

Learning from Mistakes

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- [0 : 00] Well, please keep your Bibles open at Luke chapter 9. Let me start by saying that we all make mistakes from time to time, don't we? Like putting the milk in the cupboard and the cereal in the fridge.
- Has anyone done that? Or is that just me, is it? Okay, all right. Of course, some mistakes are well-intentioned, like this next one. It was well-intentioned, wasn't it?
- Some mistakes can be just plain embarrassing. This guy's trying to show off how strong he is. And this one I can relate to because it's about a father teaching his daughter how to drive and the mistake is that Dad is trying to be too funny.
- He's wearing a crash test dummy suit. You play so much.
- And she is not impressed. Or a mistake can be as simple as a spelling mistake, like this one I saw in a church sign. God does not make mistakes.
- [1 : 26] Although I think that's deliberate, isn't it? God doesn't make mistakes, but people do. And yes, I deliberately put that on the front of the church bulletin and I saw one person notice.
- Well done, Andrew Reid. But I did, oh, a few people have noticed. My apologies. There's a mistake. The question, though, is will we learn from them?
- Which is why the sermon title on the front is learning from mistakes. But not so much learning from our own mistakes, but this morning learning from the disciples' mistakes.
- Because today we'll see four failures of the disciples when it comes to following Jesus. You see, a couple of weeks ago, Jesus told them if they would be his disciples, they must take up their cross and follow him.
- And then last week we saw that it's worth following Jesus because he is the real deal. But it seems this week the disciples are having a tough time putting, following him into practice, just as we sometimes do as well.
- [2 : 37] In fact, in verse 51 of your Bibles, which was the last verse that Connor read for us, it marks the turning point in Luke's gospel, where Jesus from now on is sets out resolutely or with determination towards Jerusalem.
- There to enter Jerusalem on a donkey with palm branches on that very first Palm Sunday, as we are celebrating today. And then five days later to die on a cross on Good Friday.
- But on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus will have to keep teaching his disciples what it means to follow him, both in terms of relying on him, but also having the same attitude as him.
- For us today, we can learn from their mistakes. I like their first one, their failure to trust Jesus's power. So verse 37.
- The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. A man in the crowd called out, Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child.
- [3 : 46] A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams. It throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him.

So it's the next day from the transfiguration. Remember last week, Jesus was on a mountain with three of his disciples. Well, they've come back down. It's the next day. And they meet a man who is desperate to see his son healed.

And Luke points out that this is his only child. Something that Luke often does, like Jairus' only daughter, or the woman of Nain's only son. And he does that as well as give us a fair bit of description here so that we might feel the desperation of this boy's spiritual oppression.

For we're told the spirit seizes him, throws him, scarcely ever leaves him, and is destroying him. Can you feel the desperation of this situation?

He needs saving, doesn't he? But the disciples are unable. Verse 40. The father says, I begged your disciples to drive out, but they could not.

[5 : 01] Here the disciples fail to heal this boy, don't they? Which is surprising because if you come with me back to the beginning of the chapter, chapter 9 on the left-hand side of the page there. And notice there that Jesus gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases.

And so they had his power to do this, and in fact they did do that early on, so why do they fail now? Well, we need to keep looking for clues in our passage, like verse 41.

Have a look at verse 41. You unbelieving and perverse generation, Jesus replied, how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son to me.

Now here Jesus uses some terminology from our first reading in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy chapter 32, where God calls Israel a warped and crooked generation, and later on in that same chapter, a perverse generation and children who are unfaithful or unbelieving.

Because Israel would stop trusting in God. But the question is, whom does Jesus apply that kind of imagery to here?

[6 : 18] Well, even though the word generation probably includes everyone standing there, including the Father, but who is the last people Luke mentions? Who are those who are unable to do something?

It's the disciples, isn't it? At this point, Jesus lumps them in with ancient Israel. And we can know this because in Matthew's account of the same event, he adds a little bit later, extra, where the disciples come up and ask Jesus in private, why can we drive it out?

