

Scriptural Meditation on Mission

Matthew 8:1-13

Matthew gives us two examples of the power of Jesus' healing touch in this passage. Jesus is journeying through Galilee teaching and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom while curing disease and sickness. Jesus climbs a hill overlooking the beautiful Sea of Galilee and continues to teach. As Jesus finishes and climbs down the hill, a leper approaches asking for healing. The leper may have been seen in the shadows of the crowds, standing alone, at a safe distance. The leper may have been desperate to hear the words of Jesus, to hear the good news of the Kingdom of God. Jesus stretches His hand out cleansing the leper. To be completely healed, the leper will find a priest to bestow the cleaning rites. A tradition all Jews would be familiar with at the time.

As Jesus walks the short distance to Capernaum, the market place and central location of travelers from many places, Jesus receives an appeal from a centurion to heal his servant. Jesus is willing to go and heal the servant. The centurion has enough concern and compassion for his servant but does not feel worthy of Jesus' presence in His home.

The amazing gift of healing is not only extended to the Israelites. Jesus is willing to heal all faithful. The leper is an outcast, the centurion is a gentile, the servant is less, yet Jesus heals them because of their overflowing faith. They are living a life reflecting the Kingdom of God. We need to look for the people in the shadows, the marginal, the ones it is easy to over look; we must reach out and heal them in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

The people we need to reach are not always exactly like us. If that were the way Jesus did His ministry, these stories would not have been part of the teachings of Matthew. Jesus healed an unclean marginal person, and two others that were not Jews. We need to reach beyond our culture, our neighborhoods, to people that need the healing of Christ, that need to hear that in their brokenness there is a Savior that will heal them. We need to welcome and minister to the people that can walk in on their own, the leper, and the ones that from a distance we can touch with a Christ-like hand. "When I was hungry, you brought me food; when I was thirsty, you brought me drink..." We need to provide the things that are needed to the people living broken and hurt. We need to be the healing presence in our communities and our world. If we are not working from that location with love, we are not following our Lord.

Luke 9:57-62

The call to follow Jesus is not now, nor has it been, free and easy. Jesus reminds us that we are to “Go and proclaim the Kingdom of God!” We must follow without looking back. In order to go and proclaim the good news we step out on faith, without a map, without the guarantee of anything tangible. We are called, like many before us to be Disciples of Christ, proclaiming the Good News that the Kingdom is near. Jesus has proclaimed the Kingdom of God here on earth and we need to be the vision of light that shows others the arrival of the Kingdom of God changes everything. We are called to continue in His footsteps preaching, teaching, and healing.

The preaching is encouraging others to walk with in a Christ focus direction without looking back. The preaching is a reminder that the Holy Spirit is with us. The teaching is taking people through the scriptures and teachings of past saints. The teaching is learning the scriptures and telling the stories. The healing is caring for and witnessing to the miracles that a strong faith brings to individuals.

Jesus calls us to follow in a faith-filled journey, without the distractions of daily tasks. Jesus wants us to follow without questions, wants us to receive and extend unconditional love, and to be Disciples leading others to the Kingdom of God.

This passage tells of three nameless individuals that could not follow. There are people called yet, can not follow. There are many called, yet we are not always able to respond with a yes. But when we do respond and follow Jesus it, He tells us we can not look back. Jesus provides us with a visual add to help us understand. Once a plow is moving under the grip of a hand it keeps going. There is a track being dug and there is no reverse or backing up. There is a forward defined movement. When we respond to Jesus with a “yes” we will follow you, our world is not our own any longer. The path is carved by the presence of the Holy Spirit to places we can not image. There are uneven and difficult times on that path, there are rocks, there are sudden stops and starts but the path is not our own. We need to accept that this is a journey some can make and others have distractions that stand in the way of the faith-filled journey.

We can never look back on the journey. We can never doubt the call of Jesus to follow. We must remember we are stepping out in faith with the Holy Spirit. We are never alone on the journey.

Matthew 13:31-35

As very small children one of the first amazing things we witness that demonstrates the miracle of creation is in the planting of a seed. In a little Styrofoam cup we plant a tiny lifeless seed, water it, put it in the sun and watch amazing things happen. It is amazing and unexplainable. In a place of total wonder Jesus shares the parable of the Mustard seed. This seed is a very small, sand colored round seed. As this seed grows it becomes a great shrub and then a tree. It becomes a place that provides a home for birds and shade for a weary traveler.

In the same way Jesus describes the Kingdom of God like yeast. A very small amount of yeast is needed to make things rise. Jesus is giving us something small and seemingly insignificant: a seed, a pinch of yeast. They are ordinary simple things, barely worth noticing, yet, they create great change. The seed planted becomes a tree providing a home and protection. The yeast is mixed with other ingredients and becomes many loaves of bread to nourish and sustain life.

