

Wednesday, October 14, 2020

Healing of the Leper

We have been considering Jesus' Sermon on the Mount the past several days. Undoubtedly, this must have been an amazing experience for his followers. They listened to Jesus lay out his plan for what life should be like in the Kingdom of God. I hope you will take time to read the Sermon on the Mount in its entirety. (Matthew 5 – 7)

Often, after these "mountain top experiences" we have, there is a letdown of sorts. After all, we cannot always live on top of the mountain! But what happened next must have amazed Jesus' followers and caused them to stop and think again about life in the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 8:1-4 - *When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."*

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

As Jesus comes down from the mountain with large crowds following him, he is confronted by a man with leprosy. Under the Law of Moses the leper was forced to live away from people, wear torn clothes and disheveled hair and to cry out "unclean" at the approach of others. All of that changes with Jesus!

The man who has knelt before Jesus expresses his belief that Jesus can heal him. Then the unheard of happens – Jesus reached out his hand and touched the leper, declaring him "clean!" Immediately he was healed.

Some of us are old enough to remember the late Princess Diana of Great Britain. She shocked the world when pictures of her appeared touching and hugging people who had been diagnosed with the AIDS virus. That was not done at that time. Much was unknown and many were afraid. The Princess added a picture of kindness and unconditional love for those who were suffering.

Jesus did that for an entire community who had been isolated, rejected and often mistreated.

How will we, his followers be like him?
With love,
Larry

Heavenly Father – Please forgive us when we have shown a lack of love and concern for those who are suffering. Fill our hearts with kindness, love and mercy for others. May we do to others what we would have them do to us! (Matthew 7:12)
Because of Jesus - Amen.

Thursday, October 15, 2020

Faith

Recently I was reading about the storm that Jesus calmed on the Sea of Galilee. That story is found in **Matthew 8, Mark 4** and **Luke 8**. Jesus had endured a very long day of ministry and was extremely tired. While the disciples navigated the boat, Jesus slept soundly. Suddenly a violent storm threatened to sink the ship. The Bible says the disciples were terrified and woke Jesus up.

Mark 4:38 - *Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"*

Here they express their fear as well as their frustration with the Lord. Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and the waves! Then he turned and asked his followers, *"Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"* Their lack of faith amazed Jesus. Today I want us to consider someone else who amazed Jesus for a different reason.

Matthew 8:5-10 - *When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly." Jesus said to him, "Shall I come and heal him?"*

The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith."

A centurion was a Roman Army officer who had 100 men under his leadership. This man who came to Jesus was not a Jewish man. He addresses Jesus as "Lord" and comes asking for his help on behalf of a servant of his who is suffering terribly. Jesus offers to go heal the man. The centurion responds with amazing confidence in Jesus, indicating his belief that Jesus could just *"say the word and my servant will be healed!"*

Jesus was astonished and amazed by this man's faith. He had found **no one** in all of Israel with this kind of faith.

Matthew 8:13 - *Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that moment.*

Jesus did exactly what the centurion believed he could do. Today I have been wondering, would God be amazed by my faith like the centurion or disappointed in my lack of faith like those in the boat with Jesus? What about you?

With love,
Larry

Heavenly Father – We believe and trust in you. Help our unbelief that creeps up at times. Remind us of your goodness and mercy. May we never forget your unconditional love. Please help us to have **amazing faith** as we trust in your son, Jesus. Amen.

Friday, October 16, 2020

The Harvest is Plentiful

Matthew 9:35-38 - *Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

Many years ago I learned how to haul hay. It was a great experience for a young boy who had no background in farming. The work was hot, dusty and labor intensive, but I loved it. Hay could not stay in a field indefinitely. It had to be cut, raked, baled and picked up. Then it was unloaded and stacked in a barn. I found this process to be amazing. Everyone had a job to do and each depended upon the other. Besides getting paid, the best part was eating the delicious meal brought to you in the hay field.

The work of Jesus was compared to harvesting. He went about preaching, teaching, healing and sharing good news. Jesus was a man of great compassion and tried to demonstrate for his disciples what it would take to bring in the harvest. Hard work, prayer, compassion, concern for people, preaching and teaching were all involved in helping people to know God.

Jesus was preparing these men to go do the work he would need them to do (**Matthew 10, Matthew 28**). One day they would do this without Jesus physically being there. Yet Jesus would remind them that he would *"be with you always to the very end of the age."*

As the harvest takes place around us, I think about these words of Jesus from Matthew 9. I wonder who the workers will be?

With love,
Larry

Our Father – Remind us that you have work for us to do while we are on this earth. Help us to have concern, love and compassion for others who need you. May we be a small part of the harvesting process. Please use us in whatever way we are needed.
In the name of Jesus – Amen.

Saturday, October 17, 2020

Jesus and Children

Mark 10:13-16 - *People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.*

It certainly says a lot about Jesus when we read these words regarding his love for children. People were constantly bringing them to Jesus to have him touch them and be with them. All of this seemed to bother his disciples. When Jesus saw this he was upset and urged them to let the children come to him. In fact, Jesus said that the Kingdom of God belonged to children like these.

My wife and I have spent some time talking about how innocent and dependent children are. They depend on adults to be adults. During this pandemic, the best and worst seem to come out among people. As a retired school teacher, she worries that some children are being neglected, perhaps left to take care of themselves or even abused. At the same time, others are making special efforts to check in, provide relief and to help in various ways.

Jesus wanted his disciples to realize how valued and loved children were in the Kingdom of God. Let's make sure we do the same! The kingdom belongs to those who will trust Jesus and I hope we will.

With love,
Larry

Our Father – We thank you for the innocence and joy that we see in our children and grandchildren. We know that you reign in the lives of those who trust in you. Help us to be dependent upon your Son and to put our hope in the cross of Jesus, now and forever. Amen.