

Messy Can Be Good!

Isaiah 43:15-21, Luke 19:1-10

April 7, 2019

Messy – let’s admit it – sometimes messy can be fun! When I was at camp as a 4th grader the camp we went to had a “Pioneers” program – which meant we slept in covered wagons for the week. We did everything like the pioneers would have done – including killing our own chickens for the last night feast! I had no idea before that if you cut the head of a chicken off and let the body go it runs around for a while! I know – some of you are going ewww! But as a 4th grader – it was cool!

Then we had a project we were working on – the road we had to walk to get to our wagons had a big dip in it and no drainage. So we worked to build a drainage ditch. Which would have been fine, except it rained for the first three days. So we were shoveling mud – and I have no idea how it started – but there was a HUGE mud fight! It was the one day we got to walk into the main camp and take showers...and they when we got onsite – they wouldn’t let us anywhere near the bathhouse – until they hosed us off. Messy can be fun.

I remember when I was a working in Chicago – two couples who were good friends of mine were going on an overnight adventure and so I offered to watch all of their children – all 5 ages 6-10 overnight for them. We were at my friend Gail and Mark’s house and Gail hates messy. So with great delight we tie-dyed pillow cases in her kitchen and garage and took pictures ☺ We also cleaned up really good too!

Messy can be fun! Messy can be good too! In January, when the journey with uterine cancer knowingly began messy came into my life in a real way. There was no way to control – I simply had to show up where doctors sent me. Biopsy, D&C, medical procedures, more doctor appointments, setting up surgery...each step I wanted them to say nope! Nothing there. Each step took me deeper into the mess.

But here’s the things – in the midst of this mess – is some amazing work by God. Not just the fact that the cancer was all contained and so there’s no further treatment needed, just check-ups...but all 3 of my sisters came to be with me. Many of you brought meals and sent cards, had conversations, simply hugged me – and I am reminded in powerful ways that messy can bring amazing community. Messy can bring blessing in the form of care.

Messy – when I let our bishop know what was going on – his response was concern for me and then asking how they could help cover worship. In the midst of messy – our bishop and his staff got to see you – FAITH in action – not scared or anxious about “what FAITH would do” while I was out – but trusting in the gifts of people here – like all those who lead worship – and the preaching team...it’s been so great to hear the preaching team, hasn’t it? They are incredible people and great preachers! And it was so fun to tell the bishop – nah – you don’t have to worry about preaching – just come and be with this community, because they have it taken care of.

So often we think we want neat and tidy – and we often get to asking where are you , God when life gets messy. But think about this - God loves chaos and messy ...

Look at creation – Chaos of creation – desert stone, lush trees, wildflowers (dandelions in yard story).

- Winds and snow, rain and storm - no matter how much we try to be aware/know what weather is going to be – there are times – it's not what's expected... storms bring rainbows, snow storms bring skiing and bluebird days
 - Birth is messy! Every seen anything born – you know it's not neat and tidy!
- Creation itself is this amazing beautiful, complicated, gorgeous mess.

We often think we want neat and tidy...but messy is a natural part of something new

- try a new sport – not great, fall down
- shift here at FAITH to missional – messy!
- Introduced it being OK to have your kids in worship – and encouraged – well – gets a little messy – babies cry, children talk loud, and when they're not “supposed to”
- Moving is messy – every time I move – gonna label all boxes right – no “stuff” – always “stuff”

Stepping out and trying anything new is often messy – traveling to new places is often messy

- to Bolivia – Beverley and her suitcase catching up after three days
- eating food not used to
- brushing your teeth using bottled water
- being in homes with no running water or electricity
- dust – lots of dust

It's messy and beautiful and I wouldn't miss it for the world!

Let's just be honest – life is messy. Faith is messy. Because God is messy.

Jesus is messy – not just living in biblical times where they walked everyone in a dry and dusty land...but Jesus' life was messy. He was an itinerant preacher – he had no home. He had a rag tag group of followers made up off fishermen, tax collectors, traitors, and doubters. And the people he talked to! Women – even Samaritan (the worst of the worst) women, the sick, the possessed. The outsiders and the unwelcomed. The looked down upon and the shunned.

