

Pastor's Devotional
February 11, 2018

Last Sunday, we listened with Twelve disciples-in-training as Jesus taught with a parable. We thought about how to cultivate spiritual receptiveness. We can soften hard hearts with kindness; we can recognize and remove the idols in rock-ridden hearts; we can pluck weeds from distraction-prone hearts. No mortal's heart is ideal soil for God's Kingdom. Faithful disciples continually cultivate their own hearts. When possible we seek to cultivate each other's hearts.

The remainder of Luke 8 portrays Christ-following as an adventuresome mission trip. Jesus took his Jewish disciples to the Gentile side of the lake—way out of their comfort zone. A storm nearly swamped the boat. While saving them, Jesus stretched their faith. On the Gentile side, a deranged man screamed till Jesus confronted the evil that shackled him. Then the Lord brought a dead girl back to life and healed a woman's twelve-year hemorrhage. Following Jesus on mission was both terrifying and exhilarating!

Then Jesus announced that his disciples had watched long enough. He "called the Twelve together, and gave them power and authority to drive out all the demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (Luke 9:1). Disciples-in-training were deputized to represent Jesus, teach like Jesus, oppose evil like Jesus, and heal like Jesus. Later on, Jesus supplemented the Twelve with seventy-two others. After ministering they "returned with joy, saying, "Lord even the demons submit to us in your name" (Luke 10:1, 17).

Those pre-Resurrection mission trips prepared Jesus' disciples for that awesome era called the "Acts of the Apostles." They remind us that our best learning as disciples happens when we allow God to send us to heal, proclaim God's Kingdom, and liberate people from evil. Unless we are stretched, we won't know the peace that comes from trusting in our ever-present Lord. Until we deal with need, we won't discover how God can magnify the impact of limited resources. Until we oppose evil, we won't experience the power of God's love.

How we wish that our Lord performed miracles each time that we minister! Several of us anointed Tom Tipps; we prayed fervently for his deliverance from cancer. A miracle not only would have spared Tom's life, his amazed neighbors would flock to our missional community!

Tom has died. Nonetheless, God's power is at work. Tom received the greatest healing—the miracle of resurrection. And God was working through us when Tom discovered authentic Christian fellowship. He and Louise faced his nightmare with our attentive support. It's been a season for Tom and Louise to renew their faith and rediscover the church. And at today's Celebration of Tom's Life, others not connected to a church may come to experience church in the wild. God is surely at work when disciples-in-training live on God's mission.

Nonetheless, in the face of human need, we will often feel empty-handed. After giving them a taste of God's power, Jesus put his disciples into an impossible situation:

Please read Luke 9:10-17.

Whether reading alone, with your family, or in a micro-church, ponder/discuss these questions:

1. How did Jesus put the disciples into a seemingly possible situation?
2. What resources did they have to respond to Jesus' request?
3. How did the meager resources more than meet the crowd's needs?
4. Have you witnessed a ministry miracle? If not, have you seen God provide in a surprising way when you (or your team) responded to human need?