



LESSONS for LIFE
March 8, 2009 11:00 a.m.
8 LIFE CHANGING MESSAGES FROM JESUS
FROM FEAR TO PEACE
Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes, C.M.

SACRED READINGS

Lesson: MARK 4: 35 - 41

Gospel: SELECTIONS FROM MATTHEW 6: 25 - 34

Typically during the season of Lent, this Sunday Palm Sunday, through Good Friday and Easter Sunday we do a sermon series and that often is a reflective series, a series where we are asked to take a look at our lives, to look at things that we do, things that need to change, take a look inside. We are going to do that again this year however I am doing a little bit of a change this year. What I decided to do is to take a look at the full set of the teachings of Jesus. So, I went through all of the gospels and the earlier books of the New Testament and looked at all of the miracle stories, parables, teachings, sayings of Jesus. I pulled out of them eight that I think are the keys to us changing our lives, eight of the most important lessons if you will lessons in the full group of teachings of Jesus. Anyone of these, I think, can change our lives; the eight of them together can transform our lives. So, I encourage you during this season to be open to those lessons.

So, what I am going to do is in the morning I will be preaching the lessons and in the evening services, I will do the opening Sunday tonight, and the closing Sunday, Easter Sunday, but in between some other folks are going to give some additional perspectives on the lessons. So we will have the same theme but a different perspective. So, I encourage you also if you would like to come out in the evenings, for this season to be able to see a second and additional perspective.

The first lesson, in the gospel reading that I shared with you this morning, in fact during the season of Lent the scriptures will also be two gospel readings, which is unusual for us so we are really going to have our minds stayed on Jesus during this season of Lent.

In the gospel reading that I shared this morning, Jesus is walking along with the disciples and the disciples noticed a man who was blind, who had been blind from birth and they say to Jesus, "Why is this man blind?" "Who is at fault here, who should we blame for this?"

So often in our lives, incidents happen. Things happen in our lives that can cause us pain or discomfort, things can happen in our lives that can change the course of our lives. Oftentimes those incidents can

cause us deep, deep pain, a deep, deep sense of loss. As that happens in our lives, it could be something where a loved one dies, either suddenly or even when we are preparing for it, when we know it is coming, the pain is still there. Sometimes it could be a case where a loved one gets an illness and we care so much for them, we want to help them and we feel lost at not being able to provide the support we would like or to be able to “fix it”. Sometimes maybe it is a natural disaster that happens in our world, a tsunami, or a hurricane or a plane crash and it happens. I want you to hear me in this sermon today that I am not at all diminishing the impact of the incident. I am not at all diminishing the pain that the incident causes us or others around us. We know that for all of us there will be many of these, right? ...There will be many of these incidents that we will face as people around us die or as pain enters into their lives. It is natural, when this happens, to begin by asking, “Why?” It is a natural question that comes to mind. Jesus was asked, “Why is this man blind?” “Why has he been blind from birth?” The temptation however, is to move into blame; who can we blame for this, who is at fault here? We might blame ourselves for a mistake that we have made and we have caused it. We might blame other people around us: Why did they do that to us? Or we might blame God. God, why did you allow this to happen? The challenge is A) that blame does not take us any place, indeed blame can cause us to get stuck in a situation. I want to use an example divorce or the separation of a relationship. It has been my experience over the years that separation in a relation especially for the party who did not want it to happen can be one of the most painful experiences ever to go through and because of the pain of the incident, the situation, people then will very quickly move into blame, blaming themselves maybe for a mistake that they made, blaming themselves for maybe not doing things differently or blaming the other person for how that person treated them. Getting stuck there is common. The difficulty with asking the question why, moving into blame who caused this is that it leads to anger, guilt and resentment, it leads to us closing down, it leads to us often moving away from God because we blame God for allowing it to happen. When we move into that place of blame and when we stay there, we often lose the focus of where our energy should go. So this morning I am going to ask you as those incidents happen or have happened in your life that instead of going to the why and the blame place the way to move passed that is first of all to grieve well, to stop in the midst of the pain or the instant and to grieve well. Often we don’t grieve well and therefore that leaves us with scars in our lives. Often an incident will haunt us for a long, long time and some people’s lives are even totally thrown off for the rest of their life because of an incident and the failure to grieve well. So that incident becomes a stumbling block for the rest of their lives. In order to grieve well we have to acknowledge the pain, and acknowledge the feelings that we are experiencing. We need to stop and spend some time there.