Take for example – Zacchaeus. He was messy! A Jew by birth, a tax collector by trade – which meant he worked for the hated Roman government...and to top it all off a thief and cheat. And he had gotten very rich. But his story...Luke 19:1-10 OR SING ZACCHEUS WAS A WEE LITTLE MAN

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. ²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. ⁵When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” ⁶So he

hurried down and was happy to welcome him. ⁷All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." ⁸Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." ⁹Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Zacchaeus' life was already messy – and Jesus – just stirs up that mess and makes it messier! Think about it – facing all those people he had cheated, giving up his fortune, wonder what the conversation with his wife was like! That's not neat and tidy my friends! Zacchaeus' life turned upside down and inside out.

Messy, Messy, Messy! (audio clip)

We think we want neat and tidy...and in some ways we probably do. Because neat and tidy is controllable. Neat and tidy keeps us safe, out of harm's way. Neat and tidy doesn't challenge us – though those of us who struggle with "piles" in our life might think a little differently about that! But really – neat and tidy is safe and clean.

The truth for today...and the truth we're going to hear as we head into Palm Sunday and Holy Week...and then Easter....following Jesus is not neat and tidy. If we're really following Jesus it's going to be messy and we're rub shoulders with those who don't look like us, act like us, even like us. And we are going to be love personified. Following Jesus is going to challenge us – and our worldview and your view of "the other"following Jesus is going to challenge us to ask the hard questions, to wrestle with God in the dark and the doubt. Following Jesus means one minute we will praise him and worship him and the next, just like the disciple Peter – we will deny, deny, deny that he has anything to do with us and the where we find ourselves. We will pretend we don't know him – that he has no right to impact how we live.

Following Jesus...if we really follow – will take us to a parade, to the streets of Jerusalem, to the crowds who shouted crucify him, to the soldiers who beat and mocked him...and eventually take us to a cross and a tomb...and an empty grave. Talk about messy!

And we can go back and try to keep life neat and tidy – one of the best ways is to keep Jesus at an arm's distance and following Jesus something you do on Sundays or sometimes. We can try to keep life neat and tidy by not letting anyone see the "real me" the one who doesn't want to ask for or receive help. The one who wants everyone to believe that life is what you see on Facebook – all awesome and glowy and great. We can try to keep life neat and tidy by fitting into the culture around us, never standing up or standing out. We can try...

But here's another truth for today...try as hard as you want to keep life neat and tidy. It isn't going to stay that way. It's not. Sorry. Life is going to happen and bodies are going to break down. Emotions are going to get out of control and words of hurt and anger will be spoken. We will each get on other's nerves and they ours. Cancer will come knocking at your door or

others will offer to help and you will shut the door. The evil at work in the world is going to seem to be winning. And your good friend will let your kids tie-dye in your white kitchen.

The key, I think to living in the messiness of life...and being able to say that messy can actually be good – is three-part: First – just accept that life is messy and when we follow Jesus it's gonna get messier – not tidier.

Second – let others in to the mess with you. Don't be all "I'm fine, I can do it by myself!" "I don't want to take advantage of people." I don't want to be a bother. Let me tell you this – if someone offers – you are already in their life and you are not being a bother. Whether you've been in their lives for a years or for a moment – you're in their heart. Just say yes – thank you! Believe me – letting others into your messiness – it brings joy. And things like cards, well-wishes, meals, gift cards...even a clean house – thank you very much Rachel! Letting others see your messiness, lets them know the real you. And that's really what we all long for – right? For our real selves to be known – really known.

Lastly – Messy can bring things neat and tidy never will into our lives. And in that comes the promise of our God – not that he will take the mess away – but that he'll be present with us in the midst of it. And he might look like me or you or you or you or any one of us. And God might sound like a voice on the phone or the person sitting next to us. But God has promised to be with us always – in the midst of the messy, messy, messy. And believe it or not – life, true life, chaotic, wild, roller-coaster, nail biting, turn you upside down and inside out, take the ashes and create new, messy, messy, messy, beautiful life with Jesus can be found in the mess.

Close with these words from Isaiah 43 – because they speak of the messiness and God's promise to be with and to redeem the mess of life – listen:

But now thus says the Lord,

he who created you, O Jacob,

he who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.

²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

and the flame shall not consume you.

³For I am the Lord your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

¹⁸Do not remember the former things,

or consider the things of old.

¹⁹I am about to do a new thing;

now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness

and rivers in the desert.

to give drink to my chosen people,
²¹ the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.