



MONDAY – Luke 18:31-43

Lee McGlone

The corona virus pandemic has forced us to see the fragile nature of our existence. Things we have counted on as fixed are no longer fixed. The resultant fear has caused panic and, I hope, much introspection. Can the disequilibrium we feel have about it a positive result? I believe it can. This challenge from Luke 18:31-43 may help us.

Jesus was on a journey. His entire earthly life was a journey, as is ours, from the cradle to the grave. In fact, there is far more in the New Testament about the journey of life than about its destination. This time the Lord was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. He passed through Jericho. The ancient city had considerable importance during the Biblical era. It was there that Joshua led the initial battle that brought Israel's journey to fulfillment—the possession of the Promised Land. We sing of it: "Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, and the walls come tumbling down." And: "We're on the Jericho Road, there's room for just two, no more and no less, just Jesus and you, just Jesus and you."

As he drew near to Jericho, two events took place. First, Jesus predicted his passion. He told the disciples plainly the sorrow that soon would come to him. He would be delivered up, mocked, humiliated, beaten, and killed. The disciples seemed oblivious to it all. They didn't understand. They couldn't see it. After all, Jesus was the Messiah. And Messiahs don't die. Messiahs live and reign. The prophets before them had made it clear. "When Messiah comes all things will be made right. The mountains will be made low and the low places raised up. The crooked roads will be straightened. The lame will walk, the deaf will hear—when Messiah comes." Suffering, uncertainty, disequilibrium, simply did not connect with the world as they had it planned. Faith is a hard thing, especially when it calls us to a life with new wrinkles—after we have it already predetermined.

Then follows the account of a blind beggar, unnamed here, named Bartimaeus in Mark's gospel. When told by the crowd that Jesus was passing by, he shouted out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." And the crowd said, "hush, don't bother the man." But he continued to cry out, "Have mercy on me." The Lord stopped, brought the man before him, and asked, "What do you want me to do?"

Here's what is interesting. A man who could not see, but who really could see, introduced the disciples, who could see but really couldn't, to the Messiah. "That I might see," was the reply. Jesus said, "Receive your sight. Your faith has made you whole." And immediately he received his sight. Here is the heart of the Christian gospel: "Your faith has made you whole."

Faith comes in as many ways as there are people to receive it. For Paul, who was Saul, faith came at an unexpected moment, a blinding light that radically altered his life. For Timothy, Paul's young protégé, faith came through the instruction of a godly mother and godly grandmother, Eunice and Lois. John Wesley said deepening of faith came for him out of despondency. There in a Moravian meetinghouse in a Bible study of the opening chapter of Romans, he suddenly heard what he had heard before—but had never really heard: that salvation is all about our faith in God's faithfulness. His heart, he said, was "strangely warmed" and he knew he really did believe.

My favorite Bible verse is Romans 8:28: It says that in all things God works for good for those who love him. It doesn't say that all things are good or that all things are God's will. Only that in all things, regardless of how terribly those things may be, God is there to bring us through and to guide to a new tomorrow. We can't choose the events of life that come to us, or the circumstances in which they come, but we can choose the ways in which we respond to them.

Is it possible that we can face the worldwide pandemic with faith in the faithfulness of God—and be strengthened through it? I believe we can—and that we must. In our text, the blind man was healed and became a follower of Christ. But it didn't end there. The most amazing thing happened. The unexpected broke in. The crowds, the larger crowds, even the disciples, were caught up in the joy of the moment. They stood astonished, overwhelmed at what they saw, and burst forth in a joyful act of spontaneous praise. Perhaps they sang something like "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see." How we respond in faith can make a difference to others who have no faith—and who need that which so powerfully possesses us.

This healing miracle is important to us for it declares hope in every circumstance. Miracles occur all around but we will miss them if we are not looking through the eyes of faith. Spring is now upon us. In just a couple of weeks winter's darkness will be gone and spring will arrive with all the colors of life. We call it a natural occurrence—the changing of the seasons. But if spring came in two minutes and not two weeks we would declare it a miracle.

