

Dive In!

Vacation Bible School Wrapup, August 7, 2016

INJ For Vacation Bible School this year we dove into a deep sea adventure. We learned some facts about strange and interesting creatures and saw that there are some similarities between the unfamiliar world underwater and the one in which we live and breathe. It was a fun week, with almost a hundred people involved over the four days. The best part was that we got to dive into God's Word. Today I want to review the lessons from the week so that you can get a taste of our adventure, and perhaps you will be able to remember the memory treasures and use them.

If you dive deep enough under the water, the sunlight fades away. Down in the darkness, the fish can be very different from the ones we catch and eat. Deep down, if you are looking intently into the gloom, you might see a small light appear. Get closer to check it out. Suddenly, a flash of sharp teeth, and the black dragonfish will have claimed its prey. The light is attached to its mouth, and it lures the unsuspecting for lunch.

Our enemy is not a fish, but the Devil who wants to devour us. He is also sneaky and tricky. What seems to be innocent is really a trap. He lures us into a false sense of safety. A quick turn, and we are done. Adam and Eve were residents of a perfect world when Satan appeared in the guise of a snake. He twisted God's words and made what was wrong seem right.

Do you remember how Satan tempted Adam and Eve? "How come God won't let you eat from any of these wonderful trees? He is an unbearable burden on your existence, isn't he?"

Eve resisted his silky words and said God only forbade them one tree, and if they ate from it they would die. Satan directly contradicted God. "You will not die! He is hiding good things from you. If you disobey God, you will be like him. Eat! And take from him what he won't give you."

Adam and Eve both ate the forbidden fruit. They disobeyed their perfectly loving and kind Creator. They brought upon themselves the curse of sin. They were separated from God and

earned the wages of death for us all.

When a fish gets eaten, it is no big deal. When sinners sin, we want to think it is nothing to be concerned about. But sin means eternal death. God didn't ignore the tragedy. He didn't rage and shout about the way all his plans were ruined, either. The God who made a perfect world also promised to send a Savior to rescue his fallen people. He did not abandon Adam and Eve, and he does not abandon us to our sinful condemnation, either.

The Savior God promised didn't appear right away. For many years, God's people were to remember the promise and to trust it. Even when times were dark, and when the complications of life seemed insurmountable, they were to turn back to the words of God. He would not forget them. He would not fail.

Our confidence in every trial is that God promised and sent that Savior. You know how he did it. The Almighty Lord God did not snap his fingers and remake everything pure again. He did not hire an outside vendor to clean up the mess. The memory verse for the first night of Vacation Bible School was from 1 Timothy 1:15 "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." God sent his own Son. He came himself to take the place of corrupt and rebellious sinners. He stands in our place. Jesus is our Savior.

Sometimes we have to wait and be patient while God keeps his promises. The misery is real. So is the temptation. But we rely on God's words, even when we are hard pressed. Those words are true, even when we have failed miserably. We trust that our God is the God who saves. Jesus has come to save sinners, all of them. Even me. Even you.

Hymn 378 All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall

2. Wouldn't it be great if, when the Devil tempts us, we could push a button and he would go away? Swipe to the left, and he would disappear, just like on our screens? Or, if we could put in a prayer-call to the Lord – a spiritual 911 – and God would stand over our shoulder and scare Satan away! Poof! No more problems.

Under the sea, there is a fish that seems small and tasty and even sort of cute. You might think it would be easy pickings for

hungry predators. You would be wrong, because when this fish is startled, it sucks in a whole bunch of water and puffs up to several times its normal size. And, sharp spikes then protrude in every direction. Any fish that tries to bite down will get an unpleasant surprise! The porcupine fish has a built in defense against its enemies.

We can't suck in water to scare off those who would harm our Christian faith. We can suck in God's Word, which makes us strong, firm and steadfast. The second Bible History Lesson we learned was from Matthew 4. Jesus the Savior stands in our place. He has taken our human flesh, and has humbled himself under the burden of God's law. For 40 days he fasted and lived in the wilderness. He was weak and tired and worn out.

