

LIFE: Living In Faith Everyday

Message for Sunday, September 1, 2013
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

Children's Message: I show pictures and stories of members of the congregation in local newspapers.

Sermon: "LIFE: Living In Faith Everyday"

1) Huh? You mean my faith has something to do with how I live???

Have you ever been completely caught by surprise? Perhaps there was a surprise party in your honour, and you walked into it without the slightest clue what was behind that door? Or maybe a friend sneaked up behind you and scared the daylight out of you.

That's the kind of impression I get when I read this story of Jesus judging between the sheep and the goats. The common feature with both groups of people, is their complete and utter astonishment that there was a connection between their religion and their everyday life. Both groups answer in bewilderment, "Lord, when did we see you hungry?"

Sure, they knew the Law, and what it said about bringing your tithes to the Temple, and about not working on the Sabbath. But to think that they would be judged for how they went about their daily lives was a shock.

The first group loved their neighbour, wherever they found one in need. But they weren't doing it to impress God. It was just a natural part of life. The second group, in a similar way, went through life in the way that was natural to them, a selfish and uncaring way. Neither one saw themselves as doing anything for God.

The first, and most obvious, point is this: I can't say that I love Jesus and go around treating people like dirt. If we truly love the Lord, then we love the Lord in the people around us.

The second point, is that there is a connection between our faith and our everyday lives. I would like us to think about this a bit more deeply.

2) Your life is a gift from God. What you do with it is your gift to God.

The Bible contains many stories of people who received from God specific instructions about what to do with their lives. For most people however, that is not how it works. We usually are left to choose for ourselves what vocation we will follow. That can sometimes be a hard decision.

Melvin Power, a Pentecostal pastor I knew in Newfoundland, told me about one Bible verse that he used when counselling people about what direction to go in. I found it very helpful. You might, too.

Psalm 37:4

Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

What that means to me is this: We have certain interests, talents, skills. Likely, these are things we enjoy doing. What a wonder it would be if one could work in a vocation where these are the very things needed! The key is that we first commit ourselves to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Then, once our lives are in tune with God's, we may find that doors open up to allow this to happen. (But of course, a life in tune with God may end up following something entirely unexpected!)

3) See yourself in the big picture.

The main point I'm trying to make here is that our daily life is linked with our faith. Sometimes that may be difficult to imagine. What, for example, does doing dishes have to do with the Kingdom of God? It's important to see ourselves in the big picture.

Christopher Wren, the architect who drafted the plans for St. Paul's Cathedral in London, stopped by to ask some workers how they were doing. He asked one, "What are you doing, sir?" Reply: "I'm laying bricks." A bit further on, he asked another worker. The second one replied, "I'm making a brick wall." Going further one, he asked again. The third one stood back, raised his arms majestically, and said, "Can't you see? I'm building a magnificent cathedral!" The last one was able to see that his effort, small as it was, was part of a great project.

It all depends on whether we can see God in the ordinary duties of life. A Boston newspaper ran a story about a cleaning lady who for 40 years did the same humdrum tasks in the same office building. She was interviewed one day by a reporter who asked her how she could stand the monotony and boredom of doing the same thing day in and day out. The woman gave this reply: "Oh, I don't get bored. I use cleaning materials that God made; I clean objects that belong to people God made, and I make life more comfortable for them. My mop is the hand of God!"

4) Your work is part of your faith; Faith is part of your work

Neville Shute wrote a novel *Round the Bend* about an aircraft engineer who supervised the maintenance of an aircraft fleet for an oil company in the Middle East during the big oil boom era. Airplanes were relatively new in the area, and the local mechanics were unskilled. Propellers fell off, landing gear collapsed, planes ran out

of fuel over the desert.... Yet before long, this company had an outstanding safety record.

How? The mechanics were Arabs, of course. As Muslims, they were required to pray five times a day. But as the young engineer worked with them on carburetors and cam shafts, he told them:

For common men it is enough to pray five times a day. But we are different, we engineers. We are called to a higher task, and Allah will require more of us than that.

With every piece of work that you do, with every nut you tighten down, with every filter that you clean or tappet that you set, pause at each stage... fold your hands, and humbly ask the All-Seeing god to put into your heart the knowledge of whether the work you have done has been good or ill.... If you do this, you will find that you are praying to God fifty times a day of more.

Their work, in other words, should be done in constant prayer. It's a wonderful idea. And it's more than just an idea; it works.

Graham Tucker spent years helping people put religion back into the workplace. He started a chaplaincy based in the office buildings at the corner of Bay Street and King Street in Toronto, the greatest concentration of financial and corporate head offices in Canada.

Many of the people who work in those offices are already members of local churches. But they have trouble translating their Sunday faith into their Monday environment. Through groups that meet at lunch time or after work, and weekend retreats, he tries to develop an awareness that Christian values didn't have to be parked at the office door with the umbrellas and overshoes.

His convictions have received support in several best-selling books about successful management, such as Tom Peters *In Search of Excellence*. Graham says, "Christians have been conned into thinking that their values can't be applied in the rough-and-tumble of the marketplace. In fact, if you treat people with love, dignity and respect, the system actually works better!"

In one of the study groups, they came up with a vision of ministry in the marketplace. "What difference would it make," Graham asked, "if you thought of your desk as an altar, and everything that passed across it as an act dedicated to God?"

If you don't work at a desk, what about your workbench, your kitchen counter, your driver's seat, your coffee table...?

Jesus told parables about people looking for lost money, about weddings, about greed and generosity, about farming. He made it very clear that the worship of God includes much more than just Sunday mornings. We become Christians when we make Jesus our Saviour and Lord. What we do after that shows whether we really mean it.