

Oaklands Chapel - Sermon

Lesson 27: Luke 9:1-17
“The First Practicum”
Sunday, May 31, 2009

Reading: Luke 9:1-17

Introduction

As we begin our time together in the Word I want to jump straight to what I believe to be the heart of our text. As Luke masterfully describes these events, the picture he paints communicates this message: “**You can trust in the superabundant grace and provision of Jesus.**” In the opening scene in our reading the 12 apostles are sent out with absolutely nothing – “no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic.” They are thrown into a situation where they can do nothing to provide for their own needs. Thus they have no option but to trust that Jesus knew what He was doing when He sent them off in this way. We might imagine, if we try to put ourselves in their position, that they might be feeling not just a little trepidation as they went out. After all, if we set out to be away from home for several days the normal routine is to take provisions along with you. My daughter and a couple of friends are hiking up in Strathcona Park somewhere this weekend. She recently put enough money together to buy a new backpack. I would be more than a little worried if she had embarked on such a trip without a backpack in which to store the provisions needed for the journey. This is an unusual instruction from Jesus – to go on a journey with no provisions whatsoever. He is putting them to the test – highlighting this issue of trust.

If we flip over to the end of the last scene of our reading, these same 12 apostles are standing there each of them holding a basket that is overflowing with bread – and that represents simply the leftovers from this incredible scene where they were actively commissioned to feed a crowd of 10,000 plus people!

The underlying thread of this portion of Luke is a call to pay attention to the reality that even in the face of great need and uncertainty, Jesus not only has the ability to provide for what we need, but He can do it ‘superabundantly’ – He didn’t just provide bread for the 12; He feeds 10,000 other people and sends them home with the leftovers!

I wonder how you’ve come here today. I wonder what life has been ‘dishing up’ for you lately. Maybe you find yourself in a time of real need in a material way – your job is uncertain or you are looking for

work unsuccessfully so far. Perhaps the recent economic turmoil has affected you directly and you're unsure of how you are going to provide for you and your family. On the other hand, maybe you're doing OK economically but there are other uncertainties in your life – maybe a troublesome relationship; maybe a serious health concern; maybe a life-changing decision to make regarding education or a career or perhaps the very momentous decision about whether this special friend should actually become my life partner in marriage. It could be that the area of uncertainty for you is the whole idea of Christian faith – maybe you're unsure as to whether or not it is right for you.

Into all of these and every other area of uncertainty, the passage before us today wants to speak a word of encouragement and confidence. Jesus is trustworthy! **You can trust in the superabundant grace and provision of Jesus.**

There have been moments for me in this past week where this message has been needed. I pray with all my heart that this same word might bring comfort, confidence and encouragement to you as well.

Background

From the very beginning of our sojourn through Luke we have said that our goal is to 'Discover the Central Character of Salvation History' by 'walking beside Jesus for a while'. Today in a particular way we put ourselves into the shoes of the 12 apostles – those ones who literally walked beside Jesus for 3+ years. We do that because in this passage they are the ones whom Jesus is focusing on; they are the ones He is investing in and training up for ministry. The miracle which we call 'the feeding of the 5000' is not so much about the crowds of people and their needs as it is about the 12 apostles and what they needed to learn about who Jesus really is and how trustworthy He is!

Last week we paid attention to Luke's masterful storytelling and how over the last several chapters we have observed Jesus interacting with different groups of people. First it was Pharisees and the religious experts; then the focus shifted to the broader group of disciples and followers – those who sincerely had an interest or at least a curiosity to discover who this Jesus really was. But now, beginning right here in 9:1, Jesus begins to show special interest in the 12 apostles – those who had been mentioned by name back in 6:14-16.

It is this little band of followers that perhaps we can most readily identify with. They seemed to have a sincere desire to follow Jesus but so often were clueless as to how to do it! I wonder if you feel that way sometimes! Let us pay attention to what Jesus is trying to teach them in this section.

I have suggested that the underlying thread in the account of these events in our passage is: **You can trust in the superabundant grace and provision of Jesus.** I ask you to imagine that this thread is made up of 3 strands.

1. Trust is rooted in the identity of Jesus
2. Trust grows in ‘apprentices’
3. God’s provision is symbolized in bread

Let us observe how these strands of thread weave together to make this amazing picture of Jesus who is trustworthy.

