



Redeemer Lutheran Church of Leisure World

13564 St. Andrews Drive
Seal Beach, CA 90740
Phone (562) 598-8697; FAX (562) 598-8697
e-mail: redeemer_lutheran@verizon.net

July and August 2023

Reflections on WORSHIP and DISCIPLESHIP by Margo Geesing

Oh, the Thinks You Can Think!; (Dr. Seuss) **Oh, the Places You Will Go!;** (Dr. Seuss)

Oh, the Stories You Will Hear!; (Jesus)

Yeah, Theodore Geisel! Or maybe you know him as Theo LeSieg; or most likely, Dr. Seuss. I remember my mom reading Dr. Seuss to me and my brothers; and I read his stories to my kids and I anticipate reading them to my grandchildren. Traditions and stories are the way we all have grown up. It's the way we learn about family, life, and what it means to be a "grown up". Jesus told stories. As we continue the long church season of Sundays after Pentecost, we have a collection of stories (parables) from the Gospel of Matthew. But these are not just stories to entertain but lessons on how we are to live our lives.

The first Sunday of July we have all of three verses for the Gospel lesson. Even though it is very short, it continues shortly after last week's Gospel full of warning of hatred, persecution, and betrayal. If you persevere through all of this "stuff" you will receive your reward! But even this is not the whole of it. You get a reward even if you just help out! You will probably go through the same stuff but maybe to a lesser degree and you will still win a prize. Jesus is calling us to hospitality. He is calling for help. He is calling for support. *How are you going to answer his call and what will be your reward?*

The second Sunday of July we hear the comparison between Jesus and John the Baptist. One lived a stoic life eating little and dressing funny the other would eat and drink with anybody. The powers complained about both. There is no pleasing them! So, as we go about our own lives, what we, as followers of Jesus, need to remember is that we are responsible for building that kingdom! It's not enough to have faith; we need to live that faith. We need to take the yoke that Jesus offers us (he never demands that we take it) and surrender ourselves to him. Most of us instinctively resist yokes and laws ~ no one can limit us! But Jesus wants us to look at his yoke as a way of rest and lightness. When we share that yoke with him, it does become lighter; we work in tandem with him and share the load.

The third Sunday we hear about the parable of the sower who scatters seed indiscriminately and what becomes of each type of seed. Jesus goes on to explain what each of the seeds represent – how people take his message and live it in their lives. On my personal faith journey, I think I have gone through all these stages! There have been times when I can hear Jesus's words and had no

idea what they meant to my life. Then there were times when I heard and sort of understood but when it was difficult to do the right thing it was easy to lose the momentum of faith. Then life gets busy and Jesus is for later, when I have more time. Time to listen, time to pray, time to worship, time to give but the funny thing is, there is never the right time. It wasn't until I took my faith seriously (actually when I had kids of my own) that I took the time to learn, pray, study, read, and really build a foundation for my beliefs and faith that I could truthfully say that I believe. I took ownership and responsibility for my faith and my faith journey.

Then we get to explore why there is evil in the world. It is always human choice that brings evil into the world. Most of us are not out there doing evil purposefully, usually our evil is omission. Things we could or should have done to help build God's Kingdom but we choose not to do. We need to remember that God did not create evil; evil exists where God is not. It is our choice what we do or don't do. God gave us free will, to make the choice to follow Jesus or not. But there are also consequences of our choices which Jesus also outlines! I remember when my children were growing up and there would be a point where one of them would not want to do homework or go to school or do chores and I would tell them that was their choice but they would have to also be willing to face the consequences of those choices. I was very lucky that they pretty much always chose to do what they were supposed to do!

The last Sunday in July Jesus tells five quick comparisons of what the Kingdom of God is like. He touches on the most common references for the people: plants, baking, a farmer, a merchant, and a fisherman. Jesus uses what people know and understand to teach. In our own lives, we teach from what we know and understand. It is how we live our lives and our words and actions that help build that Kingdom of God.

August: Prayer and Faith in Action

In August we begin with of the feeding of the multitude. Where else but through Jesus can we actually find something that is free! All Jesus wanted was a little alone time to mourn his cousin's death. Instead, he ends up with a great following of people. And in his compassion, he heals them and probably spent some time teaching also. At the end of the day, he is tired and still sorrowful in his loss. He tells the apostles to feed the people and they only have excuses on why they can't. So, he does it himself, through prayer and trusting in the Father to answer that prayer. Jesus continued to teach through his example. We are called to pray and trust in the Father.

You have got to love Peter! He is so enthusiastic, brash, and headstrong. And, like us, sometimes falls short. And we wonder at Jesus' patience with him and why he never just threw his hands up in the air and said I am done with you! And we are thankful that he never did (with Peter, or with us). The second Sunday of August starts with the disciples in a boat, in a storm, and Jesus not with them. Jesus starts across the water to them. Peter, always impetuous, tells Jesus to command him to come. Jesus does. Then Peter starts out fine but then starts looking around, realizes what he is doing, doubts, panics, and begins sinking. Then Peter, wisely, call out to Jesus again, to save him. When Peter was focused on Jesus he was doing an amazing thing, walking on water! It wasn't until his focus turned away that he began having trouble.

The third Sunday we again have Jesus teaching and traveling. He begins with the difference between outward show and inward conviction. He compares eating with unclean hands with speaking with an unclean mouth. Then in the second part, He is passing through the district of Tyre and Sidon and is approached by a Canaanite woman. She displays her faith even when Jesus tries

to dismiss her [because he was sent to work with the Israelites, who would be sent to the rest of the world]. And it is this faith that calls him to action. So, when we go in prayer we need to remember that it is not necessarily that we deserve Jesus's answer but the example of our faith in his ability to answer that we place before him.

The last week in August we have Peter at the forefront again. Peter states that Jesus is "*the Messiah, the Son of the Living God*". Can't get faith much stronger than that! Jesus heaps great praises on Peter and his faith. Then Jesus builds his church on Peter! Jesus understands human weakness and doubt but he still builds his church with human beings. Jesus looks to the heart and faith of his people and he looks with the eyes of love, compassion, and mercy.

We all walk with Peter when we are frustrated with our own failings and inadequacies to be worthwhile hands and feet of Jesus in the world today. But we can take heart, Peter had Jesus physically with him and still messed up. We need to pray, read, share, support one another, and most of all realign our vision on the goal ahead, the Lord, and quit looking around. Jesus never gave up on him and will never give up on us!