

YOUNG HEROES JUNE 27 2010  
ST. LUKE'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
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This past week our Summer Splash children's program, formerly called Vacation Church School, focused on young heroes. One of the young heroes they focused on was the boy who gave Jesus his lunch and how Jesus used his small gift to feed 5,000 people.

I would like to invite ANNIKA DEAN to join me here to read the scripture today.

ANNIKA, what grade are you in and where do you go to school? Who are your parents and do you have brothers or sisters? (Jennifer and Anthony Dean)

John 6:1-11: *After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. A LITTLE BOY GAVE JESUS HIS LUNCH OF FISH AND BREAD; JESUS RECEIVED THIS GIFT, GAVE THANKS TO GOD, AND DISTRIBUTED THE FOOD AND ALL ATE AS MUCH AS THEY WANTED.*

This morning we will be thinking about young heroes and I would like to begin by interviewing a young hero from our congregation.

I would like to invite AMBER KRIECH to join me here. Last year Amber was given the Power of Children award from the Indianapolis Children's Museum for a project she completed to help children in a low income section of our community.

Amber, tell us about your family, where you go to school and what grade you are in. One of the television stations did an interview with you about your award. Let's take a look at it.

SHOW THE TV INTERVIEW WITH AMBER

Amber what else would you like to say about the importance of volunteering?

Thank you.

Prayer

How old do you think he was? I mean the little boy who gave his lunch to Jesus. I'm guessing that maybe he was 8, 9, or 10 years old, about the age of some of the children here for our Summer Splash

program. Let's just imagine he was 9 years old and let's call him Joshua, which was a common Jewish name at that time.

Here is what we know. Joshua was on his way to Jerusalem for the Passover festival with his parents and brothers and sisters. They were travelling with a large crowd of people and someone in the crowd heard that Jesus, the healer and miracle worker from Nazareth, was preaching at the top of a nearby hill alongside the road to Jerusalem.

So the whole crowd of pilgrims all decided to go and hear what this travelling preacher had to say and joined the other people on the hillside listening to his message.

Now, Joshua and his family were fortunate; they got to sit up close where they could see and hear everything that Jesus said.

Joshua was captivated by Jesus when he heard Jesus speaking about a God who loved and forgave everyone unconditionally - young and old were important to him. Soon it was passed dinnertime and Joshua heard one of the followers of Jesus tell him to send everyone away so they could get some food before nightfall. He heard Jesus say: "YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT." The disciple complained that they didn't have enough money to buy food for such a large crowd.

Joshua realized that the disciples were worried about having enough food for everyone so he took his little sack lunch of five small biscuit size loaves of bread and two small sardine size fish and he brought them up and gave them to Jesus. I can imagine Jesus looking at the love and generosity in this little boy's eyes as he handed him his lunch.

Jesus reached down and received his gift of food and lifted them up to God and offered a prayer of thanks to God for Joshua's heartfelt gift and generosity. The disciples of Jesus looked around at each other as if to say, "What difference is that little amount of food going to do with such a large crowd?"

Then Jesus gave the bread and fish to each of his disciples to distribute and the supply of bread and fish in the hands of Jesus never ran out. Each disciple filled his basket with the unending supply of bread and fish from the hands of Jesus and Jesus provided enough food for everyone to have as much as they wanted and needed.

All the time, Joshua stood there with his eyes and mouth open as he watched his little lunch expanding to provide food for a large crowd of people.

I can imagine that after all the food was distributed Jesus knelt down and said: "Thank you Joshua for your gift and for your generosity."

It has always amazed me that none of the adults there thought to give Jesus their lunch to share but this little boy gave his lunch to Jesus out of the generosity of his heart and Jesus received his gift and a miracle occurred.

Sometimes, we as adults need to look to children as examples of faith and generosity. From this little boy we all might learn that when we give ourselves and our gifts, no matter how large or small, to Jesus, Jesus magnifies them, miracles happen and they go much further than we ever would have expected.

This little boy showed us that children can be heroes and taught us a lot about faith and generosity.

The Children's Museum of Indianapolis has a permanent display entitled THE POWER OF CHILDREN: MAKING A DIFFERENCE. It is a display which is intended to demonstrate the young children can make a powerful difference in the world and to teach us adults to make a difference in the world as well.

At the information and visitor's desk, we have this brochure which describes THE POWER OF CHILDREN exhibit at the Children's Museum and I would encourage us all to visit this display with our children or grandchildren. I visited that display recently and was greatly inspired at the difference children can make in our world as young heroes.

They have displays of three young people who have made a transforming difference in the world: ANNE FRANK from the 1940's; RUBY BRIDGES from the 1960's and RYAN WHITE from the 1980's.