Yet, is it any less miraculous if it takes place in two weeks and not two minutes? Is it not still the act of God's grace? Elizabeth Barret Browning said it so beautifully, "Earth's crammed full of heaven; and every single bush is on fire with the presence of God; only he who sees takes off his shoes for he is on holy ground; the rest stand round and pluck blackberries."

So here it is: the journey of life. And every person stands somewhere along it. Sooner or later, we're faced with the reality of it all. God is at work in the world, all the time, all around us, in every place, and in everything. And grace is everywhere calling out our names.

A Prayer for Us All

Open my eyes that I may see
Glimpses of truth you have for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key
That shall unlock and set me free:
Silently now on bended knee,
Ready I wait your will to see;
Open my eyes, illumine me,
Spirit Divine!



TUESDAY – Matthew 11:28-30

Will Thompson

Last week I shared a few of my thoughts on Psalm 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth”. What a challenge it is to disconnect and just listen to God!

This week we are looking at the gospels, and particularly the words of Jesus. I wonder if Jesus had this psalm in mind when He spoke this great invitation to his disciples, “Come to me, all who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” These words were spoken to the twelve disciples, but apply to all of us today. He knows that we are certainly capable of becoming weary as we carry not just our own burdens, but share in many other people’s burdens, as well. We often pride ourselves in seeing how much we can carry, until one day we collapse with physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion.

But it doesn’t have to be that way. Jesus knows how we are wired, and that our natural inclination will be to not ask for help. He invites us to come to Him, leave our burdens with him, and exchange them for his “easy”, perfectly fitting yoke, for “his burden is light”. Since most of us are in a type of forced isolation right now, what a great opportunity we have to we spend quality time with him in prayer each day. He invites you to “be still” right now, and “come to Him”. He will give you rest!



WEDNESDAY – Matthew 5:1-5

Alan Greenwood

In the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7, Jesus exposes what is on the inside of the audience. Jesus wants us to realize we can't do this Christian life apart from Him. To begin, Jesus opens with the beatitudes, and today, we are going to look at Matthew 5:1-5.

Matthew 5:1-2 *His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.*

The beatitudes turn cultural values "inside-out", but they are also a reversal of sorts. God has come in Jesus to make all wrong things right and all upside-down things right-side up. People in the most helpless situations are beginning to receive blessing, and believers are being called to values of justice, mercy, and faithfulness. The message on the kingdom was difficult for the religious elite to reconcile, because they wanted a political and military ruler to reign. But yet Jesus comes into the picture and talks about "blessed are those who mourn and are poor and hungry and gentle." It's not "life is good" – it's blessed as in "good with God".

5:3 – *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.*

The kingdom of Heaven is the absence of spiritual arrogance. Blessed is the person who understands that in our spirit the best we have to offer God is poverty, and bankruptcy, and nothing. The Kingdom of God is marked by complete spiritual need. Jesus knew exactly who was listening and took a shot right off the bat at the religious leaders. Jesus goes right for the heart and exposes them for their arrogance. **The poor in spirit love God enough to trust God.**

5:4 – *Blessed are those who mourn.*

No one would assume that those who are in the midst of intense grief would be called "blessed". Yet it is the very announcement that Jesus makes. People who mourn both grieve in their own experiences of tragedy, injustice, and death, and reach out to others in grief and compassion when they experience injustice, sin, evil, tragedy, and death. **In other words, they suffer and love others well who are suffering.**

5:5 – *Blessed are the meek*

The meek or gentle are those who suffer and who have been humbled and yet don't seek revenge. They instead seek God's glory and the benefit of others. It's not easy to be hurt and respond in a way that honors the Lord. You can only do it when you trust God and hope in God's timing and justice. **We live in a world all about status.** *But it's in our lack of status in a spiritual sense that we become who Jesus calls us to be.* We don't seek revenge as a reaction – rather we recognize God desires to use us in redemptive ways when we've been hurt by someone else.