And his reply, because you have so little faith, belief, trust, so little that you don't have any at this point. You see, it seems they've stopped trusting in Jesus's power to save, which is crooked and perverse, given all they'd seen Jesus's power do.

Not to mention all they had done with his power back earlier in chapter nine. Perhaps when they saw the boy, they thought, or they doubted, you know, they could do it with Jesus's power.

Perhaps he looked like too hard a case to cure. Or perhaps their earlier success went to their heads, so they started relying on their own power. We don't know for sure, but either way, it seems they'd forgotten that they were just the channel and it's Jesus who is the savior.

[7 : 38] Because that's exactly what we see him doing next. Verse 42. Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the impure spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.

And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. It's a beautiful picture of Jesus giving this boy life to the full, isn't it? Not only restoring his own life, but restoring his relationship with his dad.

But notice it's Jesus who does it. Jesus rebukes, heals, gives. And so, I wonder whether the first lesson we can learn from the disciples' mistake here is to keep trusting in Jesus' power to save others.

Now, we may not meet many demon-possessed people here in the West, although I've heard stories about it in Africa and so on, but we certainly meet many who are spiritually oppressed.

Paul puts it like this in Ephesians chapter 2. He talks about how we were once, like the rest of the world, dead in transgression and sin, spiritually dead. How he used to follow the ways of the world, and also the spirit, the devil, who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

[8 : 56] You know, whispering things like, oh, this Jesus stuff, it's nonsense. Just ignore it. And so, leading them away from life eternal. But we're not to think that any of our loved ones who might be like this are too hard a case for Jesus' power to save.

Or, we're not to rely on our own strength, our own words and strategies to see them save. I saw a website on how to attract people to your Easter services, and it had all sorts of suggestions, like updating your website and giving out invitation cards.

In fact, getting the whole church community together and painting Easter eggs, and then using that as an invitation to go out. And if we weren't so all exhausted from the last few years of COVID, we might actually try some of these things.

In fact, I did update the church website last week, so there you go. But the point is, none of that actually saves people, does it? They're good things to do, don't get me wrong. But it's Jesus who is the Savior.

And so the best thing we can do for people is to pray and help them hear about Jesus. And perhaps print out a Bible verse that speaks of Jesus.

[10 : 13] I like the famous John 3.16, or 1 Peter 3.18. You know, print that out and stick that on an Easter egg, and then give it to them. Or perhaps share some hot cross buns with them, and say, I love hot cross buns, especially the cross, and see if they bite.

Pardon the pun. Or bun. Or as a church, making sure we stay Christ-centered and prayerful. And if we don't say exactly the right thing, has that ever happened to you?

You kind of walk away from a conversation, and you think, oh, if only I'd said that. Don't worry. It's not our exact words or efforts that save. We are just the channel.

Jesus is the Savior. And if you've been doing that, and Jesus hasn't yet decided to save this person, then it's not on you. It's up to God.

Unlike the disciples, we're just to keep trusting in Jesus' power to save. Because it's Jesus who dies for us. Which brings us to their second mistake, and the rest of verse 43.

[11 : 24] While everyone was marveling at all Jesus did, he said to his disciples, listen carefully to what I am about to tell you. The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.

Last week we heard God say on the mountain, listen to Jesus, and now Jesus is saying it himself this week, isn't he? Literally, he says, put these words into your ears.

Listen, the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men. In other words, be killed. But, verse 45, they did not understand what this meant.

It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it. Now, the disciples have understood many things.

They've understood that Jesus is God's Messiah. We saw that a few weeks ago. And I think they understand the general basic meaning that to be delivered into the hands of men is not a good thing, that he's about to die.

[12 : 34] Because they are afraid to ask Jesus about it. Not because they thought they'd get in trouble for asking, but because they suspected it meant him dying, and they feared that.

In fact, Matthew's Gospel helps us to know that this is the right way to look at it, because in the same event, instead of saying fear, he says they're filled with grief at the thought that their leader is about to be delivered into the hands of men.