Let's think of the church as a small seed planted in a neighborhood, in a community, in a culture. The church is place, a building, a facility, a sanctuary, like the tree, it is a place. But the church is nothing without the people. The church, like the tree is a place that is open and welcoming. But for it to be the Kingdom of God it must preach the gospel, spread the good news of Jesus Christ being the son of God and our Lord and Savior. The church needs to heal, teach and gather the margin people of our community. It is open and receptive to those that came to nest, but it needs to be a place willing to change. Perhaps that is why the pinch of yeast is needed. The yeast makes a huge change although it is small. The church can reshape the injustices of the world, of the culture around it. When we look at Jesus' ministry isn't that what he was about? The kingdom was not a mighty powerful military force; it was a small figure, a human person, actually a person barely worth noticing that change a society. The change was so great that we are still studying and learning what that small figure was all about.

We may feel small and ordinary sometimes in our lives but we have a powerful witness, a great story to tell about a Savior that came to live among us, to teach and heal and love us for who we are. We are called by that Lord to make a difference, to change the world into the Kingdom of God.

Luke 15:1-32

There are shepherds today standing on the hills of Palestine watching over their sheep. It looks like a lonely job of walking and wondering the hills covered with little green grass and low growing brush. The paths are rough and rocky like their lives. The ones I saw had a small flock, hard to imagine trying to keep track of 100 sheep. Yet, in the parable Jesus tells of a shepherd that was keeping track of 100 sheep and lost one. When the sheep was found there was great celebration. Jesus explains this is heaven's response when one sinner repents. There is great celebration. When we go out into the community and bring in our neighbors providing food, clothing, fellowship, healing, worship, prayer, praise, are we reaching out to the lost sheep? We are helping them to repent becoming a Disciple of Christ.

Likewise, the woman with the lost coin, she searches and cleans until she finds it. And then she celebrates calling out: "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." When sinners repent there is great joy in the presence of angels and God. We need to go out into the community and search for the lost individuals. We must search and find them in their wounded places and welcome them.

Perhaps the best parable of welcoming is the story that follows with two sons dividing their father's property. If this story was about us, what character would we play? I believe many of us would be the dutiful older brother. He is an individual doing the right thing, living a disciplined life, being obedient, staying with the family. There is a good life with his father, but the younger wild brother hears and responds to a different drummer. He is not content to live the life of his father, until he experiences the other life. There are people we love in our lives that choose a different path and we continue to love them. When we find people that have responded to the pressures of the world and wandered beyond our acceptable borders, we must rejoice when they return. We can not judge them. We like the father in the parable must open our arms with welcome and celebrate.

We need to understand that reaching out in the name of Christ is not just to people that think, act, and look like us. They will be different and they will make a significant and loving impact on our church communities. They have voices we need to hear, and people we need to love. We will be a better more informed Body of Christ by welcoming the lost sheep, by finding the missing coin and by welcoming the lost undisciplined traveler. God will be rejoicing with us in our work!

Matthew 14:13-21

There is a hill that overlooks the Sea of Galilee, a hill where the people following Jesus gathered in hopes of being healed physically, mentally, and spiritually. It is a beautiful place with the sun shining across the water and the hills beyond. It is not a large place, hard to image 5000 people gathered there. But it is a place where many roads come together, road coming from one place, leading to another. There were many people from different places. It was not a place to find only Jews. The gathering of people was a gathering of nations. When hunger crept in, it was unlikely people could have easily returned home for a quick meal.

There are times when church mission works brings us to a foreign place with people from a different culture. Everyone gathered there together for a morsel of knowledge, wisdom, healing and spiritual growth. Imagine a group gathered and open to the gospel, to the teachings of our Lord. The day has grown long and the people are far from home. Jesus could continue to feed them spiritual words about their Heavenly Father, the love they must share with each other, the truth of eternal life, or Jesus could have the Disciples turn them away. Surely the right decision was to keep them together as a community.

And somehow the food is gathered, everyone receives enough. We have all been in mission work where we were lacking in supplies, knowledge, funding and yet, the Spirit is present and the Kingdom of God is near. We are able to witness and spread the good news. We somehow have enough. On that hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee there is little. There is no common culture, common tradition yet, there is a community gathering to learn, to be feed, to hear of their loving God. They hear stories, parables, and of a love so great it can over power their brokenness.

This is the heart of the mission field. We need to gather different people together and teach using one universal voice about the Kingdom of God. We need to share the food we have and the love we know. We need to keep reaching out and gathering together. We need to be the Disciples of Christ that stepped out of the way so the Lord could give all the nourishment needed for physical satisfaction and spiritual growth.