

Devotion: July 9, 2020

Matthew 9:35-10:8

35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.’

10 Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. ²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. ⁵These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷As you go, proclaim the good news, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” ⁸Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. ⁹Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, ¹⁰no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food. ¹¹Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. ¹²As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgement than for that town.

When I was younger I thought a Pre-Existing Condition meant that you had some condition before you even existed.
Made sense, at the time.
But now, as I reach Medicare, I wonder what pre-existing conditions will disqualify me in the future.
Will it be that I have hypertension?
Would my pre-existing condition be my need for prescription eyeglasses?
My lactose intolerance?
That bald spot on the top of my head?
You may scoff at these ideas, but just remember, insurance companies get to decide what constitutes a pre-existing condition.
And what is the main object of insurance companies?
To prove that your condition was caused before you existed!

Jesus not only died for our pre-existing conditions; he lived with compassion in the middle of our suffering. The text today points to "The Great Physician" who feels only compassion for those who are experiencing medical challenges, and does something about it. Jesus experienced our suffering when he saw those suffering under disease and sickness and disability.

Dr. Jesus takes one look at the charts and delivers his command to the newly appointed disciple-doctors: "*Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment*" (10:8).

God does not expect us to pay for our insurance up front. He doesn't need us to pay up before we can be worthy to approach him and receive his love, grace and forgiveness. If that were the way it worked, then what's the point?

Cleaning up our act is not a precondition for the love of God. God does not say to us, "If you would just do this or do that, then I could love you." All preexisting conditions are covered. Period.

Why is this important? Because we all know that being loved and accepted is half the battle.

Calvin Miller says that *"we live in misery when we cannot master the art of that unconditional acceptance that God extends to us."* Then he goes on to tell this story/fable:

Ethel had always had a long, long nose. In grade school the kids all called her "Beaky" until she ran into the restroom and cried. She was nearly 30 before Elmer (who had a fairly long nose himself) asked her to marry him. She said, "Yes, of course, I'll marry you, but what about my nose."

"What nose?" asked Elmer.

This was clearly the man for her.

She married Elmer, who loved her and never seemed to notice the length of her nose. But Ethel was not so gracious. Though her own nose had been fully accepted by Elmer, she had, over the years, begun to feel that Elmer's nose was just too long, and she didn't mind saying so.

"It's too long, Elmer!" said Ethel, looking straight at Elmer's nose. "If you would just have it clipped, you'd be a good-looking man."

Elmer felt bad, but he trusted Ethel. Every time she said, "If you would just" she would tell him something that was good for him. Now she was telling him the plain truth. His nose was too long. He could see that

One of the first things Ethel said to him on their honeymoon was that he snored so loud she couldn't sleep. "If you would just have your adenoids out, I could be truly happy with you." So Elmer went to an E.N.T. surgeon and had his adenoids taken out. He quit snoring, but Ethel was not entirely happy.

When Elmer saw her looking at his neck mole, he could have said it before she did: "Elmer, if you would just have that mole taken off your neck" It wasn't much of a trick. It cost \$65 in outpatient charges. Presto: no more neck mole.

The same thing happened with Elmer's overlapping incisors. "Elmer, if you would just"

"Oh, Ethel, of course," said Elmer, not letting her finish. An oral surgeon finished the task and Ethel was happy for a week or so, but soon Ethel pointed out that his tonsils were always infected and probably responsible for his halitosis. "Elmer, if you would just" So, of course, he did.

He was in the basement, meditating on whom he should call about the nose clip when Ethel made her way down the rickety steps and found him sitting in a dark corner. As her eyes fully adjusted to the low light, she saw a crude shelf with a sign over it. The sign said ELMER, IF YOU WOULD JUST A series of bottles sat on the shelf, labeled with dates and filled with clear solutions. Inside each of the bottles were things like moles and teeth and adenoids and tonsils. On the last bottle was written "nose tip," all ready to be dated when his surgery was over.

"Ethel ..." Elmer hesitated, "I was about to call a plastic surgeon."

"Why Elmer, if you would just -" Ethel stopped and looked at the sign over the shelf. Suddenly she felt ashamed. She realized If-you-would-just was a terrible game. "Elmer, if you would just ..." she went on, "postpone that nose clip. I want to get mine clipped first."

"But darling, I like your nose the way it is!"

"Elmer, are you sure?"

He stood up and kissed her sweetly on the tip of her long proboscis. "Ethel, I know how to make our marriage perfect."

"I do, too, Elmer, but go ahead and say it."

"If you would just quit saying, 'If you would just ...'" (Calvin Miller, An Owner's Manual for the Unfinished Soul).

God doesn't play the If-you-would-just game.

God says instead, "Just as you are, come."

No matter the warts, moles, overlapping incisors, tonsils, adenoids and long proboscis, balding or lactose intolerant we are.

All pre-existing conditions covered.

Let us pray:

O God, you shelter your people amid their distress; you provide them a haven of security and rest. You bring comfort to those with affliction, and hear the pleas of the persecuted. You cause your mercy to flow like living water; your benevolence stretches to the ends of the earth. We come in praise of all your goodness and lift our voices with thanks for your care.

-James G. Kirk