

Title: Encouragement for the Team
Date: May 1, 2022
Subject: We gain happiness by encouraging others.
Scripture: Matthew 9:1, 2; 14:22 - 32

Last week in our series on true happiness we encountered some of the things happiness isn't as well as ways people try to achieve happiness that leave them hanging – money, fame, pleasure, health, relationships, thinking happiness is the absence of anything sad or bad.

When David Murray tried to encapsulate Christian happiness in one sentence, he distilled it to this: “Christian happiness is the grace of loving and being loved by Jesus who gave his life for me.” (David Murray on christianity.com).

God loves us so incredibly that he sent His Son Jesus to die for you and me so we could be in a right relationship with God, experience forgiveness of our sins and receive eternal life. True happiness begins with knowing Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord. We admit our need of him, our desire to have him and take him into our lives. He came to give life to the full, lives which are purposeful, meaningful, fulfilling, joy, contentment, satisfaction, wholeness, well-being, peace.

True happiness often involves giving, reaching outside of self. That shouldn't come as a surprise, considering Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). For that matter, we have no better example than that of Jesus. He lived a happy and fulfilled life marked by giving. He gave of himself by leaving heaven, coming to earth and entering humanity as a little baby. He gave of his time to people including those who interrupted his schedule. He gave of his kindness to men, women and children. He loved children and allowed them to get close to him while other adults operated by the idea “children should be seen and not heard...and maybe not even seen.” He reached out to the marginalized, those in need of hope.

Jesus is the chief encourager. We're going to look at how he sought to encourage while he was on earth. Before we do, we pause for a brief definition.

The word we use for encourage originated from two words when combined mean “to call to the side of, to come alongside of another.” It conveys the ideas of building up, strengthening or preparing someone for battle. Jesus came alongside people during his lifetime. He desires to continue to come alongside us today.

I. Jesus is the chief encourager

Jesus acted in encouraging ways and spoke with encouraging words – “Be encouraged, take heart.” We begin in Matthew. Read Matthew 9:1, 2.

Jesus had returned home, people wanted to see and hear him. People had heard of the miracles Jesus had done. He healed people - those with leprosy, those with severe fevers, children who were deathly sick and many others. He demonstrated his power over nature. He spoke with authority. The text we read gives scant details. Two other books of the Bible supply more.

The inhabitants of the town and people from the surrounding area came to see the local boy. They gathered at the house where he was. They packed it and the outer courtyard so they could hear him proclaim the good news of God. More people wanted to see him but couldn't gain access. Four friends brought a paralytic man to Jesus so he could be healed. One major problem – they couldn't get close to Jesus. It's challenging for four guys carrying a mat with someone on it to navigate through the crowd. One of them came up with an idea -- approach from high ground, meaning the roof. They scampered up on it and began removing tiles.

It had to be noisy and distracting. Jesus is speaking and people hear the scraping and scratching of clay tiles being rubbed against each other. Their attention is drawn upward. First they see a small opening and hands moving more tiles. Then they see faces looking down at them. And then there's a person being lowered through the new skylight.

Jesus was fully aware of what was happening. He saw the trust these four men had in what he could do. Jesus told the paralyzed man: "Take heart...your sins are forgiven." Take heart. Be encouraged.

Jesus announced he had the ability to offer forgiveness of sins. This infuriated the religious leaders. They correctly understood that only God has the power to forgive sins and Jesus was claiming to be God. They believed this to horrible, terrible blasphemy and sacrilege.

Jesus countered with a question: "Which is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "get up and walk"?" Both are difficult. If either would be easier, I think it would be to tell a person their sins are forgiven. We can't look into the depths of a person to see if forgiveness actually took place. On the other hand, there's external confirmation if someone is told to get up and walk. The person either walks or doesn't which shows whether the person who gave the command speaks the truth or is a liar.

Jesus says he's going to show that he has the authority to forgive sins. He's going to tell the man to get up, take his mat and go home. He did. The man did. The conclusion: Jesus can heal and forgive because he not only claims to be God but is in fact fully God.

Jesus came to earth to forgive sins. He came to give us life - spiritual life, eternal life, life in the fullest sense of the word. For those who place their trust in Jesus to deliver them from their sins, by admitting they're sinners who aren't able to save themselves and need help from an outside source even as a person who's drowning can't reach up and grab their hair to save themselves. They depend on what Jesus has done as the one perfect solution for the punishment we deserve for our sins, our moral crimes against God.

