

Lost Lamb or Person of Power? The Choice is Ours!
Rev. Dr. Durrell Watkins
Sunshine Cathedral, 19 July 2009

Mark 6.34 – *They were like sheep without a shepherd and Jesus began to teach them many things.*

My cousin Bonnie was at the Wal-Mart and noticed something shiny. Now, Cousin Bonnie is not the sharpest knife in the drawer. She asked a clerk what the shiny object was, and the clerk said (almost incredulously), "It's a thermos!" Bonnie asked what it was for, and the clerk said, "it keeps things hot and cold." So, at our family dinner at my great-aunt Gladys' house the next Sunday, in walks Cousin Bonnie with this thermos. Aunt Gladys asked her, "Bonnie, honey, what've you got?" Bonnie said, "it's a thermos. It keeps things hot and cold." Aunt Gladys asked, "what have you got in it?" She said, "Hot chocolate and two popsicles." Poor Cousin Bonnie. She was like a lamb without a shepherd.

*As [Jesus] went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like **sheep without a shepherd**; and he began to **teach them** many things. (Mark 6)*

Don't you wonder what he was teaching them? I bet it was a message of personal empowerment, because that's what the gospel of Jesus Christ is.

What is Jesus teaching? He is teaching people to have a change in consciousness, a change in attitude so they can access the Good in life for themselves.

The complainers you will always have with you.

The naysayers you will always have with you.

The people who see only despair and defeat you will always have with you.

But Jesus says, You can choose a different path. You can't choose it for them; but you can choose it for you. If you don't like what you see in life, change your perception. If your attitude and your outlook aren't making you happy or productive or hopeful, change it! It's the one thing you actually can control.

How did we ever get through the worst of the AIDS years? My God, without hope, without joy, without a sense of purpose, without a refusal to give up no matter how many doctor visits and funerals filled our days, how could we have done it? We didn't let the crisis define us. We moved through it. We didn't give up. And eventually, miracles started to take place. That's the message of Jesus in action!

How did my grandparents get through the Great Depression and World War 2? Without hope, without joy, without a sense of purpose, without a refusal to give up no matter how hard times were, how could they have done it? They didn't let the crises define them. They moved through their crisis. They didn't give up. And eventually, peace and prosperity were experienced again.

We didn't whine our way through AIDS, and the generations before us didn't whine their way through their difficulties. They stood up to the challenges; they looked for the opportunities. They decided that they would outlast the problem and be lifted up to new heights in the fullness of time. Complaining never brought about resurrection; but faith always will.

What is faith? What is that faith the size of a mustard seed that will explode with achievement? It isn't opinion. It is trust. If we trust God, if we trust our own potential, if we trust our ability to adapt as much as a mustard seed trusts the soil and sun to provide all that it needs to grow, then nothing can stop our accomplishments either. "If God is for us, who [or what] could be against us?"

Faith doesn't make miracles easy; it just makes them possible. That's what Jesus has always been trying to teach those who needed good news.

If we were to read the rest of Mark's 6th chapter, we'd see miracles. But before the miracles, Jesus is teaching people many things. Jesus is teaching the people, and it gets late. And the people are tired and hungry and cranky. And the disciples are tired, and hungry and cranky. And the disciples say to Jesus, "Send these people home; it's late." Oh, is ministry inconvenient for you, my disciples? Maybe you'd like to go back to fishing. We're not in this for us; we're in this to help them. I'm sorry if you don't like the hours, but this is ministry. Feed them!

The disciples immediately complain that they don't have any money and they don't have much food. How can they ever feed so many people? Find a way. Yes, you have a problem, so you'll have to move through it or rise above it or outlast it. Then we see five loaves and two fish somehow do more than five loaves and two fish should. People find a way where they seemed to be no way. Thank God Jesus didn't listen to the nay-sayers. Thank God Jesus gave miracles a chance.

Later Jesus is walking on water. He's doing something bold, courageous, impressive. The disciples see it, and they're terrified. They see Jesus rising above the waves of despair and walking above the currents of defeat, and they say, "It's a ghost!" Jesus just says, "It's me. DON'T BE AFRAID!"

These miracles begin with Jesus seeing people who are lost, scared, aimless, desperate, lacking a vision...they are like sheep without a shepherd; and it breaks his heart. So he teaches them many things. Some of them learn the lesson, and they begin to see life differently. They begin to experience miracles. Jesus seems to be saying, "you don't have to be a lost lamb. You can be a person of power. The choice is yours."

Now, let's have a prophetic moment; that is, let's do some truth telling. I know that retirement accounts have lost money. That is scary. I know that some doctors have a horrible bedside manner and can instill fear just when you need hope instead. I know that houses have depreciated by as much as 75% (my own condo as well). I know that people have taken 10 and 20 percent pay cuts just so they wouldn't lose their jobs entirely, and others have lost their jobs. I know that life is tough sometimes. But the children of God are tougher.

Summers at Sunshine Cathedral are historically very difficult. 60 to 100 people leave us for the summer, and the people who stay will miss two or three weeks for vacations, if their finances allow. Giving dips for about 8-10 weeks, and that makes it tough around here. We limit spending, do fundraisers, but the fact remains we exist on the faithful generosity of our members and friends. Collectively, we are the church and the church will never be more than we give to it. And in this economy, you can imagine that the stress is even higher for those who have to make miracles happen on a budget.

People will sometimes suggest that we send the people home...cut ministries, cut worship services, cut doing church because it's difficult, or temporarily scary. But then I see Jesus saying, "You have no money? Feed them anyway!" "I see Jesus walking on the water and shouting out, "Don't be afraid!" Jesus taught people to stop being lost lambs, and start being the persons of power that children of God are meant to be. And the miracles happened. And they still do.

We will not be cutting ministry or worship services at Sunshine Cathedral. We may add some, but we will not be doing less. Some services may have 20 people, others may have 200, some will have 500. But do you know the most important number of all? It's the number 1...the one person who needed a word of hope and who heard the word in due season because we were here to offer it. Maybe that person is you today. At some point, it's all of us.

We are not ruled by the circumstances of life; we are guided by faith in a good God and by a mandate that says we will continue Sharing the Light with the world...even when it's inconvenient, even when it's difficult, even when it's scary, and maybe especially in those times...because

others are feeling the pain and the fear as well. And that's when they need ministry most. And it's our job as the people of God to provide it. We're in this together; and together, we will be blessed and we will be a blessing to others.

The summer will give way to Fall, and things will get better. The Recession will give way to prosperity one day, and things will get better. But we aren't waiting for things to get better. We are going to rise above the chaos and confusion and show the world that miracle workers still exist in the body of Christ! (and at the Sunshine Cathedral).

Jesus taught them many things. I hope we can listen, and learn some of those much needed things. If we will, then somehow, someday, a miracle will break forth in our lives. This is the gospel. This is the good news. Amen.

© Durrell Watkins 2009

I am a person of power.
I am a person of faith.
I am a child of God.
I am blessed to be a blessing.
And so it is!

"Our life is an expression of our deepest beliefs...To heal the body or the business, one must heal the belief." Rev. Dr. Frederick Bailes