

This is my Story – Psalm 119:97-104

This month we have been looking at the value and importance of scripture. The written Word of God is a great gift he has given us through the inspiration of the HS so that we might know the Living Word of God who is Jesus – the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

Earlier Ziou read for us from Psalm 119:97-104. The Psalmist starts this section with this thought:

“Oh how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.”

The law is any teaching that comes from God. It is not just the Ten Commandments or any other regulations. It is much broader than that – for every word that God gives to us is filled with life.

The psalmist goes on to say God’s Word makes him wise, and that God’s Word has kept his feet from evil. This section of the Psalm concludes with,

“I gain understanding from your precepts.... Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light on my path.”

This morning I have an ambitious goal, and that is to show you how scripture tells our story. Though I could start back in Genesis and work through the scriptures, I will focus on some of the accounts from Jesus’ life in Matthew’s Gospel to show how we can gain understanding about ourselves and our lives in relation to God through his precepts, or teachings. Ready for a fast ride?

In Matthew 8:1-4 we meet a man who is not sure Jesus would be willing to heal him. He was a leper, and the message he received from the people around him was you are nothing, you are an outcast, you are not worth our time. Could Jesus care about him?

There may be those today that might be saying, “That is my story!” They do not feel loved, or important. In fact, they may feel like they have messed their lives up so much that there is no way Jesus would ever want to help them.

But Jesus says, “I am willing [to help you]. Be clean.” Jesus even touched the man, something forbidden. But Jesus still reaches out a hand of mercy and touches us with a healing touch no matter how terrible the disease of sin has been in our lives.

Later in Matthew 8 (23-27) we see ourselves with the disciples in the boat as the storm hits them. Maybe it was the storm of COVID, maybe it was the storm of a lost job, lost health, or a lost relationship. The storm fills us with fear and dread, and we are sure we are going to go under. So where is Jesus now?

The disciples look for Jesus and he is asleep in the boat. What? When they need him most Jesus is sleeping? The disciples say what we have said to Jesus on more than one occasion, "Lord, save us! We are going to drown!"

And Jesus calmly rebukes the wind and the waves, and the storm ceases. We marvel at the power of Jesus, and are grateful for His help. However we sometimes miss this point: he was always with us, even in the storm. The boat will not go down when Jesus is in it. Why do we forget this?

In chapter 9:1-7 we read of some friends bringing a paralyzed man to Jesus. Maybe this was your story at some point. Paralyzed by fear, self-doubt, anger and bitterness you were stuck. Fortunately there were people in your life who took you to Jesus. Maybe they prayed with you, or took you to church with them. Maybe they dragged you off to a rally or a Christian concert and when you got there, Jesus touched your life. He whispered those words we needed to hear, "Your sins are forgiven" and in that moment all the fears and doubts and pains fell off your shoulders. But Jesus is not done yet: he then tells you to walk again. You were no longer paralyzed. His touch has set you free and all can see the healing Jesus has done in your life.

I met Daniel as he came to our small town to share his testimony. He was a former member of Hell's Angels, and lived a life of crime and violence. He produced pornography and profited by exploiting others. He was huge, and very scary. But one day Jesus came into his life and set him free from the demons that had been controlling him. Now he wanted to tell young people there was a better way to live. He wanted to tell them about Jesus. His story was like that of the two men Jesus met in the graveyard who were demon possessed, found in Matthew 8:28-34.

Yesterday in her report at the Mission Festival, Dell Marie from the Compassionate Resource Warehouse told of a cashier she took time to greet and show a little compassion to. She even broke COVID protocol this one time to give the lady a hug as she was leaving, for the lady said she had not had that kind of human touch in five months. The woman started to weep. The next day Dell went back to the store to see how this lady was doing. The lady told Dell that she had just saved her life. She had planned to take her life but the small gesture of love showed her there was hope. The lady thanked Dell, but Dell said she should thank Jesus. Jesus had raised her to life, like the girl Jesus raised in Matthew 9:18-25.

I had a man come into my office all angry and upset, not at me but at his son and his son's partner. Nasty words had been exchanged and the son was threatening to walk out of the father's life forever. The father was upset, and wanted to set the son straight, and had prepared a response that was likely to do even more damage. So we talked, prayed and tried to listen to what Jesus wanted done in this situation. The father's heart was softened, and his response to his son was one of apology and humility and love. Father and son have a relationship to this day, because Jesus had opened the eyes of a blind father just as he did to the blind man in Matthew 9:27-31.

My Bible has put the title, "The Parable of the Sower" on chapter 13 of Matthew. However, it is really the parable of the soil, and that soil is our lives. Some people are so hardened against God that they have no room whatsoever for Jesus. This week I listened to a lecture telling about the humanist manifesto that says we do not need God. The world's problems, they say, will be solved when we just listen to ourselves. That is hard soil. The shallow soil is the person who gets all excited about Jesus – maybe on Sunday at church, or at a camp meeting or revival service – and then the next day back at work they forget about that commitment. The soil with weeds simply sees the demands of life choke out their relationship with God. And the good soil is the heart fully surrendered to what God wants. Jesus says, this parable describes each of our hearts. So which soil is your story?

