

The Season of Lent

The Little Children and Jesus

Review:

Last week we looked briefly at the Season of Lent which is the forty day period before Easter Sunday. It is a season of preparing one's heart for the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and his Sunday Resurrection. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, a day of humility, leading us into a time of prayer and fasting, introspection and repentance. We also discovered that Mardi Gras – Fat Tuesday, was originally an opportunity to get ready for Lent. However, over the years Mardi Gras has become more of a wild party than a time of preparation for Lent.

In the context of Lent, we looked at the Parable of the Persistent widow. In this parable the widow refuses to accept her fate. She voices opposition to injustice without relenting. As a result of her persistence, “**grant me justice against my adversary**” even the unjust judge is compelled to act.

The inspiration of the parable is simple, if an unjust judge can be moved to grant justice, then imagine how much God desires to help those who are struggling with injustice. Jesus invites us to bring our prayers and intercessions before God who is more than able and more than willing to answer our prayers quickly. This kind of praying comes with passion and tears. This persistent and prevailing prayer means to have a valid request continuously before the Lord. God is not like the judge who did not want to hear or who wasted time before giving the widow justice. God hears the effectual prayer of the righteous, who call on him with a sincere heart, and an earnest petition. Our loving Heavenly Father is eagerly waiting to answer our prayers bringing justice and righteousness to bear upon our lives and circumstances. As well, God hears our intercession for justice on behalf of those who are weak and defenceless in society.

Introduction:

This week in prayer I felt the Lord lead me to the concept of engagement. This is an amazing word to consider. It gives us the beautiful picture of a young man proposing to a young lady and entering into an engagement or agreement to marry. Engagement speaks to the reality of commitment and being present in relationship. Engagement also reminds me of the military, where one engages the enemy in combat. This kind of engagement challenges the soldier to be active, prepared and in an effective state of battle.

- The Father connected himself (engaged with the world) with the world through the birth of his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus has become the Bridegroom wooing his Lover to his side. Jesus reveals his amazing love to us in some personal ways, engaging us to respond. Jesus is a jealous Groom who does not want to compete with others for our love. He looks towards us with longing and desire and desires us to long for him...

- As well, Jesus is known as the Commander of the Lord's army. He defeated the principalities and powers through his death on the cross. He engaged the enemy fully and completely won the battle; he was without sin and totally conquered death.

As I applied this idea of engagement to my life I felt like the Lord said, "If you do not embrace the concept of engagement how can you become the Bride of Christ." As I thought and prayed about this several thoughts came to my mind.

- Jesus is looking for a response from us to his proposal to us; **"I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except by me."** He is looking for intimacy from his bride. He desires a close, understanding relationship with you and me. He longs for a church who will engage with him and stay engaged with him despite all the distractions of life and work and family etc...
- As well, he is looking for a people who will engage in the battle for souls. Just as he went to battle against the schemes and strategies of the enemy, he is looking for a people who will resist and stand against temptation and the tempter. He is looking for a people who will walk in the fear of God – loving God and hating sin. He is looking for those who will become friends of sinners, snatching them from the fires of hell.

Lastly, "if you do not embrace the concept of engagement how can you become the Bride of Christ" reminded me of Jesus saying we have to become like children to enter the Kingdom of God. With this understanding of engagement, we will look the following Scripture in the context of Lent – those forty weekdays before Easter Sunday.

The Little Children and Jesus

Luke 18:15-17 - People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. ¹⁶But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁷I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

- I believe Luke placed this short section here to follow up on the message of the previous parable. Jesus had taught that it was necessary to be humble before God, like the tax collector compared to the Pharisee.
- Humility as seen in children is wonderfully refreshing. In these verses Jesus compared humility to childlikeness.
- Childlikeness can be described by some awesome words. Children for the most part are innocent and pure. I have seen children get away with the most amazing comments simply because they are so candid, sometimes naive. On the whole, children are uncomplicated and unsophisticated. Life is full of wonder. They are trusting first and foremost.