A couple of years ago a family in our congregation experienced a miscarriage. Some people around them made comments like, “Oh well, you can always have another baby, Oh well, you’ll have other... oh well, you are still young.” When what the family needed was the support to grieve well, to stop, to not move past that, but to stay in that situation for a while and grieve the loss. Sometimes when people lose a pet, how often do people say, “Oh well you can always go to the humane society and get another one? “You can always...” No, we need to stop in the midst of that loss, we need to be able to express and to feel the pain and the loss of it instead of jumping over it moving past it, to be able to stop and spend some time there to grieve well. If we do the grieving well, then that will help the healing to come.

In that first gospel reading... it sounded harsh this morning, didn’t it? Folks, this week, Brian and I were chatting and talking about it, and in that gospel reading when someone wanted to follow Jesus, and they said but first I have to go and bury my dad. Jesus said let the dead bury the dead. That sounds harsh. Someone else says I want to follow you but first I have to go and say good-bye to my family and Jesus said anyone who looks back is not fit for the realm of God. That sounds harsh. It wouldn’t have sounded harsh to the people who heard it. It didn’t sound harsh to the disciple who wrote it down and included it in the gospel. If it had sounded harsh they wouldn’t have included it because it would have made Jesus look bad. It didn’t sound harsh because they know that Jesus talked in metaphor. They know that it was not to be taken literally. So what Jesus was saying was, yes I understand that you want to go back to those

places and to those individuals that you love and who have died. It is also important to be able to move forward at the right time and not to stay stuck in the death. Jesus said, I understand how you want to say good-bye to your family and keeping your connection with your family of birth is important however, there comes a time when you too must live your life and move forward in the living of your life. They understood that this was what he was what he meant, that he was talking in a sense about metaphor.

Experiencing the incident, grieving the loss and then being able to move into what are the lessons that I can learn here?

I remember years ago when I broke up with my first partner, many years ago, I broke up with my first partner. The woman I was renting a room from in the house, she was a lesbian, and she was a grandmother, and she just had just had her first lesbian relationship and she had just broken up and so it was a Saturday afternoon and we were sitting at her place and she cooked up a bunch of chicken thighs, a whole big tray of them and a ... few bottles of beer, were there (Laughter) and we were sitting and eating and drinking and eating and drinking and crying and crying about our relationships and our experience and experiencing the pain. Then just out of the blue I said, "You know, I hope our future partners are able to appreciate what we are going through right now, because the lessons we will learn from this will help us in that future relationship". Being able to experience the loss and move into asking ourselves without blame; "What are the lessons that I can learn here?"

When Jesus was asked, "Why is this man blind and who do we blame?" Jesus said there is no one to be blamed here. Then he said the person is blind in order that the works of God might be seen or some other translations say in order so that the glory of God might be seen. Now, again you could misinterpret this, if you look at this and say okay God made that person blind so that God could look good, so God could heal him and then look good. If you believe in that kind of an egotistical, selfish God, then yeah, you could interpret it that way. However if you think of it this way, Ironies centuries later would say the glory of God is you fully alive, the glory of God is you fully alive, as people move through the incidents, grieve well learn lessons, it is amazing the beauty that can rise up later as they are able to move through that. ...When you see a parent on television talking about the need to forgive someone who has murdered their child, the power of that moment, the glory ...of that moment. As you look at individuals down through the centuries who have gone through challenging periods or incidents in their lives who did not get stuck there who didn't stay in stay in blame, who didn't stay in anger but were able to move through that and the glory that is seen in their lives as they move through the incident. What can I learn from this?

