

“Weather Forecasts”

Matthew 15:29-16:4

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • December 8, 2013

Throughout all of history people have been trying to predict out the future. All of us have to deal to some degree with the fear of the unknown. We want to know what the future holds because if we knew, then we could prepare and we wouldn't have to fear. Over the years people have tried various things to predict the future. In the ancient world people believed that animal livers could tell the future. Archaeologists have discovered stone tablets carved with instructions on how to “read” a sheep's liver.

Others have turned their attention to the stars, believing that the way the stars aligned could have some influence on events here on earth. Even today there are lots of people who believe that astrology can give them some answers about the future. Every year people look at what's going on in the world and try to make predictions about what will happen later. The financial world is filled with people telling you what they think is going to happen in the markets. I particularly like the commercials on the radio claiming that the price of silver could double in the near future. They may be right, since silver now trades for half what it did when they started running those commercials.

There's one area of fortune-telling that almost everybody is interested in, that's the weather forecast. We want to know what the weather will be like later today or tomorrow or next week. In today's reading we learn that this was the case in Jesus' day as well.

This passage basically has three “scenes.” The first scene picks up where last week's reading stopped. Jesus has just healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman. This was shocking because she was a Gentile and a woman. By Jewish tradition Jesus shouldn't have been talking to her, in fact he shouldn't have been in her country. We begin to see that the Kingdom of Heaven is not just for Israel, it includes the Gentiles, also.

So today's passage begins, “Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee.” In other words, Jesus is still in Gentile territory. The people he encounters will be Gentile, not Jewish. Then it says, “he went up on the mountain and sat down there.” If this sounds familiar it's because it should. The Sermon on the Mount in chapter 5 begins, “Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.” Sitting down indicated that he was going to teach them so Jesus probably did some teaching as well as healing “the lame, the blind, the crippled, and the mute.” Those are basically the same signs that Jesus told John the Baptist's disciples proved that He was the Messiah.

These Gentiles see these signs and believe in Jesus. Verse 31 says, “the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.”

This brings us to the second scene where Jesus feeds the 4,000. You may be thinking, “didn't we already study this?” Well yes and no. In chapter 14 we learned about Jesus feeding the 5,000. Some people argue that this is not really a different event, but instead Matthew has mistakenly recorded the same event twice. Indeed, the wording of this passage is almost identical to the feeding of the 5,000. Almost. There are subtle differences between the two and those differences make all the difference. For example, the size of the crowd is different, the number of loaves is different, the number of baskets of leftovers is different. But most importantly, the location is different. The feeding of the 5,000 took place in Jewish territory and he fed Jews.

The feeding of the 4,000 takes place in Gentile territory and Jesus feeds Gentiles. Matthew wants us to see that Jesus feeds gentiles exactly the same way he fed the Jews.

He teaches and heals the gentiles in the same way. As Jesus says in verse 32: "I have compassion on the crowd." This is important for us today because *we* are those Gentiles. In Romans 11 the Apostle Paul shows us that we are the outsiders who have been grafted into the covenant. You and I have no inherent claim on the Kingdom of Heaven. We are here because Jesus shows us compassion and mercy.

One more point about this scene. In verse 32 Jesus says, "I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." A recurring theme in the last few chapters has been the disciples desire for Jesus to "dismiss" people, to send them away. Before the feeding of the 5,000 they want Jesus to dismiss the crowd. Then they want him to dismiss the Canaanite woman.

I think we're a lot like Jesus' disciples. When we encounter needy people – whether their need is physical, like food and clothing, or emotional, we want to dismiss them. But Jesus has compassion on them and helps them and so should we.

When Jesus returns to Jewish territory for the third scene in this passage, there's an official delegation waiting for him. Matthew 16:1 says that the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test him. It would have been highly unusual for the Pharisees and Sadducees to be there together. These were the two opposing parties in the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews. They disagreed on a number of things and argued frequently. I'm so glad politicians today aren't like that.

But there was one thing that brought the two sides together and that was their opposition to Jesus. As the old saying goes, "politics makes for strange bedfellows." They have come, representing the Sanhedrin, asking Jesus to show them a sign. Of course they're not really looking for a sign. They're not looking for proof so they can believe in Jesus. They're trying to trick Jesus. They want to show the

crowd that Jesus is an imposter. The irony is that Matthew has just finished showing us sign after sign after sign that Jesus performed. But none of those were good enough for the Pharisees and Sadducees. They refused to believe no matter what.

Jesus calls them out on their unbelief and their refusal to accept the miracles that he has already performed. He says, "you can predict the weather by looking at the signs in the sky. But you can't see the truth that's right in front of you." Then he says, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah."

What the religious leaders are asking for is for Jesus to perform some kind of unmistakable miracle, probably similar to the things Elijah did like calling down fire in his conflict with the priests of Baal. Instead, Jesus says, they will only get the sign of Jonah. We looked at this a few weeks ago. Jonah didn't perform any signs. He *was* the sign. While trying to run away from God Jonah found himself thrown off the ship and swallowed by a giant fish. After three days the fish spit Jonah up on the dry land. Similarly, Jesus will be dead and buried and on the third day be raised again. The resurrection of Jesus is the only sign we should ever need to believe in him. It is the single most important fact of history and it is the source of our renewed relationship with God.

There are a couple of lessons that we should take away from this passage. First, Jesus may be found in some very unlikely places. Tradition said he should stay out of Gentile areas but he went anyway and he brought the Kingdom of Heaven with him. We can find Jesus at work in unlikely places as well – at our jobs, in prisons, here in the inner city. We can't say, "Jesus would never go *there*. Our job is to find what Jesus is doing in those places and partner with him in those ministries. The person you think is farthest from Jesus is often the one most likely to come to him. Jesus

meets us where we are and he loves us no matter how bad we are.

Second, as people who are adopted into God's Kingdom, we discover that He loves us and provides for our needs. How many blessings do you and I miss every day because we don't trust Christ fully? Perhaps like the disciples, who still didn't trust that Jesus could feed the crowd with the bread and fish, we simply forget to trust him. We try to handle life on our own and so deprive ourselves of the benefits of living by the Lord's power.

Finally, if you're not convinced the Jesus is who he says he is – that he's God – let me encourage you to take a look at the "signs of the times." Look at the evidence. Is there anyone else who has ever conquered death the way Jesus did? Has there ever been anything like the church in the world? Recognize the signs from heaven and trust in the Lord Jesus. He will meet you in your struggle and he will provide for your needs. Then we can all glorify God together.

Amen