- The list goes on and on; uninhibited, wholehearted, simple, open, wonder-fied, lack of cynicism, daring and cheeky, bold and dependent.
- This childlike humility so confronts us adults. For many of us, we have lost our innocence, rather than being wonderfully candid we have become angry and rude. We take the “un” out of uncomplicated and unsophisticated, finding ourselves full of complex twists and turns and at times arrogant superiority.

Why does this happen? It is my belief that a life goes on and little children become adults, they embrace the challenges and hurts of life. We grow up and become independent of God and sometimes each other. We struggle through the challenges in our own strength and effort. We grow up and become hurt and then offended and lastly cynical and unforgiving. There is something to be learned about “staying childlike” as we grow up. Little children are completely dependent upon Mom and Dad. Likewise we adults are to be completely dependent upon the Lord as we face our struggles and hurts.

Jesus ends this illustration by stating, **“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁷ I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”** Under Jewish Law, little children (under the age of 13 for boys and 12 for girls) were not obligated to observe the Law. In others words, they lived under a special grace until they came of age and experienced Bar Mitzvah. They were to learn the Law so that as they gained the age of accountability they became accountable.

In other words, Jesus is saying that you must engage in childlike – “grace”, and give up the requirements of the Jewish (or adult) Law... We must give up trying to impress God with our greatness and become like children – with wide-eyed wonder...

In Conclusion:

In a similar passage of Scripture to the one we looked at in Luke 18, the disciples asked Jesus **“who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?”** Jesus plainly tells them that **“unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18:1-4).**

The phrase **“you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven”** reminds me of evangelical theology relating to the salvation and being “born again”. We believe you must be born again, born of the Spirit, in order to enter the kingdom of God. We preach a vigorous gospel message based on John chapter 3.

There is a question that arises for me – why don’t we interpret these passages of Scripture - Matt 18 and Luke 18 – the same as John 3? We must become like children in order to enter the Kingdom of God, just as we must be born again. Sobering thought... When we think like this the effects of being childlike are immediate and immense. The challenge is simple, as adults (in the Jewish context of age – over the age of 12 or 13) we must embrace the childlikeness and grace of little children; we are not to be childish.

Think about it for a moment. If you are not born again you cannot enter the kingdom of God. In the same view of thought, Jesus says if you do not become like little children you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

In Application:

We are speaking to several issues this morning. One is the season of Lent, where we are preparing our hearts and lives for the death and resurrection of the Lord. The other idea is that of engagement. As the people of God we must be engaging the Lord on a moment by moment basis. He is longing for us and in turn we respond with heartfelt passion. We seek to be “like Christ” in our daily activities, looking for opportunities to connect with people and share the engaging love of God with them.

In the context of today’s Scripture – **Luke 18:15-17**, we are to engage with the Lord and become like little children. We must understand the soberness of this Scripture.

In light of this let’s ask ourselves as adults a few questions:

- Do I live in wide-eyed-wonder of life or have I become a squinty-eyed Scrooge? Do I wake up amazed at life, the sunrise or the birds singing? When was the last time you were amazed in life?
- Do I walk in trusting faith with God? The simple faith and trust of a child touches our hearts with such warmth; how much more so the heart of God. Without faith it is impossible to please God.
- Do I live uninhibited before God? Do I live in self-conscious fear or in God-conscious reverence? King David danced before God like a child, how about you.
- Do I live open hearted before God and people? Remember as kids when we went to a friend’s house and said, “Do you want to come out and play?” When was the last time you did that?
- Do I live dependently upon the Lord? Have I become an island unto myself? Do I live in relationship with others letting my needs known? Or have I become sophisticated and isolated?
- Do I live in childlike innocence and purity? Or have I become corrupted or guilty?
- Do I live accepting and trusting of others or have I become cynical and critical? Do we choose to believe the best of others and then live accordingly? How good it is to live in peace with all.
- Do I live in daring boldness? Do I have the nerve to ask God (or others) for something I want, not necessarily need?

In this time of reflection, let’s allow God to search our hearts and guide us towards childlikeness and the kingdom of God.