Mary Anne Williamson said we think we are not happy because of what we are not getting or what we have lost. Instead, she says we are really not happy because of what we are not giving. When we go to that place of blame and when we close down we stop giving, we stop giving our love, we stop giving our support, we stop reaching out and therefore we stop receiving the happiness and the support. We are called as people of faith, not to stay stuck in blame, we are called to grieve well, we are called to learn lessons, we are called to move past a spirit of blame into a spirit of blessedness. For some of you we have done funerals here, in the church, for people you have loved people who were special in your lives. The sermon is not saying move past remembering, treasure the memories hold them close to you, experience a spirit of blessedness by being blessed with those people in your lives and not by getting stuck in blame. This can lead us to a strong sense of hope because we know that as the incidents happen we can handle them we are not going to get stuck in the blame or the why that we will be able to grieve and learn and experience blessedness.

Down through the centuries there have been lots of folks who have experienced blindness or a challenge to their sight and yet who didn't get stuck there, here are some of their names: Helen Keller, Stevie Wonder, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harriette Tubman, Louis Braille, Galileo, John Milton.... Andrea Bocelli.

Andrea Bocelli was born in 1958 in Tuscany with the rare musical gift at a very early age. Andrea was born with glaucoma and went through several eye surgeries in his young life, his family hoping that he would be healed of that, that he would be okay, and then suddenly at the age of twelve he went completely blind because of a soccer accident. Years later a producer was doing a demo tape of a song and he wanted Pavarotti to agree to sing the song and record it so they asked Bocelli if he would be the person to sing on the demo tape and when Pavarotti heard it he said you don't need me to sing that let him sing it and they persuaded Pavarotti to do it as a duet with Andrea. Later on he would sing his famous song *Time To Say GoodBye*, then later on he would sing with Céline Dion *The Prayer*. He didn't get stuck in the incident but the glory of God can be heard and seen in his voice, ever humble and now one of the richest men in all of Italy... moving past blame.

A number of people have experienced dyslexia and have been able to continue to live their lives: Agatha Christie, Albert Einstein, Alexander Graham Bell, Cher, Danny Glover, George Burns, Hans Christian Anderson, Jackie Stuart, Leonardo Da Vinci, Magic Johnson, Thomas Edison, Tom Cruise, Walt Disney, Whoopie Goldberg, Winston Churchill, Woodrow Wilson, George Patten, and on and on ... dyslexia not getting stuck there, moving past.

These people of the world have experienced polio in their past or polio throughout their lives: Donald Sutherland, F. D. Roosevelt, Arthur Clark, Jack Nicholas, Mia Ferrel, Neil Young, Paul Martin Sr. and Paul Martin Jr., Alan Alda, Diana Shore, Joanie Mitchel, all individuals who have experienced Polio in their lives, not staying stuck there and blaming and bitterness grieving and learning and blessedness.

I want to end today with the example of Ray Charles. Ray Charles was born in 1930 in Georgia very early on his family, in the midst of extreme poverty, moved to Florida and at five years old Ray Charles had to endure the trauma of witnessing the drowning death of his younger brother. Within two years of that death, by the age of seven, Ray Charles was blind. The source of the blindness was never officially diagnosed however his mother refused to allow him to wallow in self pity and she challenged him to move from that self-pity. Very early on he showed an interest in music. He developed his interest in music and by the age of fifteen, his mother had died and he was left on his own. At fifteen and totally blind he began to go on tour. Later on he would meet a young Quincy Jones only fourteen himself and Ray Charles would teach him. Later Ray Charles wrote a song called *Georgia on My Mind*. You know, when Ray Charles looked back on his life, he could have gone back to Florida in his mind, to the death of his younger brother that he saw, or to where he went blind and symbolically he could have got stuck in Florida in terms of bitterness but he moved through that and the glory of God was revealed in him. I can see him singing *Georgia on My Mind*, see him celebrating life, see him, hear him, and hear the glory of God.

This morning, you know that there are going to be incidents, you know that there are going to be things that will happen to you that will be deeply, deeply painful. I would ask you this morning, don't jump over it, or rush through it. Take time to grieve and to grieve well. But don't get stuck in the 'why' and the blame; move past that through grief into learning lessons and into a spirit of blessedness remaining open to give to those around you. And the next time you hear *Georgia On (Your) Mind* just close your eyes and think of Ray Charles and how he moved through his incidents and how the glory of God was heard in him.

Amen