Anne Frank was a Jewish girl who lived with her parents and sister in Amsterdam Holland during World War Two in the 1940's. Adolf Hitler, the leader of Germany at that time, blamed the Jews, Gypsies, and homosexuals of Europe for all of their problems and started a campaign to drive all the Jews, Gypsies and homosexuals out of Europe or to kill them in gas chambers.

Hitler's Nazi troops rounded up all the Jews in Amsterdam, putting them on trains and sending them to concentration camps in Germany where six million were put to death in gas chambers.

Anne Frank was 13 years- old when her father and mother decided to take their family into hiding in a secret small apartment at the back of her father's business in 1943. For more than two years, Anne lived with her mother, father, older sister and four other Jewish people in a small cramped apartment where they had to keep silent during the day for fear of being discovered by the people who worked in the business downstairs and never got to breathe a breath of fresh air for over two years. Friends would bring them food at night so they wouldn't starve to death.

Anne received a diary for her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday so she spent a lot of time each day doing her studies and writing in her diary about her life and feelings.

Anne and her family and friends hid in that small apartment for over two years until someone betrayed them to the Nazis who invaded the apartment, arrested them, separated them from other members of their families and put them in cattle box cars on trains and shipped them to concentration camps in Germany. Anne and her sister Margot became ill from lack of food and medical care and died in a concentration camp seven months later when Anne was 15 years old.

Anne's father was the only one in the secret apartment to survive the concentration camps and after the war he came back to the secret apartment and discovered Anne's diary about her experience and it was published under the title *DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL*.

Anne's diary sold millions of copies and was translated into 60 languages because it is an example of the suffering and deaths of 6 million Jews during WW2 and the feelings of love and hope of a teenage Jewish girl in spite of her oppression.

What amazes me and what I learn from Anne is how she continues to live with a spirit of hope and love for all people because of her faith in spite of her imprisonment in that apartment.

Here are some of the amazing things she wrote in her diary:

I LONG TO RIDE A BIKE, DANCE, WHISTLE, LOOK AT THE WORLD, FEEL YOUNG AND KNOW THAT I'M FREE, AND YET I CAN'T LET IT SHOW. IF ALL EIGHT OF US WERE TO FEEL SORRY FOR OURSELVES OR WALK AROUND WITH DISCONTENT CLEARLY VISIBLE ON OUR FACES, WHERE WOULD THAT GET US?

RICHES, PRESTIGE, EVERYTHING CAN BE LOST. BUT THE HAPPINESS IN YOUR HEART CAN ONLY BE DIMMED; IT WILL ALWAYS BE THERE, AS LONG AS YOU LIVE, TO MAKE YOU HAPPY AGAIN. I WANT TO BE USEFUL OR BRING ENJOYMENT TO ALL PEOPLE, EVEN THOSE I'VE NEVER MET. I WANT TO GO ON LIVING EVEN AFTER MY DEATH!

IT'S A WONDER I HAVEN'T ABANDONED ALL MY IDEALS; THEY SEEM SO ABSURD AND IMPRACTICAL. YET I CLING TO THEM BECAUSE I STILL BELIEVE, IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING, THAT PEOPLE ARE TRULY GOOD AT HEART.

I think that 13 year-old Jewish girl can teach all of us about how to handle hard times without giving up hope and to always believe in the basic goodness of people in spite of some of the evidence to the contrary.

Whenever we go through hard times, the loss of a job or health or a divorce, it is easy for us to give up and become negative or hopeless. However, when we look at the tremendous suffering that Anne went through and how she never gave up hope, always lived with compassion towards others, and sought to bring happiness into her cramped world, it makes us realize that faith, hope and compassion are the only values which live eternally.

Anne Frank is a young hero and teaches something to all of us because she shows all of us how to live with hope in the bleakest of circumstances and how to believe in the goodness of people even when you are experiencing the evil that people are capable of.

RUBY BRIDGES is the six- year-old African American girl who was the first black child in a New Orleans school after court ordered desegregation in 1960. Prior to 1960 all the schools in the south and many in the north were segregated; whites went to white only schools which were generally the better schools and blacks went to black only schools which were generally poorer schools.

In 1960 the federal courts determined that separate schools were not equal to each other and that blacks should be allowed to attend white schools.

However, there was hatred and bitterness from many whites over the idea of integrating schools.

The NAACP in New Orleans asked families in the black community if any of them would allow their children to be the first to integrate a white school knowing that there would be great hostility and suffering as a result.

Mr. and Mrs. Bridges had a very bright daughter, Ruby, who they wanted to get a better education than she was likely to get in an all black school so they volunteered to send Ruby as the first black student at the William Frantz grade school in New Orleans.

On her first day of school, federal marshals came to Ruby's house to take Ruby and her mother to school and to protect them from the hostile crowds which had gathered at the school to protest the integration of schools.

Several hundred angry white people had gathered around the school with hateful signs and shouting and screaming hateful things at Ruby and her mother as the federal marshals took them into the school on that first day.

