although scientific

facts change, science is believable because of its credibility found in its corrigible and transparent approach. In other words, we believe science because we trust that it's able to adjust to new findings, while, at the same time, demonstrate and explain the change. So, even though science changes, it's still believable.

For generations, the church has had an opposite approach. It has gone to dangerous extremes to preserve specific beliefs and avoid change. The church killed, imprisoned, lied, and destroyed in the name of preservation. Yet, what if we took Jesus seriously and became like infants? What if we adopted a willingness to learn and question beliefs? Could we allow our beliefs to improve? Might we emphasize a religious methodology instead of the preservation of specific beliefs?¹ And, what might that look like?

Well, Jesus offers us an answer in verses 29 and 30. Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Take my yoke – Jesus wasn't talking about brunch. What is a yoke? It's pictured on the front of the bulletin. It's a way to pair animals to work as one. Here, Jesus said, "Join me." Jesus invites us to join in is something qualitatively different from the religious teaching of the time. You see, the Jewish law had 613 commandments to learn and follow.² Yet, Jesus sums them up in two "easy" commandments. The first is the great commandment, which is to "love

¹ McClaren, Brian D. *The Great Spiritual Migration: How The World's Largest Religion is Seeking A Better Way to be Christian.* "A Deeper Loyalty." P.34-48.

² This is known as the halaka and was an important part of Pharisaic tradition.

the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37) The second commandment is to “love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39). The shift from 613 detailed commands to 2 general commandments, moves our understanding of God from limited to inexhaustible, it shifts us from the need for a vast knowledge to essential understanding, and it’s a change from specific beliefs to a faithful methodology. With this movement from 613 to 2, Jesus ushers in a change in how the people understand God. A change that finds God in all three of those bears’ porridge. Because, God could be found in that too salty, too sweet, and “just right” all at once.

So, “where might Jesus’ yoke lead you?” What is it like to love God, neighbor, and self? How might we be liberated to see God in both the “just right” and the extremes? What if we focused more on a “faithful methodology” instead of “right beliefs?” (Take a moment to ponder.) I can think of a few. Perhaps we can see God more fully when we add images of Jesus embodied in dark skin. When we feel that things are “too political” or “too divisive,” maybe we can yoke ourselves to Jesus’ broad, expansive, and bold welcome. When we fall into a scarcity mindset thinking we don’t have enough, we look deeply at the abundance of God in new ways.

I’ve said all of that to remind you of our God who is gentle and humble in heart. Our God who gave us the best example of a transparent and corrigible faith as seen in the life of Jesus Christ. Our God who is found not in deep knowledge but in humble

openness. Our God who is seen in both the extremes and the “just right.” Our God who invites us to move from “right beliefs” into a faithful methodology of love. Thanks be to God for these gifts. Amen.