Reminds me of a line from a song by Danny Gokey, "Tell your heart to beat again." The heart of the person whose sins have been forgiven can truly beat again. They've been resuscitated and have new life.

Jesus encourages by coming alongside during our lives. We move to a later incident.

READ Matthew 14:22 – 32.

This miracle is on the heels of another fantastic miracle. Jesus fed 5000 men plus women and children from two loaves of bread and five fish. And there were leftovers. 12 basketsful. One for each of the twelve disciples. They each had a visible illustration of the power of Jesus.

Now they're in a boat load of trouble. The wind and waves of the fierce storm are battering them. They'd been in the boat since late afternoon and it was approaching dawn. They're still in the middle of the massive lake and had rowed for hours. It felt like days. The experienced fishermen are giving orders to row harder, bail water, move in anticipation of the next wave to crash against them, pray.

Meanwhile, Jesus had been praying. He finished talking with the Heavenly Father and decided it was time to catch up with the disciples. He could have instantly teleported from shore to suddenly appear on the boat. He could have run and yelled I'm coming as they were in trouble. No. He walked...on the water.

He was about to pass by the boat when the disciples saw him but thought he was a ghost, a water spirit, which according to Jewish superstition meant disaster when seen at night. The fear level jumped off the charts.

Jesus called out, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Take courage. Be encouraged. I'm here. No need to fear.

It wasn't enough for Peter. He wanted to be where Jesus was, though he wasn't completely sure it was Jesus. "If it's really and truly you, tell me to come to you on the water." Kind of daring. What if the initial thought was correct and the "ghost" would tell him to come... but with malicious intent?

Peter gets out of the boat. Do you think he jumped? Or did he cautiously stick out his toe to test the water? We aren't told, but as Peter often was impulsive, he probably just stepped out, not thinking about what he was doing. The main idea is he starts walking toward Jesus, on the water...and has a lapse of focus. He pays more attention to the wind and the waves, causing him to sink. Jesus rescues him. Peter is safe and sound.

Nice for Peter, but what about the other guys in the boat? Their immediate situation didn't change while they're watching Peter getting closer to Jesus. They're still bouncing and jouncing up and down like a cork on water. They'd heard Jesus words of encouragement. Should they take courage? Even though they weren't included in the invitation to get out of the boat and come to Jesus?

When Jesus got in the boat, the wind died down. The storm stopped. Another account tells us: "immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading" (John 6:21). Jesus encouraged the disciples by his presence and message assuring them things would be alright. Jesus said we can be encouraged even though we'll have trouble, because he has overcome the world (John 16:33).

Jesus calls us his brothers and sisters, including us in the family of God. He provides a place in heaven for us. He loves us as with his incredible love. Since he does this, he's not going to let us flounder in the storms of life. He promises his presence, that he'll never leave us nor forsake us. When we went through that thing that wasn't so pleasant or when that thing we'll be facing in the future, we can be reminded that Jesus walks with us all the way.

II. We encourage by copying the Master Encourager.

To do that we need to understand what encouragement does, how it helps.

A. Encourage to give life to others. The Bible tells us "The tongue has the power of life and death" (Proverbs 18:21). We understand and recognize that God is the Author of life. He knit us together in our

mother's womb (Psalm 139:13) and knows how many days we'll live (Psalm 139:16). Our tongues don't bring about life or death but we need to use them in ways to point people to the life Jesus Christ offers.

We need to be like Jesus. Dispense the encouragement that comes from truth. Remind people they're made in the image of God. Tell them how much God loves them. He wants them to be him in heaven forever. He gives the ability to be sons and daughters of God. He chose them to be his. If God is for us, if he's on our side in the battle, who can really be against us? He holds us in the palm of his hand and won't let go of us. He walks with us every step of life and when necessary he carries us as a shepherd carries a lamb.

We are to encourage one another and build each other up by reminding one another of what Jesus has done, what he's doing and what he will do for us (1 Thessalonians 5:10, 11). It's not to be an occasional thing. We're to encourage one another ***“daily”*** so we won't have an unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God and we won't be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:12, 13).

B. Encourage to provide strength. Christian thinker William Barclay has written: “One of the highest of human duties is the duty of encouragement... It is easy to pour cold water on their enthusiasm; It is easy to discourage others. The world is full of discouragers. We have a Christian duty to encourage one another. Many a time a word of praise or thanks or appreciation or cheer has kept a man on his feet.”