I remember the day he came to me with his great plan: he was going to travel across Canada and tell people his testimony. Sounds great, right? We had just had an amazing service and the Holy Spirit's presence was very real. In that service this young man had recommitted his life to following Jesus. It was not easy, as the abuse of alcohol led to all kinds of troubles in his home. But today he was all on fire for Jesus. He could walk on water, just like Peter in Matthew 14:22-36. But when Monday rolled around he was reminded he needed a job, and his rent was due. He was stretched trying to be a good father to his children, and a good husband to his wife. They needed him at home. And I could see this young man slip down into the waves. He got his eyes off of Jesus and everything else started to fall apart. I could see the hand of Jesus extended ready to lift him out of the waves and take him back into the boat, but the young man would have to choose if he would take Jesus' hand or not. His story continues....

He was only a young boy, four or five years of age, but his parents loved him very much. His parents took him to Sunday School and Church every week so that he could learn about Jesus and what it means to be a follower of Jesus. One day the parents sat their young son down and asked him a most important question: have you asked Jesus to come and live in your heart? The parents were not sure what the young boy would say, but were delighted when he answered "Yes!" "Every week in Sunday school we sing the song, "Into my heart. Into my heart. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in today. Come in to stay. Come into my heart Lord Jesus." One week I made that my prayer and I invited Jesus into my heart." That day the boy fulfilled what Jesus said in Matthew 18:2: "Unless you change and become like a little child you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." The simple faith of a child was his story...

I did not realize that our dear friend Paula was 92 years of age when she passed away. We had only known her a few short years, but in that time she prayed to invite Jesus into her life, forgiving her sin and making her a child of God. Earlier this summer Elsa Quantz went to be with the Lord after walking faithfully with Jesus for many, many years. She also passed away at 92 years of age. And both now have gone on to their eternal reward, a home in heaven in the presence of Jesus. Both will receive the same reward, even though one had a personal relationship with Jesus for a few short years while the other faithfully served Jesus for many years. But their story is told in Matthew 20:1-16 in the parable of the workers who all receive

the same reward, no matter how long they worked in the field. Heaven is for those who served Jesus a long time and those who just met him. Our God is a generous God...

Chapters 21 and 22 have several parables, and we can see ourselves in the stories told there. There is a parable of two sons, one who says "I'll do what you want, Father," but doesn't, and the other who says, "I won't do what you want," but after reflecting a bit decides to do what his father wants. Which son are we when it comes to obeying the things of God?

There is a parable about a wedding feast put on by a generous king. But many guests make excuses: they are too busy to come. They need to make money, to enjoy their stuff. They were offended the king wanted to interrupt their lives. How many people are too busy for church – even online church? So the king moves on and invites others to join the banquet and the original guests miss out altogether. How sad. May that not be your story.

He liked to be called Reverend. He liked to be held up on a pedestal as the leader of the church, the spiritual guide. He sang well, and preached well and was very likeable. The church was going forward under his leadership and he loved the accolades at District Assembly and pastor's gatherings. But Jesus told his story in Matthew 23:5 with these simple words: "Everything they do is for people to see." This pastor had a terrible secret he was hiding. He had an affair with someone in the church. He wanted people to see him as very spiritual while inside there was a real problem. He fooled everyone but Jesus...

Visits from the kids are always precious, but on one visit my son taught me an important lesson. We were walking the waterfront together, enjoying conversation and each other's company, when suddenly Peter excused himself and said he would be right back. Lise and I decided he must have seen an old high school friend and was heading back to say hello. After awhile he joined us and curiosity caused us to ask where he went. He had noticed a homeless young man, he said (one I must confess I had simply overlooked) and he went to talk with him and find out his story. Peter discovered this man had been stabbed while on the street and was suffering. Peter took compassion on him and did what he could to help him. I could not help but think of Jesus' words in Matthew 25:40 "When you did it to the least of these brothers of mine you did it unto me." Of course, I also remembered the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:45, "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these you did not do for me." I was happy for Peter's story that day, but was not proud of my story.

What I hope you have seen this morning is that the scripture is not just about stories that happened a long time ago. The scriptures describe our story. The settings may be different but the lessons are the same. And Jesus wants us to see ourselves in these stories, and learn what it means to be a true follower of him. When we fall short he desires we repent and seek his forgiveness and by his help and grace do better next time. And as we see the love, compassion, and grace of Jesus poured out to us in each story may we be drawn closer to Jesus, and may we commit ourselves to follow him whatever the cost, wherever he leads us.

In scripture we see this is my story... this is my song ... praising my Saviour all the day long.