1. Trust is rooted in the identity of Jesus
 - a. This is not a new theme by any means – we have already bumped into it several times. Remember the ‘who is this’ questions...
 - i. ‘Who is this who speaks the demons and they obey to Him?’
 - ii. ‘Who is this who has authority to forgive sins?’
 - iii. ‘Who is this who commands the wind and waves and they obey Him?’
 - b. In fact, if we stop and think about it we realize that this identity issue is absolutely key to our ability to trust.
 - i. After all, if Jesus is just like any other fallible religious leader who does good things but makes many mistakes and dies and goes away, then I will not put my trust in that Jesus.
 - ii. But Luke is not letting us think that about Jesus – he is presenting Him to us as One who is different from all the rest – He is the unique Son of God who is worthy of our trust.
 - c. But how is His identity presented in our text here?
 - i. **He is the One who possesses and delegates supernatural authority.**
 1. *“When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases.” (9:1)*

2. There was to be no doubt in the disciples' minds when they went out and cast out demons that the authority for them to do that did not come from them; they did not earn it. It came directly from Jesus whom they had already observed acting with this authority Himself.

ii. He is the One whose identity is debated even by the king

1. In fact, in the little commentary section (7-9) between the 2 main events of our text we find Herod raising yet another 'who is this' question.
2. It is worth noticing that Herod hears about Jesus through the work of the disciples – v. 7 *“Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed.”*
3. Here's the debate that is stirring up among the people: *“some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life. But Herod said, “I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?” And he tried to see him.”*
 - a. It seems that everyone is trying to explain Jesus – where does this power come from? Before John the Baptist it had been 400+ years since the Jewish community has had a prophet of God who acted with authority. The only way they can make sense of Jesus is to peg Him as one of the great prophets come back to life.
 - b. This debate will come to a crisis in our next lesson as Jesus pushes this issue of identity with his disciples

iii. He continues to display His power through compassion

1. We see this as the apostles return from their mission – *“he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida.”* (v. 10)
2. We see this in His treatment of the crowd –
 - a. *“He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.”* (v. 11)
 - b. His compassion continues of course as He displays His power in supernaturally providing food for the whole crowd which is defined as 5,000 men (plus women and children).
- d. And so this ability for these 12 men to trust Jesus is rooted in their growing understanding of who He really is. He really is not like any other rabbi or other religious leader. His

power and authority has been displayed in every power of life. Now they have actually tasted some of this power and authority in their own lives as they go and do some of these supernatural acts of healing and casting out demons.

- e. We need to be clear about this in our own experience.
 - i. Our ability to trust in Jesus is rooted in His identity – not in circumstances; not in what He does or does not do in response to our prayers.
 - ii. This is a liberating concept because that means that even when circumstances seem to be confusing in our lives we can continue to trust because we know that He is the “Christ of God” as Peter will declare later on this chapter, and He will do what is right and good for the bigger picture!
- f. How do we learn to grow in our ability to trust? By becoming apprentices of Jesus!

2. Trust grows in ‘apprentices’

- a. Many of you know that I am a carpenter.
 - i. Many years ago I became an apprentice carpenter and got a job with a contractor in town. I was put alongside Peter who was a journeyman carpenter with many years experience. Peter taught me many things – I learned by watching him, then by doing it with him until ultimately I was equipped to do some of those things on my own. This is the heart of the concept of apprenticeship and this is exactly the picture of what is going on here at the beginning of Luke 9. In fact this whole passage is a beautiful example of the whole idea of apprenticeship.
- b. Look closely at what Jesus asks them to do
 - i. “*and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.*” (v. 2)
- c. What has Jesus been doing up until now?? What have they been watching him do?
 - i. Preaching the Kingdom of God and healing the sick!
 - ii. Up until now they’ve been watching Him – now it’s their turn and so He sends them out.
- d. What do they experience as apprentices?
 - i. Poverty and dependence upon God and the hospitality of the community.
 - 1. This was very much the experience of Jesus – you recall perhaps Jesus saying at one point in His ministry ‘the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head’