Words can build up or destroy. We're to use words to refresh others. Famous wordsmith Mark Twain quipped, “I can live for two months on a good compliment.”

John Powell had a friend who was on vacation in the Bahamas. He noticed a restless crowd on a pier. He was curious and discovered they were fixated by a young man making last minute preparations for a solo journey around the world in a boat he'd made. The crowd was actively expressing their pessimism, telling the adventurous sailor all the things that could go wrong: “The sun will broil you!... You won't have enough food!... That boat of yours won't withstand the waves in a storm!... You'll never make it!” When Powell's friend heard all the discouraging comments, he felt an irresistible desire to offer some optimism and encouragement. He went to the end of the pier, waved both arms wildly and kept shouting: “Bon voyage! You're really something! We're with you! We're proud of you! Good luck, brother!” (John Powell, *Fully Human, Fully Alive*, pp. 17, 18).

I don't know how the story ended, if the sailor made it around the world or not. I believe the encouraging him words stuck with him, maybe not for Twain's two months, and injected courage to go on.

C. Encourage to instill confidence and hope. Coaches have a powerful effect on players. I had coaches who seemed as if they were always angry and expected perfection. If you made a mistake in defensive pass coverage, you get pulled out of the game, given a dressing down (“What do you think you were doing?”) and told to go sit on the bench. It made me more tense, self-conscious and second guessing what to do.

It would have been better to try to teach and explain. “Here's where you should be and what to watch for. Here's how you run the pattern.” Someone has said, “People have a way of becoming what you encourage them to be—not what you nag them to be” (quoted in Alan Loy McGinnis, *The Friendship Factor: How to Get Closer to the People You Care For*, p. 69)

We should hand out encouragement like candy, just make sure it's meaningful. Don't dispense fluff, praise and encouragement that is inflated, over the top, extreme. For instance, telling someone they're the greatest and most wonderful and most beautiful because of anything and everything they do. I've known people like that. Their kids picked up on the hollowness of the compliment and adopted the attitude of not needing to try. Or the person can feel like it's impossible to meet the standard of perfection. Or the person can become narcissistic, thinking the world is all about them and owes them everything.

Alan Redpath and some friends formed a mutual encouragement group. They devised a simple formula to apply before speaking to or about someone. It's used the letters from the word THINK to remind them of five questions: Is it true? Is it helpful? Is it inspiring? Is it necessary? Is it kind? The group developed a summary sentence: "If what I am about to say does not pass those tests, I will keep my mouth shut!"

For most of Tim's childhood he was raised by a single mom. She often worked 16-hour shifts as a nursing assistant but wasn't able to lift the family out of poverty. Tim got a job serving popcorn at the movie theater. The teen would run across the street on his breaks to the fast-food joint to get a meal – french fries and water. The owner, John Moniz, noticed and asked the repeat customer why he always got the same thing. Tim told him it was all he could afford.

One night Moniz gathered a bag of sandwiches. He took them over to Tim. The two talked. It led to a friendship, then to a mentorship. Tim was failing several classes so Moniz shared life-lessons about discipline, responsibility, the biblical principles he used to run his restaurant and most importantly, he taught Tim about Jesus.

Tim eagerly consumed the sandwiches and wisdom from his older friend. The 17 year old felt life was coming together until tragedy struck. Moniz suffered a pulmonary embolism and died at 37. As Tim stood at the graveside of his friend, he faced a crossroads. He chose to put the lessons from Moniz into practice. He wrote a purpose statement expressing his desire to have a positive effect on, not just his neighborhood, not just his school, not just his city, but on one billion people.

He's making substantial progress. At age 47, Tim Scott was sworn in to the US Senate in 2013. He was the first African American senator from the South since Civil War Reconstruction (adapted from Max Lucado in *How Happiness Happens* who adapted it from Andrew Shain, "As He Heads to the U.S. Senate, Tim Scott Praises Early Mentor," *Beaufort Gazette*, 7/2/2013, islandpacket.com/news/local/community/beaufort-news/article33492450). It began with one person reaching out to another, showing concern and listening.

Mrs. Loritz told me the focus for Awana this year was "Being on God's Team." This morning we've heard how Jesus, the Head Coach and Captain of the team, encourages. We're to do the same for one another. We were made to be encouragers. We're coaches and fellow players on a team whether it's your family or it includes people around you. We need to be close to one another so we can deliver encouragement. We need to have the same message Jesus had. We gain happiness as we encourage the rest of the team.