

## Life: You Make the Difference

### Life Sunday Sermon

**(Matthew 17:14-20) When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. Lord, have mercy on my son, he said. He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him. O unbelieving and perverse generation, Jesus replied, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me. Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment. Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, Why couldnt we drive it out? He replied, Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, Move from here to there and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.**

A venture of faith is something only a Christian truly understands. By its definition ventures of faith lack all of the measurable evidence to make it a good business decision. Ventures of faith often lack the kind of historical track record to ever make anyone feel really comfortable about doing it. Yet, ventures of faith are pretty descriptive of Christian living.

God defined faith this way: **(Hebrews 11:1) Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.** It is an illogical, optimistic and idealistic approach to life. And I would add, that for Christians it is also realistic. In faith believers will step into a fiery furnace or a lions den for their convictions, confident he will be OK.

In faith, believers will leave family and friends to bring the message of faith to distant and primitive lands. In faith, Christians will risk job security to defend the name of Christ. In faith, children will boldly correct teachers and classmates who misrepresent Christ. In faith, Christians will spend countless dollars to support causes consistent with God's Word. In faith, they walk away from a laundry list of things to do on this day, to talk about issues of life, death and the will of God, because they know they are really more important. You have come here to be equipped so that in some way you can make a difference.

Well, I am here to tell you that **YOU MAKE THE DIFFERENCE.** You make the difference first, because of faith. Secondly, it is a difference that touches others. Earlier Christ gave this instruction to his disciples:

**(Matthew 10:7-8) As you go, preach this message: The kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.** It had to have been disheartening for them to attempt to drive out the demon in this boy and to have failed. After all, the assignment was clear. So, why did they fail? Jesus answered the question: **Because you have so little faith.**

Earlier in our text Jesus called the disciples and their contemporaries an **unbelieving and perverse generation.** He called them that because the message of faith was not sinking in. When asked to explain why he talked in parables to the people he said, **(Matthew 13:13-14) Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.**

The people, including the disciples, just were not getting the message of sin and grace. When Jesus said he would suffer and die for the sins of world, his disciples rebuked him. When He was betrayed His disciples deserted him. When challenged on their allegiance His disciples denied him. When seeing His resurrected body His disciples needed to touch the wounds. In one moment they would draw swords to

defend Him. In another they would deny knowing Him.

I believe the disciples originally became infatuated with a cause. On one occasion they argued over who would reign with Christ in His kingdom, failing to grasp what the kingdom of God really was all about. On another occasion they criticized the woman for wasting fine oil and perfume on the feet of Jesus when it could have been sold and money given to the poor. They had semblances of faith, but put all together, it was less than the size of a mustard seed.

Does this sound familiar? How many times havent we embarked upon a mission of mercy only to meet frustration? How many times havent we walked away feeling we have done right in the eyes of God and yet failed? How many times havent we read the words of this text and came to the conclusion, I cant move mountains, therefore I too have weak faith.

Christ used this and other examples in the lives of his disciples to illustrate for them and for us that a venture of faith is more than just healing. It is more than just doing nice things. A venture of faith begins with an internal conviction that my number one goal in life is to glorify God. That is more important than driving out demons. It is more important healing the sick. It is more important than saving unborn children from abortion or rescuing the elderly from euthanasia.

You glorify God and please Him when you live by faith. As Scripture tells us, **(Hebrews 11:6) And without faith it is impossible to please God.** Faith is that perspective you have that sin destroyed your relationship with God. Faith is that conviction that though I could not save myself, God saved me when He sent Jesus to die for my sins. Faith is now a heartfelt conviction that entrusts all of life to the will of God, confident of the promise that: **(Romans 8:28) And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**

Listen to the words of promise and comfort we find in Proverbs: **(Proverbs 3:25-35) Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared. Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, Come back later; Ill give it tomorrow -- when you now have it with you. Do not plot harm against your neighbor, who lives trustfully near you. Do not accuse a man for no reason--when he has done you no harm. Do not envy a violent man or choose any of his ways, for the LORD detests a perverse man but takes the upright into his confidence. The Lords curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble. The wise inherit honor, but fools he holds up to shame.**

In faith we recognize that there is often temporary blessing in good things, but eternal blessings in challenges, disappointments and failures. We see that in suffering, even if our efforts to help fail, God has a purpose. When we act we do so always with the conviction of the third petition: **Thy will be done**, regardless of whether it makes sense to me.

It is with this faith, given to you miraculously by the Holy Spirit, that you really do make a difference in the lives of others. Christian service becomes not so much an effort with measurable returns, but rather a focused investment, with confidence that success is guaranteed. God Himself said, **(Isaiah 55:11) [My word] will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.** It is a guarantee! God will make it work. Our role is to simply share it and to reflect Gods love to others.

You make the difference in the lives of others when you become less focused on success, progress and

personal accomplishment and more focused on faith, service and contentment in doing the Lords will. God blesses endeavors of faith. The history of our congregation and our lives are testimony to this fact. When all odds seemed to be against us it succeeds as a venture of faith consistent with the Lords will.

Even though we face new, complicated and tempting issues of life and death you continue to make a difference in touching more lives with guidance from Gods Word. You wear the little pins so that when asked you can talk about the Creator of life. You write letters to the editor to clarify Gods view of life now and forever. You elect political leaders who uphold the moral absolutes that you have learned from God and who work to keep religious freedom so that you can share Gods Word.

You make the difference that touches others because you know what it means to be touched by God through Christ. And in this service you make the devil stompin mad! He will seek to discourage, embarrass, frustrate and demoralize you. He will attempt to frighten you into silence, lull you into apathy and overwhelm you with the challenges of faith. But hold your ground for as Paul said, **(1 Corinthians 15:58) Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**

Continue to make a difference for you already have, you certainly can through faith, and as God has already promised, you will. Amen.