And Satan took the opportunity to attack. It seemed like an obvious answer to Jesus' needs. Why not turn stones into bread? If Jesus is God and has all that divine power, what good does it do not to use it? If you are hungry, eat! What could be wrong with that?

All sorts of things were wrong with what Satan proposed. Jesus was there to humble himself, not to make himself comfortable. He was to limit the use of his almighty power, not show off with it. He was to trust that his Heavenly Father would provide even in these circumstances. To step in and provide for himself would be unbelief. If Jesus turned stones into bread, he would not be our Savior.

Jesus resisted temptation by turning to God's Word. "We do not live on bread alone, but on the powerful word of God." What does that mean for us? When I am hungry, God promises to give daily bread. When I am weak, he says he provides strength. Even if I should die in this situation, God has promised heaven to me. I can trust his words without question. Wait, and be patient. God's Word is my confidence!

Satan came at Jesus again. "You want to use God's Word? He says his angels will guard and keep you. So jump off this high perch and see if he does it!" If Jesus jumped, it would have been the opposite of trusting God. It would have been daring God to keep his promise under the terms and conditions set by me. Jesus again sucked in God's Word and defended himself against Satan. "The Bible says not to put the Lord your God to the test." God's words are our defense, too. Suck them in and use them!

A third temptation tried to get under Jesus' skin. Satan used the art of reason. "This fight between us, Jesus, is going to be long and hard. I won't give up. You won't give up. Why don't we end it all here and avoid the pain and suffering? I will give you all the pleasures of the world and never interrupt you again. You can do whatever you like after you bow down and worship me."

Do you ever feel that kind of temptation? Give up and it will be easier? Except it won't get easier. Sin entangles and corrupts. The curse of God makes misery on those who refuse to listen to him. Conscience interrupts. And over it all the condemnation of hell looms. There is no easy way. Only the way God has made in Christ Jesus. He obeyed. He won the victory. He opened heaven to all who trust in him. The words God has inspired for us to learn and know are everything we need!

So Jesus did not bow down to Satan. He said, "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." Only the True and Triune God can rescue us from sin and death. Only his words will defend us from every evil attack and trap of the Devil. Jesus took every one of those temptations for us, and he is victorious for us. We worship Jesus our Savior, and we use his words to break the power of Satan.

The memory verse we learned urges us to keep God's Word handy for daily use. Memorize it and learn it. Hear it and contemplate it. God's blessing comes to those who suck in his words often. "Blessed ... are those who hear the word of God and obey it." That word shows us Jesus, our Substitute. He defeated Satan and he gives us the victory.

Hymn 202 If God Had Not Been on Our Side

3. The central message of Christianity is unmistakable. You have heard it and learned it many times. The life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the backbone of our faith. The pattern of the Church Year repeats the highlights for us. God promised the Savior, and sent him at Christmas. God took on human flesh and was born of a virgin. Jesus was placed under the law to keep it in our place.

Jesus perfectly obeyed every command of God, yet he was

not loved and adored by the people. Enemies of God, those who sought personal gain and power, opposed Jesus. They plotted and planned, and came up with exactly what the Lord intended. To be our Savior, Jesus not only had to obey perfectly in our place, he also had to die as an innocent sacrifice in our place. So Jesus was betrayed and condemned and crucified on Good Friday. By the shedding of blood, the blood of the God-man, atonement was made for all sin. For our sin. The death of God's Son paid the wages of sin completely.

God's story is not over at the cross, though. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. He conquered death and left it behind. At Easter we shout: Alleluia! Jesus lives. And now we have proof that his payment for sin was enough. We have confidence that since he rose, we, too, will live. All of God's promises are true! Jesus is the one in whom we trust.

The message of Jesus' death and resurrection is something we want to proclaim to everyone. It isn't hard to understand sin, and the need we have for a Savior. Everyone has similar experiences with guilt and fear. So we talk about Jesus who forgives sin. Who removes fear. Who lives to give life to all who trust in him.

In the ocean you will find a strange sea creature called the sand dollar. It isn't a fish, but a mollusk, a shelled animal that feeds on plankton in the water. The animal is striking because of the obvious designs that are visible on the shell. Christians through the ages have used those designs to tell the Christian gospel. Look at a sand dollar, and you see the design of a flower on the top side. It looks like a poinsettia, the red flower we use at Christmas to celebrate Jesus' incarnation. In the center is a star, like the one the Wise Men followed to Bethlehem. The sand dollar speaks of the Savior's birth!

