

TFTD 23.11. Monday March 6
Matt chapter 8: Reaching out



Fishermen's houses in Capernaum, with the modern Church of St Peter (built over the traditional site of Peter's house) beyond.

When Jesus came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; and there was a man with leprosy who came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.” Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “Yes, I do choose. Be made clean.” Matthew 8.1-3

As the crowd spills down the hillside, released from the spell-binding words of the preacher, the question is: Can Jesus match words to deeds? He’s told us what God’s Kingdom is like — does he choose to reach out, to show us the Kingdom in action? That’s what this chapter does, with breathtaking speed and audacity (read the whole chapter if you have time).

Jesus’ words open up a new world, full of unexpected possibilities. What will it be like, being part of this world? That’s a Monday morning question, isn’t it? The moment where the things we heard in church yesterday collide with the crowded world outside, the world we don’t always want to get involved with.

But Jesus has no hesitations. Jesus said that God’s Kingdom is for the poor, the downtrodden, the baffled, the ones who don’t fit in. So here they are, crowding in to touch him — and wherever he goes, Jesus’ touch reaches out to bring healing — touching the untouchable (vv.2-4), healing a fisherman’s mother-in-law (vv.14-17), calming the mentally afflicted (vv.28-34). Yes, I do choose, Jesus says: I’m unreservedly here for you. It’s you I came for.

There are enemies as well as friends out there, but God’s Kingdom reaches out to them too: so here is Jesus, reaching out to heal a Roman soldier’s houseboy — and finding faith in unexpected places (vv.5-13).

Wherever Jesus goes, the Kingdom of heaven is present and active, transforming lives, confronting the powers of evil, making a difference to wrecked human lives. Across two millennia we can still sense the disciples’ awe: what is he like? What kind of person is this? (v.27)

So that still leaves the question: are you up for it? “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go” (v.19). Winning the X-Factor is just the beginning. Discipleship isn’t just about sharing a celebrity lifestyle: it means living in the eye of the storm, having your faith challenged, travelling a way that seems at odds with the expected norms. It means (as Leith Fisher points out) opening your front door and finding a needy world clamouring on your doorstep:

“Discipleship begins when we find that Jesus speaks to us, touches us, welcomes us, says ‘Yes’ to us ... heals, reassures, restores us, as he does with Peter’s wife’s mother. But what happens next? The mother-in-law is restored, she’s back to health again, she gives the company their tea; and when it’s over, she opens her front door and discovers waiting outside it half the sick population of Galilee.

The journey begins with our own personal encounter with Jesus, where he says ‘Yes’ to us and we say ‘Yes’ to him. But out of the closeness of that encounter he leads us to the door and says: ‘I want you to meet my friends, I want you to be among those I have come to heal and help, serve and save.’” (Leith Fisher, *But I say to You*: St Andrew Press, 2009)

“Teacher, I am ready to follow you wherever you go.”
Lord Jesus, your world is very wide and my faith is very small.
Help me today to look out from my front door
and see ways to put God’s Kingdom into action.
Amen.

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