That moment was etched into our memories by painter Norman Rockwell when he painted a small black girl in a white dress being escorted by federal marshals into the New Orleans school.

The white students all left the school because their parents would not even allow them to be in the building where a black girl was attending classes. Mrs. Barbara Henry, originally from Boston, was the only teacher willing to stay in the school and teach Ruby Bridges.

So for a whole year, Ruby was escorted to class every day by federal marshals and was met every day by screaming white protesters and was the only student in her first grade class with Mrs. Henry. Ruby said the reason she kept going to school was because she loved Mrs. Henry and knew Mrs. Henry loved her.

A child psychologist met every week with Ruby to see how she was handling all of the hatred being expressed towards her. She explained that the only one that bothered her was a white woman who was there every day with a small casket with a black doll in it and shouting that Ruby was going to be killed and put in a casket.

However, Ruby's mother told her simply to ask God to be with her each day and that God would protect her from all the hatred that was expressed towards her. So each day Ruby would pray as she walked past the protesters.

One day, Mrs. Henry, Ruby's teacher asked Ruby what she prayed for when she walked by the protesters and Ruby said her mother taught her to pray the prayer Jesus prayed from the cross: GOD FORGIVE THEM BECAUSE THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING.

Can you believe that? Here is a little 6 year-old girl praying that God would forgive those hateful protesters who want her dead. How many adults do you know who would have the faith and love to do that?

Ruby was a model of the teachings of Jesus who said: LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO ARE AGAINST YOU.

It is hard to believe that a little six-year-old girl could bring such wisdom and love to such a conflicted situation. Ruby Bridges is another young hero and we can learn how to forgive our enemies from her.

In 2000, forty years after the desegregation of New Orleans schools, newspaper reporters wondered what Ruby Bridges was doing now. They went to New Orleans and discovered that Ruby Bridges was a volunteer mentor three days a week at the same school that she had integrated 40 years earlier helping students with their homework and personal problems.

Ruby graduated from college, married, had four sons, had a travel business, attended church and volunteered at school.

Today, Ruby Bridges and her teacher, Mrs. Henry, who now lives in Boston, travel around to schools together and talk about their experiences in 1960 and encourage all children to become friends with kids who are different than themselves.

Ruby Bridges reminds me to pray for those who do wrong: FATHER, FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING.

RYAN WHITE is the third young person in the POWER OF CHILDREN display at the Children's Museum.

You know the story. Ryan White had hemophilia and had to have regular blood transfusions. When he was 13 years-old he discovered that he had AIDS from an impure blood transfusion.

In 1984, we knew very little about AIDS, there was no cure for it or medication to treat it, and people were afraid they would get it just by touching a person with AIDS, which is not true.

Ryan lived in Kokomo, Indiana and the school board voted to not allow him to attend classes because of the fear of AIDS so Ryan had to stay home for a year and talked to his teachers over the phone and did his lessons at home.

Eventually, the court ordered the School Board to allow Ryan back in school but when he went back to school he was called ugly names, his books and locker were regularly defaced, and no one would eat with him in the cafeteria or sit near him in class. Even when Ryan and his mother went to a Methodist church one Easter, they were asked to sit in a special place apart from everyone else.

One day, someone drove by his house and fired a gun into their front room window.

Ryan's mother decided that it was time to move and so she talked to the Superintendent in Cicero, Indiana about moving there and whether or not they would allow Ryan to attend school with other young people. The Cicero superintendent made a commitment to educate his students about AIDS so they would not be so afraid of Ryan.

Then, when Ryan attended Cicero, the students welcomed him with open arms and he was able to attend school without fear of discrimination or hatred. Ryan's goal was to graduate from high school and go on to college but he died of AIDS just a month before his high school graduation.

Ryan became famous around the nation and the world for his courage in facing his illness and his compassion for those who discriminated against people with AIDS. He always simply said that they needed to be educated about AIDS and then they wouldn't be afraid of him.

Ryan also appeared on many television shows and there was a television movie made about his life. He became friends with many famous people including ELTON JOHN who sang at his funeral service held at Second Presbyterian church here in Indianapolis in 1989.

Ryan's attitude of compassion and need for educating those who hated him is a model for all of us to follow.

Anne Frank lived with discrimination because she was Jewish, Ruby Bridges lived with discrimination because she is African American, and Ryan White lived with discrimination because he had AIDS.

All three of these young heroes teach us that, in spite of the problems and challenges we face, we can overcome them through our attitudes of love, compassion and forgiveness. These are three children who are good models for all of us.

And, maybe the larger lesson for all of us, is for us to examine our own attitudes today to see if there are people we are prejudiced against or antagonistic towards. From these young heroes we too can learn love, compassion and forgiveness.

Let us pray.