And so I take it the word that they can't grasp is why the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of men. The Son of Man is that Old Testament figure who received all authority, power, and that his kingdom would last forever.

So how can that one die? How does that fit with God's plan? Of course, we know that his death pays for our sin.

That's why he had to die, so that we could be saved from our spiritual oppression. And I think that's why all this happened the next day after the transfiguration, to help show why Jesus must suffer first, then enter his glory, because it's by his death that he will save from spiritual oppression.

[13 : 52] In fact, I think Luke tries to point that out in verse 43, the second half. While everyone was marvelling at what Jesus did, you know, healing this boy, he turns to his disciples and says, listen to the thing I must do, the most important thing, and that is die.

Because again, it's only by his death that he can save from spiritual oppression. but this was hidden from them, so they could not grasp it. It's hard to know who or how it was hidden from them, but it seems like they should have understood it.

After all, Jesus says, listen, as though they could grasp it. And they had their Old Testament which predicted it. What's more, they could have asked Jesus for help to understand it.

Like Jesus gives them later on without even asking after his resurrection. He, notice, opened their minds to understand the scriptures about his necessary death.

Then, forgiveness being preached to all the nations. That was God's plan. But here, their fear prevents them from asking. And I wonder for us whether we can sometimes fail to grasp his word as well.

[15 : 17] As sometimes our fear of looking silly might stop us from asking for help. Or our fear of what it might mean for us, that it might mean something a bit too fanatical for me, which I fear so I won't ask for help to understand it.

Or a fear that it might be too politically incorrect that prevents us from asking for help to get it. Ignorance is bliss, as they say. Or sometimes we can fail to grasp even his word about his death.

Not why he died, we get that, don't we? But the enormity of it, such that it grips our hearts and shapes our lives, where we seek to live every day in humble thanks and joyful forgiveness and obedient reverence.

And this time we might not ask for help to grasp the enormity, not because of fear, but perhaps because of familiarity. Ah, yeah, I know all about his death, we hear it every week at church, oh good, it's Easter, I can't cop it twice in one week now.

But unlike the disciples, we're not to let fear or familiarity prevent us from asking for help. Instead, pray for God's help to open your mind, to help you understand his word, or even to grasp more fully the enormity of his death for you.

[16 : 48] How much love God must have for you, for example. For God promises to give us wisdom, perhaps God's spirit will give you one of those aha moments.

Have you ever had one of those? You've kind of been reading and then suddenly the penny drops, ah, yep, got it now. Or perhaps God will work through one of his people to help you grasp his word. Either way, unlike the disciples, ask for help to fully grasp his word.

Well, the first two failures have to do with not following Jesus in terms of relying on him or trusting him, whether his power or help. It's kind of the vertical, us and Jesus.

The second two have to do with not following Jesus in terms of having his attitude towards others. It's horizontal, one another. In fact, if the disciples had fully grasped his death, they'd see that he had an attitude of humble service and wouldn't argue over who is the greatest, which is what they do next.

Verse 46. An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Now, we don't know the details here, what led to this argument.

[18 : 02] Perhaps Peter, James and John, who were up the mountain with Jesus last week, were saying this week that if they were there with this demon possessed boy was brought, they could have healed him, no worries.

You nine, you're a bit low class here. Who knows? I don't know. Either way, it's an issue of pride or arrogance, isn't it? Like, you know, the famous Muhammad Ali, what was his line?

I am the greatest. Yeah. In fact, he continued by saying, I said that even before I knew I was. Now, I doubt any of us argue over who the greatest is at church, do we?

I haven't heard anyone doing that. It's not something we're likely to do. But perhaps we can still look down at others. You know, those who are different to us.

You know, those older people at church who like those old organ hymns. Don't worry, I said the young people at the morning service who like the loud modern hymns.

[19 : 06] Or those people who can't park properly in the car park. Or perhaps those who seem less godly. Or anyone who barracks for Collingwood.

But if we follow Jesus, then there's no place for pride or arrogance. Because even the least among us is great. Verse 47.

Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me.