- ii. Opposition – not everyone agrees with or likes their message and so Jesus gives them very specific instruction as to what to do when they receive persistent opposition.
- iii. Later on as they re-join Jesus they learn the value of rest from Him as He seeks to take them away to a quiet place. They also learn compassion as Jesus pushes them to be the ones to come up with a solution about how to feed the crowd.
 - 1. The miracle story is a beautiful example of an apprenticeship relationship in action – Jesus giving instructions and working alongside the 12.
- e. I believe we have much to learn by considering the whole idea of following Jesus in ‘apprenticeship’ language.
 - i. I Howard Marshall comments: ““*The Twelve experience the power and authority given to them by Jesus and so are faced anew with the question of who Jesus is; at the same time the instructions they receive constitute the beginning of a call to the same life of poverty, dependence upon God and rejection by men as was lived by Jesus himself.*”¹
 - ii. Dallas Willard, author of such books as ‘The Divine Conspiracy’ and ‘Renovation of the Heart’ challenges all followers of Jesus to consider themselves to be apprentices of Jesus. Too many Christians believe that all they need to do is get saved and wait until Jesus comes again.
 - 1. This is certainly not what we are hearing from Jesus in Luke! Jesus is calling us to be His apprentices in the Kingdom of God – not simply find a fire escape from hell to heaven!
 - iii. Thinking like an apprentice of Jesus calls us to a much greater sense of purpose in life; a greater willing to sacrifice for the sake of the advancement of the Kingdom of God.
 - iv. Thinking like an apprentice will put us in situations where we will be less dependent on ourselves and more dependent on Him – THIS is what causes our trust (faith) to grow deep and strong.
 - v. This is why I suggest here that the 2nd strand in our thread of trust here is that ‘trust grows best in apprentices’.

¹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 350.

1. It is more than coincidence that just after this miracle of the feeding of the 5000 is the time when Jesus presses the disciples to grapple with who He really is. This is the time when Peter is able to stand up and say with confidence, ‘You are the Christ of God’. This experience of going out to do the ministry on their own coupled with the feeding miracle built their faith strong!
- f. As you think back on some of the uncertainties of life that we talked about earlier, imagine facing those uncertainties with the attitude and mindset of an apprentice of Jesus.
 - i. How does this change the way you look at life? How does it change the perspective on the size of the uncertainties in comparison with the scope of the power and ability of this amazing Person, Jesus?
3. God’s provision is symbolized in bread
 - a. I would like to suggest that this is the 3rd strand in the overall thread of this text that invites us to put our trust fully in Jesus. There is something very simple and yet powerful and dynamic in the imagery of bread in this text.
 - b. We have already noted that this whole text is tied together by the reality of the disciples taking no bread on their journey at the beginning and then these same people holding the overflowing baskets of bread at the end.
 - c. In previous weeks we have also paid attention to the reality that Luke records Jesus very often eating with people.
 - i. Robert Karris, to whom we referred last week, notes that in Luke’s Gospel “*Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal or coming from a meal!*”² (No wonder I like Luke so much!)
 - d. What I would like to reflect on briefly is the special significance of bread. A commentator by the name of Jeremias offers these comments.

² Robert Karris quoted by Wilson Poon, “Superabundant Table Fellowship in the Kingdom: The feeding of the five thousand and the meal motif in Luke” *The Expository Times* p. 226

In Judaism . . . table-fellowship means fellowship before God, for the eating of a piece of broken bread by everyone who shares in a meal brings out the fact that they all have a share in the blessing which the master of the house had spoken over the unbroken bread. Thus Jesus' meals with the publicans and sinners . . . are not only events on a social level . . . but had an even deeper significance. They are an expression of the mission and message of Jesus . . . The inclusion of sinners in the community of salvation, achieved in table-fellowship, is the most meaningful expression of the message of the redeeming love of God.

- e. In our Western societies bread does not play nearly as large a role as it would have in Jesus' day and as it does on other parts of the world.
 - i. Bread is a symbol of life itself in many places.
- f. With this in mind we read Luke's masterful understatement of this miracle – *“16Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people. 17They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.”*
 - i. The picture is one of Jesus breaking 5 small loaves of bread into enough pieces to feed more than 10,000 people! It is a picture of abundant life and extravagant provision.
 - ii. Can you imagine the look on the disciples' faces when He begins to break the bread and then just keeps on breaking and breaking?!

Conclusion

We too have been invited to a Table; to a meal where bread plays a key role. As we come to the Table today I invite you to reflect on what we have learned by observing this marvellous text.

- You can trust the superabundant grace and provision of Jesus

This thread is comprised of 3 strands

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