

June 14, 2015 Third Sunday after Pentecost    2 Corinthians 5:6 -610, 14 - 17  
Lakewood United Methodist Church            Mark 4: 26 - 34

### Even the Little things Matter

I read these two scripture lessons several times this week. With all the things that are going on in the world today they really got me thinking. Our lesson from 2 Corinthians 5:14 says, "For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died".

5:15: "And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them".

Do we really believe that? Do we believe that every person on this earth has equal value because "one died for all?" What about people who haven't accepted Christ or who don't go to church? Do we believe God loves and values them as much as those who do know him? What about people who are different from us....different color, different nationality, different religion. What about those with special needs or those who are just ...different? Did Christ die for them too? Do they have as much value as those who are like us? If we are really His and have accepted Him and try to follow Him then yes, we have to believe that God loves us all equally, no matter what. Maybe we do believe it, but do we actually live it? What do many of us do if we see someone we think may be homeless? Do we cross the street or not look

them in the eye for fear they may speak to us? Do we look down on them because of their appearance? If we are true followers of Christ then the answer should be no. Should be. Paul goes on to say...

5:16: "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way".

What would that look like? What if we looked at every person from the point of view of Jesus rather than our own human imperfect view? What if we didn't see the color of their skin or what they were wearing? Would we treat people differently? What if we didn't notice their accent when they spoke to us or didn't care if they were a woman or a man, gay or straight? Would we treat them all with dignity and respect because Jesus died for them just as He did for us? What would it be like if we didn't care if someone was an executive or a shop worker, a server or a garbage collector? What would the world look like if we loved one another as Jesus loves us all?

Many of us have heard the famous "I Have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. But for those of us who haven't, let me share a little of it with you.

"Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a *dream* today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls

will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a *dream* today!"

This brings me to the parable of the mustard seed. It's a story we have heard many times.

4:30: "He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?

4:31: It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth;

4:32: yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

The mustard seed is the tiniest of seeds yet it grows into a very large tree.

For a believer this represents our faith. It starts out small and as we learn and study more, our faith grows. In the world it also represents our faith and how we share it with others to make other disciples. Jesus started out with just 12 disciples...fishermen, tax collectors and others just like us. Ordinary people doing extraordinary things by sharing their faith and love of Christ. Look how

many Christians there are in the world today. There are over 2 billion...almost one third of the world population. And it started with only 13 men!

When I read this parable this time, I looked at it a little differently. Well, maybe not differently but a little more deeply. I started thinking about the little things. Everything must have a beginning. It may start out small but it can become bigger than anything we ever imagined. I read of a scientific experiment involving dyes and a container of water. Drop by drop the dye is placed in the water. At first, it doesn't seem to do anything...the water is still clear. But if you keep putting drops in eventually the whole container of water changes color. It is the repeating of the drops that has that effect. The disciples did the same thing. It was their repeated efforts of spreading the words and love of Jesus that caused Christianity to become what it is today.

Have you ever heard of the butterfly effect? I won't give you the technical definition but basically it says that one small change can have far reaching effects....like a butterfly flapping its wings having an effect on the time and path of a hurricane some weeks later. I found a story on the internet that will demonstrate this butterfly effect. It is said to be a true story.

## **A Poor Scottish Farmer**

One day in the countryside of Scotland, a common and poor farmer was toiling in his field when suddenly he heard a cry for help. Startled, he recognized someone was in trouble and the plea was coming from a nearby bog. Immediately he dropped what he was doing and ran to the source of the plea. When he located the voice calling for help, he stumbled upon a terrified boy up to his waist in black muck, screaming and sinking deeper and deeper into the bog as each minute passed.

The farmer calmly retrieved ropes from nearby, pulled the boy out of the bog and saved his life.

The next day, an elegantly dressed nobleman arrived at the farmer's small and simple home. When the nobleman stepped out of his carriage, he introduced himself as the father of the boy the farmer had saved.

Emotionally, the nobleman thanked the farmer and asked to repay the farmer for saving his son's life. The farmer waved off the offer and informed the nobleman he could not accept payment for doing what was right.

At that moment, the nobleman asked if the farmer had a son in which the farmer replied he did. Subsequently, the nobleman insisted he provide the

farmer's son an education on par with that he would provide his own son.

Upon leaving the farmer's house, the nobleman told the farmer, "if the lad is anything like his father, he'll no doubt grow to be a man we both will be proud of."

The nobleman's prediction concerning the farmer's son proved to be prophetic.

True to the nobleman's word, the farmer's son attended the best schools in the world and eventually graduated from St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London. More importantly, he went on to become known throughout the world as the noted Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of Penicillin.

Years afterward, the same nobleman's son who was saved from the bog was stricken with pneumonia. What saved his life this time? Penicillin.

The name of the nobleman? Lord Randolph Churchill.

His son's name? Sir Winston Churchill.

... Small things do make a difference!

Now, what would the world be like if we all thought about the little things?

What effect could a smile have on someone's day? What if we opened a door

or let someone out in traffic? What if we stood up for the kid being bullied or gave to food to a hungry person? These are all small acts of kindness but we never know what kind of effect they may have on someone. Here is another illustration of how a small gesture can have a lasting effect. It is a story written by John Wayne Schlatter.

Mark was walking home from school one day when he noticed the boy ahead of him had tripped and dropped all of the books he was carrying along with two sweaters, a baseball bat, a glove, and a small tape recorder. Mark knelt down and helped the boy pick up the scattered articles. Since they were going the same way, he helped to carry the burden.

As they walked Mark discovered the boy's name was Bill, that he loved video games, baseball, and history, that he was having a lot of trouble with his other subjects and that he had just broken up with his girlfriend. They arrived at Bill's home first and Mark was invited in for a Coke and to watch some t.v. The afternoon passed pleasantly with a few laughs and some shared small talk, then Mark went home.

They continued to see each other around school, had lunch together once or twice. They ended up at the same High school where they had brief contacts over the years. Finally the long awaited senior year came, and three weeks

before graduation, Bill asked Mark if they could talk. Bill reminded him of the day years ago when they had first met.

"Do you ever wonder why I was carrying so many things from school that day?" asked Bill. "You see, I cleaned out my locker because I didn't want to leave a mess for anyone else. I had stored away some of my mother's pills and I was going home to commit suicide. But after we spent some time together I realized that if I had, I would have missed that time and so many others that might follow. So you see, Mark, when you picked up my books for me that day, you did a lot more. You saved my life."

The little things do matter. You just never know what how someone's life could be different because of one small act of kindness. Every small act is showing our love for people and our love for Jesus Christ. Every tiny gesture is displaying our servanthood. Even the little things matter.

Now I will leave you with a quote from Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

Let us pray:

Grant, Oh Lord, that what has been said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.