And whoever welcomes me welcomes God who sent me. great. For he's the one who is least among you all who is great. Jesus actually drops the comparative greatest there.

It's just great. You see, in Jesus' day, a child had a very lowly status. They were the least in society. Kids were to be seen but not heard, if you're familiar with that expression.

[20 : 09] And they were regarded as having little worth because they didn't contribute much to the household. Instead, they consumed everything in the house. Michelle and I go shopping on Mondays and by Tuesday afternoon, the cupboard is gone.

And the cupboard doors are left open. Does that happen in your house as well? I'm thinking about taking the cupboard doors off the cupboard actually. But the point is the child represents the least or the lowly.

And Jesus says, whoever welcomes this child in my name, that is as a fellow believer, therefore welcomes me, because he is with believers, and God who sent me.

And if Jesus is with them, if we are welcoming Jesus himself, then that means even that least child is important, doesn't it? Even the least among you all in the world's eyes, like this child, is great.

Which means every believer is important, so every believer is to be welcomed. The other gospels kind of focus on the idea of service, which does come up here, but Luke's point is that every believer is welcomed, is every believer is important.

[21 : 25] And to be welcomed, though, is to be warmly received and served. And this is what you do when you welcome someone to your home, isn't it? You warmly receive them, ah, it's great to see you, and then you kind of get the shoes off or on policy out of the way because everyone has a different policy, and then you serve them.

Would you like a cup of tea or a glass of water or something else? We're to warmly receive and serve every believer, even those who in the world's eyes are regarded as least amongst us, even those who are different to us.

After all, is that not what the Son of Man did for us? He welcomed us and served us by dying for us. So unlike the disciples, welcome all believers as great.

And finally, serve together with humility, unlike the disciples whose pride prevents people from ministry, verse 49. Master said, John, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he is not one of us.

Now, in verse 49, the word said, John, it's literally answered. That is, John is answering Jesus' comments about welcoming and being great.

[22 : 49] And so he seems to be saying, surely, Jesus, we were right not to welcome but stop this guy because he's not one of us great ones, you know, one of the twelve elite.

It's the issue of pride again. people say if they're not one of the special ones in the church, they can't serve like us, would be a modern equivalent. In fact, I also wonder if there's a hint of jealousy here too because did you notice this guy is doing the very thing they could not do for the boy because this one is doing it in Jesus' name, trusting in Jesus' power to save.

Either way, Jesus says in verse 50, do not stop him, Jesus said, for whoever is not against you is for you. If anyone is not against you, that is, if they're genuinely wanting to serve with you, then they're for you.

So don't stop them, encourage them. You see, serving is not about status, but support. It's not about competition, but cooperation. It's not about hubris, but humility.

After all, we need each other, don't we? It's why we here try to encourage people who want to serve. Sometimes it needs to be directed, or there needs to be training in order to best build the body.

[24 : 13] But we shouldn't think because they're not old enough, or not Anglican enough, or haven't been with us long enough, they can't serve if they want to. In fact, at 1030 Church, I think it was last Sunday, we had an 11-year-old doing slides at the back, being trained up.

I think he's out, is he? Yes, C.J. How cool is that? And now, having said all that, I doubt many of us would prevent people from serving out of pride, will we? Again, I don't think that's quite our issue.

I wonder whether our issue is more not wanting to serve, because perhaps we think we're not good enough, or perhaps we feel like life is busy enough. But Jesus didn't say to his father, I'm too busy to be delivered into the hands of men.

He said, not my will, but yours be done. And so unlike the disciples, we're to serve together with humility. Let me finish. The wife of US President Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, said this.

She said, learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself. And so unlike the disciples, following Jesus means trusting in Jesus' power to save others, asking for help to fully grasp his word, welcoming all believers as great, and serving together with humility.

[25 : 37] I wonder which of the disciples' mistakes you can learn from this morning. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you so much for the Lord Jesus.

And we pray that you would help us to follow him. Help us to learn from the mistakes of the disciples and even our own, that we might continue to follow him rightly.

We ask it in his name. Amen.