

THE FIRST 15

Friday, August 23, 2024

Please be in continued prayer for our team currently in Tanzania serving alongside Zoe Ministry. Today we pray for safe travels home for our team and for God to be present in our lives, in our church, and in the lives of our Zoe children. To learn more, visit our website at fmcm.org/ZOE, or for the prayer guide go to fmcm.org/ZOE-Tanzania.

Today is Friday, August 23 and we are exploring how God's goodness and mercy follow us.

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed Lord God, thank You for loving me. I come to this quiet place and seek Your presence. I calm my scattered thoughts, release my worries and slow my breath. I focus on the goodness and mercy You promise. The goodness and mercy that follow me. Great Shepherd of my soul, open the ears of my heart to hear the message You have for me today. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." Matthew 25:31-36

REFLECTION

God is a God of goodness and mercy. God is compassionate. He responds to suffering and need with a heart bursting with deep love and kindness. His compassion moves Him to step into people's lives and respond generously. Jesus is with us in our suffering, want, need and lack of resources. In the Gospels, Jesus reached out in compassion to those who were hungry, feeding them, healing them and having mercy on their physical needs. In imitation of Him, I am to respond to the needy people around me with a compassion that cares enough to become involved in their lives. I am invited to work alongside Jesus with joy, give generously to others and help those in need.

Mixed flocks of sheep and goats were customary in ancient Israel. The illustration of separation would be a common image in this region. Every evening the shepherd separated the flock. The goats needed to be kept warm at night because they are less hardy and the cold harms them, but the sheep prefer the open air at night. Similarly the present age is a mixture of good and evil and the future promises a time of separation. The Bible looks forward to a time of future judgment that will confirm right and eliminate wrong. There will be a time that purifies, winnows

and prunes. This should cause me to examine my life before the day when I will stand before Jesus Christ my judge.

Interestingly in the parable, both those who perform the acts of mercy and those who do not are unaware of what they have done. The king must tell them. Small gestures, small acts of kindness, a cup of cold water, a sympathy note, an hour visitation, or a phone call may seem insignificant. The sheep did not know the good they had done. Their acts seemed so small and inconsequential. Yet, God is found in the small things. Whatever I have, Jesus encourages me to share generously with others. Whether it is a few dollars, a coat that has grown too small, an extra blanket, a place of shelter, a cool drink, a visit to the hospital, an offer of prayer, a word of encouragement, a sincere welcome, a kind smile. Whatever I have, if I am willing to give, I will leave a legacy that will outlive myself and produce fruit long after I am gone. May goodness and mercy follow me.

Ask: When have I followed Jesus by attending to the needs of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and imprisoned? When have I not?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy Lord God, If I am to leave a legacy I must begin today by using my time, talents and treasure to pour into the lives of others. Especially those who are suffering, alone and in need. Make me aware of what I can do to help - in my family, my church, my neighborhood and my community. Show me the treasures I have in my possession. What have you given me that I could share with others? Show me where there is need and inspire me to respond with goodness, mercy and generosity. Let me leave a legacy of love in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.