

April 18th, 2010

Houghton Lake United Methodist Church

Take Jesus At His Word

John 4:43-54

Pastor Tom Anderson

I have been a desperate father a time or two. I have not had to worry about my children's physical health, but there have been many moments when I have panicked about their attitudes, their academics, their motivation, and their ability to someday grow up, sustain employment and become respectable community members. What parent among us has not lost sleep wondering if your kids are going to make it? I'd say we can all relate to the desperate father in our gospel lesson.

I want to go right to the center of this miracle today. Turn to John 4, verse 50: *Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed.* Underline that last phrase: *The man took Jesus at his word.* You see Jesus created a real dilemma for this desperate father. The man came to Jesus insisting and begging that Jesus come home with him but Jesus will not give him what he is asking for. The father now has a choice to make. Does he stay with Jesus and insist on having proof and reassurance or does he take Jesus at his word? Does he insist on religion on his own terms or does he dare to take the terms that Jesus gives him?

Most people today want to make up their own religion. They want a Jesus who fits into their lifestyle. They want a Jesus who blesses what they are already doing and what they are already thinking. They want a religion that is predictable and secure. They don't want a Jesus who says no to their desires. They don't want a Jesus who sends them away on a dare. But miracles are not given as personal favors, rewards or to make life easy. They are given to create faith. Jesus makes a promise to this father and dares him to believe it. That is a great definition of faith: taking the promises of God and daring to believe them. It is a risk. It leaves us vulnerable and dependent. To trust someone that we haven't quite figured out and probably will never figure out.

Miracles happen when we take Jesus at his word. This is my message to our confirmands today! Think of the things that Jesus has specifically said to you, "To whoever receives me and believes in my name I give the power to become children of God." (See John 1:12) "Whoever believes in me will not walk in darkness." (See John 8:12) "I am the vine, you are the branches;

if a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.” (See John 15:5) A lot of people admire Jesus, but they do not take him at his word. Their real trust is in the ideas of secular culture: work hard, look out for you, and buy happiness and security. But the Christian is one who dares to take Jesus at his word. The Christian knows that what life is about is bigger than one’s self. The truth will prevail even if it costs my life or is beyond my life. If I dare to believe I will be transformed, I will see others transformed, all kinds of miracles I couldn’t imagine will take place including a sick child near death making a full recovery.

Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. (See John 1.) By the word of the Lord the heavens were made. This word is the wisdom and power that is behind all of life. The Bible is the written word of God. God himself guarantees the message of this book. The logic of revelation spells it out. If God took the trouble to enter time and space and die a horrible death on a cross to bring us freedom, would he not also guarantee the reliability of the written record of his accomplishment? All authority on heaven and earth was given to Jesus Christ, and he has endowed the Bible with authority as the record of his accomplishments for our salvation. This is my message to our confirmands today: Dare to believe the Bible!—even when you do not fully understand everything in it. Trust that God has given it to us not to hurt but to heal our souls.

The Bible says that “every word of God is flawless...do not add to his words.” (Proverbs 30:5.) Everything we need for salvation is here. Everything we need to live a sanctified life is here. Everything we need to do justice and show mercy is here. O, let the church return to its Bible! I fear we have wandered far afield and pierced ourselves with much sorrow and confusion because we neither know the word nor do we take Jesus at his word. “I wait for the Lord... and in his word I put my hope,” said the Psalmist (Psalms 130:5-6) The prophet Jeremiah said “God’s word is like a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in, indeed, I cannot.” (Jeremiah 20:9) Miracles will happen when we take Jesus at his word! There is power in the word and our access to this power is faith.

Pat Pelham and Elaine VanCleave are two church ladies who live in Birmingham, Alabama where twice a month they attend a Bible Study for young mothers. They talk about their kids, their faith, their community and dream of changing the world.

One day Pat was watching her favorite sit-com on TV and was struck by the appearance of a little boy who survived the Ethiopian famine a few years back. She went for a walk and heard a scripture verse in her mind, “Here I am Lord, send me.” Then as she describes it God spoke to

her by giving to her a strong impression: *make something of this*. She shared her experience with the other women. Together they went to their pastor at the Independent Presbyterian Church. He gave them some information on a Christian Citizen's lobbying group called *Bread for The World*. The women began to research about world hunger. They held a dinner at the church, invited a guest speaker and sent invitations to their senators and congressional representative. To their utter astonishment, Spencer Bachus the republican congressman for their district showed up. The next day he called the two women and said, "Thank you for introducing me to the issue of world hunger. I would like to champion your cause in Washington this next year." It was 1999.

That term representative Bachus was appointed chair of the subcommittee on foreign aid and debt relief. He summoned the ladies to Washington to brief him on the problem of debt among African nations. These two soccer moms boned up all they could and flew off to the capital to brief the congressman. He introduced legislation. He held hearings and he gave this speech, "Doing the right thing, whatever the material cost, should always be the imperative." He delineated the material cost of the three year \$970 million debt cancelation bill: \$1.20 for every American each year. "It is the cost of an ice cream cone." He said. That year the United States formally cancelled 100% the foreign debt owed by the poorest nations in the world--nations that could not even feed their own people.

Now let's review what happened: two church ladies took Jesus at his word and a miracle occurred. But this time it was not one little boy who was sparred but millions of African children. Let me remind you again of Jesus' words: "Whoever has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even great things than these because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12)