

Matthew 9:35-10:8

The task before us

I will be making 2 main points this morning. First, how very precious we are to God - the depth and breadth and height and immensity of God's love for us. And secondly, how much God longs for us and for all the world to know that love - every man and woman and child the globe over.

First: how precious we are to God -

One day a small boy tried to lift a heavy stone, but couldn't budge it. His father, watching, finally said, "Are you positive that you're using all your strength?" "Yes, I am!" the boy cried. "No, you're not," said the father. "You haven't asked me to help you."

"God is our shelter and our strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not be afraid, even if the earth is shaken and mountains fall into the ocean depths; even if the seas roar and rage and the hills are shaken by the violence."

Do we really know how very much God loves us? That God is always ready to help in times of trouble? Or are we like the small boy, struggling with the tasks and hurts and confusion of life, alone? A year or so ago, someone said scornfully that there are people who turn to God to arrange parking places for them. He believes that we are to take care of much of life on our own. I would agree with him on parking places. However, I believe that far too many people have no idea the wonder and joy of walking closely with God - sharing each moment of laughter and tears, hopes and disillusionment. Too many of us "save" God for the big crises in our lives and in so doing forget to talk and walk daily with God. We overlook the promise that God made in Jesus, that through the Holy Spirit, God would be our companion, for the duration of our journey - every step, every moment - sharing, loving, comforting, strengthening, rejoicing.

A favourite image of mine comes from St. John of the Cross, a great Christian mystic. I suppose I like it because sometimes when I'm praying, I drift off to sleep. In fact, when I can't sleep, I start to talk things over with God, and am always a little surprised when I awaken feeling the weight taken from me. St. John of the Cross, it is said, often went to the chapel in the monastery where he lived and served God. He would take his prayer shawl and stretch out upon it on the chapel floor. Often he would slumber, sleeping the night away on the chapel floor. He thought of it as "resting on my Lord".

God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help ...

Now, the second point - growing out of the Matthew passage. Jesus saw the crowds pressed in around him one day and his heart was filled with pity - they were worried and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

God cares for this world - God loves all people with a passionate and eager heart. As John phrased it, "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that by believing none would die, but all would be in the kingdom, feasting and living forever with him."

Jesus looked at the crowd - their fear, their helplessness, their "lostness," and his heart was filled for them.

I shall always remember a very special young lady when I hear of Jesus' compassion. It was in the late '70s and I still remember it in full detail. She was just 15 at the time. One day, after school, she came into my office and within moments, tears were streaming down her face.



Some of her friends were trying lots of different things to "get high". "Don't they know," she asked, "that they are precious to God and that he can take them higher than anything else? They could destroy their lives, lives that God meant to be beautiful and happy. They could end up dead and never know how much they are loved."

Jesus looked at the crowd, was moved with pity and longing for them, and then named twelve disciples who would walk with him, learn from him, and learn of him so that they could go out - farther than he was able to go himself - and tell about the kingdom, how near to hand it is.

The crowds still press around us - and they are still worried and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. And today, Jesus would name us as his disciples. He would send us out to share in the lives of those around us in such a way that they will hear about, feel and come to know the kingdom and their immense worth to God.

"Fear not" Jesus said. "The Father's greatest pleasure is to give you the kingdom." That promise is for us, because God loves us. That promise will never be heard or believed beyond this place, unless we move out into the homes around us. Jesus said to the disciples, "You have received ... so now give."

Francis Bacon once said, "It is not what we eat but what we digest that makes us strong; not what we gain but what we save that makes us rich; not what we read but what we remember that makes us learned; not what we preach but what we practice that makes us Christian."

To recap: 1. We are loved without measure, without condition, and 2. We are to tell someone, everyone we meet, for God has brought them to us to tell, to show, to love.