

There were a lot of storylines people were anticipating going into the Olympics. Would our men's basketball team rebound from a very shaky lead up to the games or would they continue to falter? Would our women's soccer team continue the sheer domination they've shown for the last decade? Would our new generation of swimmers rise to the occasion now that the era of Michael Phelps was officially over? Would Covid bring the entire thing crashing down around us before it ever truly got started? But I don't think anyone was anticipating the storyline that hit the games like a freight train this week. Everyone knew that we would be talking about Simone Biles, it was a given. She's a legend. The greatest gymnast of all time, and surely she was about to make even more history in Tokyo, and she did...just not in the way anyone was expecting.

The news that Simone wasn't going to compete in the team competition and then the individual all-around was enough to shake USA gymnastics to its core. The questions surrounding her were never ending. Was she hurt? Was she feeling her age? Was there something going on people didn't know? Even the extremely annoying question of was this all a ploy to garner excitement for individual competition? And then two words entered the conversation that made me cringe because I knew it was going to lead the conversation into just the worst sectors of humanity: mental health.

When I listened to the interview after Simone had exited the team competition and I heard her describe going to the locker room and not being able to stop shaking, I knew...she had had a panic attack. The experience she described was one I was all too familiar with and immediately my heart broke for her, because I know how easily it is to feel ashamed of anxiety when you're dealing with it on your own, let alone when you're dealing with it on a global stage under the scrutiny of every single person with access to the internet. And of course the conversation started...what did this exit mean for her legacy? What did this say about her? Could we still call her the GOAT after all of this? Had she done enough to cement her place in the annals of history or were these Olympics a necessity to that title?

It was maddening...because here's the thing. Hands down, without question, Simone Biles is the greatest gymnast the world has ever seen. She has four different moves named after her. *Four*. She has done things that no one has ever seen before, won more accolades than can truly be enumerated. And then there this, as her star was ascending to its highest peak, she was willing to speak out against sexual abuse, help bring to light the disgusting practices at the heart of USA gymnastics for far too long, and do all she could to make sure that the survivors of this abuse were heard. And yet somehow...even with all that, so much of the world didn't feel like it was

enough. She had done all of this and yet people still wanted more. She had shown more strength and bravery and composure than most people can even fathom, and yet more was demanded, more was expected, and it made you realize a truth that we all have always known: people will always demand more. There will always be something to complain about, some expectation not met. It doesn't matter what has happened in the past, because all that matters is today, this very second, and if this very second is disappointing well then it's all useless. Humanity will *always* find something to point a finger at and say...this isn't enough.

It's as true now as it was thousands of years ago. As true in the Olympic halls of Tokyo as it was in the burning sands of the Sinai desert. As true for 21<sup>st</sup> century people as it was for the Israelites. No matter what, we will find something, anything to complain about even in the face of perfection, even in the face of freedom, even in the face of salvation, and that is exactly what we find the Israelites doing in our first lesson this morning. Humankind has always been humankind and so we enter into the story of God's people in the midst of a lot of *whining*.

To give you some context...our first lesson comes from Exodus 16. Passover, the Red Sea, Moses demanding Pharaoh let God's people go is in Exodus 14. We are barely two chapters removed from God doing the

absolutely incomprehensible for the people of Israel. God has freed them from generations of slavery, violence, and oppression. God heard their pleas and sent them an advocate who would rescue them and ultimately lead them to the Promised Land. God showed how deeply God loved them, *two chapters ago*, and yet here we are. We're only a few weeks, months maybe into the wilderness journey and humanity is just rearing its ugly head.

I mean there's complaining: *we are so hungry!* And then there's *complaining*: if only we were still in Egypt! Sure, we were slaves, but at least we were full!! Talk about the most short-sighted perspective in history. God has just done this amazing thing for them, and already the people are livid, annoyed, cranky, and whiny because they don't have the food they were expecting. Imagine being at a point where you decide that slavery is preferable because you had food, as opposed to a life of salvation. Imagine railing at the God that just gave you the gift of salvation and basically saying it isn't good enough because your stomach is growling. It's practically unfathomable. The complete lack of perspective. The utter boldness it takes to declare that God has done something horrible for them despite it being one of the most miraculous things God has ever done.

Ya know, I keep saying imagine doing that, but the reality is, we don't have to stretch our imaginations too far to get to scenarios in which this

happens, in which we are just as guilty as the Israelites. Imagine believing that God sent God's only Son to save the whole world and then being indignant that when God said *everyone*, God meant *everyone*. Imagine living in a world that is literally filled to the brim with abundance, with more than enough, and then hoarding those items for ourselves because we need them more than our neighbors who have nothing. Imagine walking around a creation that God lovingly created for humanity to steward and then treating it recklessly, carelessly, like it isn't the most precious thing we have been entrusted with. Imagine knowing that God created each of us with care and declared that we were beloved and cherished, and then looking in the mirror and saying God's creation is worthless, meaningless. We are constantly in the same position as the Israelites, so intensely human, but we so rarely want to fully admit that we do this.

We don't want to admit that even in the midst of a world that God is constantly providing with abundance, more daily bread than we could ever imagine, we are perpetually finding something to complain about. Somehow, some way, we always find something to point our finger at God and declare that it's not good enough. It could be something about our neighbors, the world we live in, the creation we walk amongst, or ourselves, it doesn't matter, we find something to say isn't enough. We sound just like

the Israelites, you know *back then* at least we had food! Forget that life was awful and dangerous! We don't know how to be happy with what we have!

But here's the amazing thing...in the face of the Israelites throwing their best five year old temper tantrum...God responds. God says, ok, I hear you. You're hungry, so we're going to get you some food. God literally makes food fall from the skies, enough each day for each person to have their fill. Enough that they don't have to hoard, don't have to steal from one another, enough to provide for all. God doesn't lament their stubborn humanity, God just keeps doing what God does best...God provides, in miraculous, wondrous ways, that are incomprehensible to our human hearts, because at the end of the day we have no idea how we deserve such treatment. But God has never been in the business of what we do and don't deserve, God has always been in the business of love, of providing for God's people in ways they sometimes can't even recognize.

Each and every Sunday, we join together and we pray...give us this day our daily bread. Sometimes we think this means we're only praying for food or only praying for communion. Yet, Martin Luther said that this petition means that we are asking God to provide everything we need for daily living, from food to good weather, from good friends to good government. We are bold enough, audacious enough to ask God to keep

being God, to keep providing for us, even when we get it wrong, even when we aren't as appreciative as we should be, even when we fold our arms in the middle of the wilderness and lament that we used to have it better.

It's not always the easiest thing to trust, to believe in, and yet God just keeps showing us again and again that God never tires of providing for us. I mean, think about the last year. It's been so easy to look around at what we don't have, to complain about how things aren't how they used to be, but think about what God has provided. Technology that has allowed us to connect in incredible ways. Weird little communion cups that allow us to still experience Jesus' body and blood. Doctors, nurses, and scientists who never stop striving to bring healing and protection to the world. Enough tv shows and movies to binge when you're stuck at home. Things like DoorDash and Grubhub when you're tired of cooking. People who are willing to work in those places which might not provide as much protection in order that others might be served. If we dare to look at the world with bold, daily bread eyes, we will see that God has never stopped providing for us, and God is never going to stop. No matter how much we complain. No matter how much we whine. No matter how much we say it isn't good enough. God is going to keep showing up. God is going to keep providing. God is going to keep being the GOAT. **AMEN!!!**