FBC Fam – you are deeply loved by a God who is on your side and relentlessly pursues you. We can't do this alone and it's calling us to more than we're able to individually do. That's the point – Jesus did what we couldn't. And offers each of us the gift of life. Take comfort and refuge in Him.



THURSDAY – Luke 18:9-14

Nancy Harrell

⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ¹³“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ¹⁴“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

In my life, this parable shows up like my birthday: it circles back around every now and then, catching me off-guard each time. I welcome it, for the most part, but it’s also a little unnerving. Because each time it comes back into view, I wonder when – or if – I’ll ever read it and relate more closely to the tax collector instead of the Pharisee.

Isn’t what the Pharisee and tax collector both wanted what all of us want, really? To be justified – or *right* – with God? One man thought he had it by comparing his sacrificial deeds with the lousy living of others. The other knew he didn’t have it based on his deeds – good or bad – but knew exactly where to find it: in the merciful embrace of the Father.

In a time when it’s easy to point fingers and cast blame for the problems of the world...or, for me, in a time when it’s easy to berate oneself for the myriad of mistakes made *while in very close proximity for a prolonged period of time* with loved ones, may you and I use our moments differently. When tempted to compare our behavior with others’ (in order to feel either better or worse about ourselves), let’s instead use the tax collector’s prayer as our own breath prayer: “God, have mercy on me, a sinner!”

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FRIDAY

Roberta Long

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies..." John 11:25
Martha was grieving the loss of her brother and questions why Jesus didn't come on time to save him. Jesus answers by challenging Martha's limited faith with the promise of life, but what kind of life? He answers that in John 10:10, "...I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." Abundant life... even in the midst of the grief, pain and uncertainty life here on earth can bring?

Because He lives I can face tomorrow
Because He lives all fear is gone.
Because I know He holds the future
Life is worth the living just **because He lives.**

This familiar refrain was written by Gloria Gaither at a time of fear, anxiety and uncertainty in the world and in their personal lives. She was about to bring their third child into the turbulent days of the 1960's and shares how God filled her with an overwhelming sense of peace and assurance that the future was in the loving, sovereign hands of her resurrected Savior.

These words would also become a source of comfort, peace and hope for Gladys Weatherford Staines as she, a single woman, left her home and family in Australia to follow God to where He chose to use her. She followed Him to India where she met, married and served lepers with Graham Staines. Later, the hope within those words would carry her, victoriously, following the violent murders of Graham and their two sons when they were burned alive by militants persecuting Christians in India. Her faith remained steadfast and sure because she believed what the angel said in Matthew 28:5b-7a, "Do not be afraid...He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said...Come see...and go quickly and tell His disciples He has risen from the dead..." She and her daughter were given the grace to forgive and to continue in ministry.

The reality of Christ's resurrection gives us that same living hope and confident expectation of all He has promised (Romans 15:4). Hope flourishes within us as we hold fast to our faithful living Savior, especially in these times. Many live in a state of perpetual anxiety. Instead, we must count our blessings for there is no room for fear or anxiety in a heart filled with hope and gratitude. Be a hope-filled testimony of your risen, living Savior and live abundantly. **Because He lives...**

...I have a good Shepherd who knows me, guides me, protects, and blesses me even in the midst of trials. (John 10:11, 14)

...I am forgiven. (1 John 1:9)

...I never have to dwell in darkness. (John 8:12)

...I have a peace the world cannot comprehend. (John 14:27)

...I am never alone. (Matthew 28:20)

...I have my every need supplied. (Philippians 4:19)

Pray God would fill your heart with hope and gratitude in specific ways today.

Meditate upon what is yours **because He lives.** **Memorize** a scripture upon which one of your "Because He lives" statements is based. **Share** your hope with someone today.