



STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, November 8, 2009

“Faith Like a Child” ENOUGH: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity, Week 3 of 4

Mark 10:13-16 — *The Word from the Bible (Today's New International Version)*

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.

Mark 10:13-16

The disciples fail here to understand the relation of children to the kingdom. The same story is included in Matthew 19:13-15 and Luke 18:15-17. Neither Matthew nor Luke reports the indignation of Jesus. This follows the tendency of Mark to report the disciples inability to see Jesus as the Son of God and puts the disciples in a poor light. One of the most popular statements from Jesus is included in this short passage, **“for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”**

In spite of its popularity, this quote from Jesus is unclear. Children have all kinds of qualities, some desirable and others not. It is left to the interpreter to point out the possible qualities that Jesus might be referring. We find clues in the way that Mark presents this quote as well as where he places it in his gospel. From verse 15, Jesus uses the term “receives,” a word in the Greek that suggests the receiving of a gift. This would lead us to believe that our relationship with God is dependent upon the good will of God as a child is dependent upon the good will of their parent. In this sense, the Kingdom of God is seen as a gift received from God, not an achievement, like the doctrine of salvation by grace.

Further, this passage is followed by the conversation Jesus has with the rich young ruler. In this passage, we see Jesus offering salvation to the man if he is willing to give up everything to follow him. Sadly, the man refuses because he is not willing to part with his wealth. This indicates a basic trust issue. Is God big enough to take care of me when I can not take care of myself? A child has no other choice than to trust. The child has nothing to lose and comes freely, trusting in the good will of the Father.

Faith Like a Child

Using the idea of coming to God as a child is a useful guide for our own spiritual lives. Trust is necessary to a true relationship with God through Christ. Are we willing to trust God in all things? Is our relationship with God based on obligations met by a particular behavior or pattern of rituals? Do we see our spiritual life resting on one hour of worship each week? Or is there something else required in this divine-human relationship?

In the book of Jude, the writer speaks of this trust and dependence in verses 24 and 25. **“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.”** Notice here the writer promises two things. First, in this life, Christ will keep us from falling. As we trust, so God is ever before us. Second, in the future, Christ will present us without fault and with great joy. For now and forever, God becomes our ally.

This is a powerful promise. Christ is guarding us, keeping us, protecting us, securing us, and helping us not to stumble. Christ loves us and rescues us – lifts us up when we are low and supports us when we are weak. As long as we rely on Christ and trust in His presence, we are connected to the God of all creation. God never leaves us. Through lack of trust and dependency, we move away from God. When our trust turns away from God and we depend on other things of this world, we separate ourselves from God... so we stumble and we continue lose our way.

We often think of God as keeping records of our wrongdoings. We equate failure with judgment. But this passage re-

minds us that God keeps no records of wrong. Our stumbling is directly related to our lack of trust and dependence — not because God is punishing us. God wants to bless us in all things. But we remove ourselves from the presence of God and lose touch with God's glory. We convince ourselves that life is found in the things of this world instead of the things of God.

Considering God in all Things

We often think of the spiritual life as what we do in quiet on our knees. Certainly this is part of the spiritual discipline of prayer. But Paul uses this phrase in I Thessalonians, ***“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”*** Paul is referring to an attitude of life. If we trust God, then we are to consider God in all things. This ***“continual prayer”*** is not an absence of activity or logical consideration of our circumstances. Instead, to pray continually, is to trust God in all things – to allow God to be part of our work, our family, our play and our finances. ***“Continual prayer”*** is handing over to God the deep emotional traumas of our life, so we can function at the highest level in all circumstances knowing that God is with us. ***“To be joyful always”*** is to know that no matter what may be happening today, God has our future in God's hands. ***“To give thanks in all circumstances”*** is to trust that no matter what may come to us, we can find the good through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Do you trust God? Are you willing to depend on God? Can you imagine the joy of living a life knowing that you are connected to God?

Prayer Focus

Trietsch is a praying church. This morning, as you worship, one of our prayer volunteers is praying for everyone in each section of our worship center. We believe that prayer changes lives and hearts for good and for God.

We invite you to join these volunteers by praying for those persons around you. We believe these prayers will have an immediate impact on those for whom you are praying.

Remember... someone is praying for you. Here are a few prayers to guide you.

The Prayer of Jabez

And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that it may not cause me pain! And God granted him that which he requested.

The Prayer of Jabez is found in 1 Chronicles 4:10. The prayer is composed of four parts. First, Jabez asks God to bless him. Second, he asks God to enlarge his territory or increase his responsibility. Third, he prays that God will be with him and stay close. Lastly, Jabez asks that God keep him from harm so that he will be free from pain.

The Prayer of Jabez reminds us that everybody struggles with choosing to rely on himself or God. Whether you are a focused Christian or just searching to find out more about God, life is a growing process. However, it is very clear in reviewing the Prayer of Jabez that God is faithful in caring for those who seek God. Jabez sets a great example of how God wants everyone to come to God through constant and passionate prayer.

This morning include this prayer in your worship. Our focus is deepening our spiritual relationship with God. This prayer gives us the chance to partner with God as we look to the future.

***Make us worthy, Lord, to serve our fellow men
throughout the world who live and die in poverty and hunger.
Give them through our hands this day their daily bread,
and by our understanding love, give peace and joy.***

Mother Teresa

My God, I pretend to nothing upon this earth, except to be so firmly united to you by prayer that to be separated from you may be impossible; let others desire riches and glory; for my part, I desire but one thing, and that is, to be inseparably united to you, and to place in you alone all my hopes of happiness and repose.

St. John Climacus

Daily Readings

For the past two weeks we have looked at the five-fold promise we make when we join the church. The first Sunday we dealt with our spiritual life together through prayer and worship. Last week we dealt with our promise to serve God through our volunteer time in the church and community. This week we look at our promise to uphold the church with our financial gifts. Next week we bring turn in five fold promise to the church – to uphold the church with prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.

Monday, November 9 – Read Matthew 6:24. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus deals with the issue of wealth. How do we make our decisions? Look at your checkbook and see what priorities are reflected. Where is God?

Tuesday, November 10 – Read Malachi chapter 3. These are difficult words. The prophet Malachi spares no feelings in talking about gifts. All that we have belongs to God. For Malachi, to withhold our gifts is an act of disobedience comparable to stealing from God. On the other hand, to give is to see the windows of heaven open for even more abundance. How have you seen the working of God's abundance in your life? Are there areas where you might be stealing from God? Would you like to hear a sermon on this?

Wednesday, November 11 – Read Mark 12: 41-44. We have all heard the story of the widow's mite. While teaching, Jesus recognizes the widow who gave out of her poverty to the work of the Temple. This story illustrates that the importance of giving is not in the amount of the gift, but rather the amount of the sacrifice. Further, the emphasis is on the need of the giver and not the need of the church. Are you giving out of what is left over? Or does your giving cause a strain in your lifestyle? Are you looking at the needs of the church or your capacity to give?

Thursday, November 12 – Read Matthew 22: 15-22. Rending unto Caesar is a big deal in our society. Between sales tax, property tax, gas tax, and income tax, the average citizen of the United States pays 30% of their income on taxes. What do you estimate your total taxes to be? How does it compare to your giving to the church?

Friday, November 13 – Read II Corinthians 8: 1-8. Paul uses the church at Macedonia as an example of generosity and giving. Macedonia is the poorest of the churches. It is no Flower Mound or Highland Village. Macedonia is praised for its complete sacrifice and commitment to the work of ministry. How would you grade Trietsch Memorial United Methodist Church?
