

Sermon for Sunday, February 16, 2025

Luke 7:18-35

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

For the last few weeks, we have been exposed to Luke's testimony about Jesus. We've heard numerous stories detailing acts of healing as well as hard conversations with the religious leaders of that time and place. I've said several times that Luke is providing us with layers of evidence to demonstrate or prove Jesus' identity as God's Son. Today's Scripture passage demonstrates that even the staunchest of Jesus' supporters can have doubts. That staunch supporter? John the Baptizer.

As Luke tells it, John was arrested and imprisoned by Herod shortly after Jesus' baptism. (some scholars think that Jesus was more than just baptized by John, that Jesus was actually a disciple of John and tutored by him and that Jesus' ministry began in part because of John's arrest. Since John couldn't perform his God-ordained work Jesus stepped into the gap.)

For now, I want you to put yourself in John's shoes, stuck in a Palestinian prison 2000 years ago. It's dark, dank, and dirty. The only word he receives comes from loyal disciples who tell him the "news from the outside world." He is not an eye witness to Jesus' actions. It is not recorded that Jesus comes to see him or talk to him....John's only information comes by word of mouth. And in the confines of the prison, John starts to question. Even one of Jesus' strongest supporters has doubts about Jesus.

John has known from childhood that he had a specific call from God to "prepare the way" of the Lord. There is that lovely story that John jumps in his mother Elizabeth's womb when he hears Mary's greeting. At that moment, John *knew*. But life happens. John found himself leading an unusual life out in the wilderness calling people to repentance. Now he's in prison. He can't prepare the way for the Lord as he has faithfully performed for however many years. He starts to wonder about Jesus because if Jesus isn't the Messiah, then John's job isn't complete. And he's going to have to figure out how to complete it.

That's why John sends his disciples to ask the big question of Jesus, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' It would have been helpful for John (and for us) if Jesus

had made it easy by just saying yes or no. But Jesus answers in his typical enigmatic way by using his actions to demonstrate his answer.

The Message tells it like this: "In the next two or three hours Jesus healed many from diseases, distress, and evil spirits. To many of the blind he gave the gift of sight. Then he gave his answer: "Go back and tell John what you have just seen and heard." In other words, the answer to the question, "Are you the Messiah?" is w0atch what is happening. Watch the healings. Watch how those in distress are calmed. Watch the casting out of spirits. Watch how the blind have their sight restored. And then go report all of this to John. (*Pause*)

Another way to think about John's question to Jesus is that he may have had a particular understanding of what the Messiah was going to say and do. It's likely that Jesus doesn't fit into those notions. He doesn't act in a way that is consistent with John's vision of the Messiah. And that's okay because even today Jesus does not fit into our notions of what he brought to the world.

Part of the turmoil in our world lies in arguments about specific religious practice: specifically questions of whether "you personally have accepted Jesus as your lord and savior." These arguments are utterly meaningless. First, remember, it is not about what you personally have done. It's about what God has done. It's about what God has done for you. God has called you by name and claimed you and has done so through nothing that you have done. It's not through works...so that no one can boast.

Secondly, let's think specifically about Jesus' answer to John. Jesus *demonstrates* that the Messiah/Savior heals, delivers people from distress and gives sight to the blind. As God's representatives here on earth, as followers of Jesus and Jesus' way our task is to be God's hands on earth. Our task is to heal from disease, deliver people from their distress: are they hungry? Feed them. Are they sick or in prison? Visit them. Are they in need of clothing or shelter? Help to fill those needs.

At a time when much is in turmoil in our world, it wouldn't surprise me if there are folks who are having doubts about Jesus. It's really easy for humans to create a picture in our minds of how we think Jesus the Messiah should behave or act. Where is the mighty Savior who has promised to return and "set things right?" The startling thing is that Jesus consistently defies our expectations.

Until Jesus returns it's our job to act as God's compassionate hands to heal and restore the hurting people of the world.

Jesus doesn't engage in a debate about messiah-ness. When John says, "are you the one?" Jesus *demonstrates*. What he *demonstrates* is breadth of healing and relief for the poor. That's what the witnesses needed to experience 2000 years ago. And that's what we need to stand firm on today. All the propositional arguments that are being made are not important. The games that are being played about exactly what the religion is supposed to be or how Jesus and God are to be worshipped is just that: a game. The teaching coming to us from Jesus in today's text is this: What matters is that there is healing being done and good news coming to the poor.

When we stand before the judgment throne: the question isn't going to be about whether we went to church every Sunday and threw in a Wednesday evening for good measure. It's not going to be about whether we believed in this church doctrine or that one. It's absolutely NOT going to be about adhering to Martin Luther's teachings or John Wesley's or any other human's statement of belief. If those matters had been important to Jesus his teachings on those matters would have been written down. No, what's going to matter is that there is healing being done and good news of God's grace coming to the poor.

That's God's call to us. And my friends, that's what happened here in this space yesterday. We brought the good news of God's grace to the Mikaelson family and their friends. That's one simple example of how we can act as a community to demonstrate God's love and grace to the people of this world. Go and do likewise. Amen.