There are five holes in the sand dollar. Four small ones correspond to the four nail holes in Jesus' hands and feet. The larger hole is like the wound the spear made when they stuck it into Jesus at the end of Good Friday. On the underside of the sand dollar the design resembles an Easter lily. That flower we place around the altar to rejoice that Jesus has risen from the dead. The entire Christian message is right there in the markings on a sand dollar! It makes for an interesting conversation.

But you don't need a sand dollar to talk about Jesus. The message you hear at church, at Vacation Bible School, in Bible Class is the message you also speak to your family and friends and neighbors. Jesus died and rose again to forgive all your sins. Jesus comes to you in the gospel word to give faith and to strengthen it. Use those words of God for yourself and for those you love. The memory verse for this day came from 1 Thessalonians: " We believe that Jesus died and rose again."

Hymn 159 Morning Breaks upon the Tomb

Read the Nicene Creed at the beginning of the fourth devotion

4. On the last day of VBS we covered a lot of Biblical ground. We talked about the people of God's promise, the Israelites. They had a rough time. When they were in Egypt, they had been miserably enslaved. Yet God had promised to lead them out of captivity and to their own land. Nothing happened fast. Would God do what he said?

God sent Moses to lead the people out of Egypt. The process was not easy. It took ten plagues and lots of wrangling before Pharaoh let them go. Even after the Israelites headed East, the Egyptian army pursued them. Finally, the people were trapped. In front of them was the Red Sea, with waters they could not cross. Behind them was that fearsome army, bearing down with murderous intent! How could God help them? When would he help them? Why is he making this so difficult?

Do you ever ask those questions about your life? It doesn't seem that God cares about us. What it looks like is that he is making things worse! Misery and fear and uncertainty swirl around us. Do we get angry with God? Or, do we trust his promises? Lord, forgive us for our unbelief! Fill us with confidence in your word.

So Gracious and Almighty God did not abandon his people at the Red Sea. He caused the waters to divide and all those people walked across on dry land! The Egyptian threat was neutralized. The people of God were safe. Yes! God keeps every one of his promises.

The lesson is a hard one to learn, also for us. The Israelites spent a lot of time in the wilderness as they traveled to the land God

had promised them. All the while they complained, they grumbled, they forgot about how good the Lord is. And God remained faithful. He provided everything they needed. He kept before them his promise of a Savior. He never failed.

We are just like them! They grumbled because they didn't have water in the desert. "God wants us to die! We should have stayed in Egypt!" God did not want them to die. He gave them life not only spiritually in the promised Savior, but also physically. He provided water from a rock, and everyone drank.

They needed food on their travels. God gave them manna. Every day there was bread miraculously in front of them. When they got sick of the bread and complained about it, God gave them quail. Meat to eat! Did they give thanks? Once or twice, but then they resumed their grumbling. Isn't it amazing how often things are not right, and the reason they are so bad (in our own eyes) is that God messed it up.

God isn't the problem. We are. That is why he sent his Son to be the Savior. Why he was born and died and rose again. Why he gives us the words of his promise to hear and learn and memorize. When we are so stubborn and self-entered, God gives us his gracious words. He calls us to repent of our sin. He forgives us in Christ Jesus.

What fish helped us learn this lesson? It is familiar to us from the movie "Finding Nemo." In the ocean the sea anemone has tentacles that stun unsuspecting fish so it can eat them. But the clownfish is not affected by the poison. The clownfish can swim safely through the tentacles of the sea anemone while the predators have to stay away. God gives us protection through his word. We swim safely through the passages, the chapters, the Bible History, the memory verses. The Enemy is turned away.

When your life looks like it is falling to pieces, and when it seems that not even God can help, turn back to his promises. Trust what he says in the Bible. Peter wrote our memory verse, and it is a good reminder for all our life – even after VBS: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." Dive in to God's Word, and you will see the Lord's gracious care for you. SDG Amen.