Sacrifice Results for Good  
Sunday, March 18, 2018

Introduction
Society shapes us to achieve results. Preschoolers in club sports are taught to play for the win. Elementary students are taught that an A is much better than a C (or F)! We are taught in our work to always be growing the business, growing profit, expanding the footprint. At performance review time, we are disappointed with anything other than an excellent rating. And weight loss might be the only thing in our lives when a positive result comes from a diminishing number.

In a results driven society, faith is counterintuitive. It is a place where results don’t look like the rest of our lives. In many ways, we grow in our faith and follow Christ, but trust God with the results. We can’t do anything to earn our way into heaven; we have to place our faith in the faith of Jesus and receive the grace that comes through his sacrifice.

Today we are continuing our study of Christian sacrifice. Sacrifice is central to our faith, but it is definitely not an end in of itself. God gave us sacrifice to point to a much deeper reality. For the Christian, sacrifice means giving up something of great value to us for something of even greater value to God. For us this may be time, where we deploy our talent, or how we steward our financial resources. It may be the expectations we place on ourselves or others. Today we are going to look at sacrificing results in our life of faith and we will learn that when we sacrifice results we are free to see the difference God can make through our faith.

Scripture and Message
Since Lent is all about patterning our life after the life of Jesus, we have been looking to Jesus’ example. I can think of no better place than to look to Jesus’ relationship to his disciples.
There are three boat stories in the Gospel of Mark; and they all happen after a really significant event. Boats are a place that the majority of Jesus’ disciples would have been most comfortable. After all, they were fishermen. Yet, it is the place where they seemed to express the most fear or bewilderment.

The first of these stories happens after Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of God. Let’s look first at Mark 4:35-41:

> 35“That day when evening came, [Jesus] said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.”
> 36Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.
> 37A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” 39He got up, rebuked the wind and the waves, “Quiet! Be still.” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.
> 40[Jesus] said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have not faith?” 41The were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the wave obey him!”

The disciples had watched him pray, heal, cast out demons, and teach. They had seen the sense of awe that he had left on the crowds. Yet, when they got into the boat and the storm blew on the water, they were beside themselves. It’s as if they saw all he had done for others, but still didn’t believe it.

After that, you think they would have gotten it. They traveled with him to exorcise a demon-possessed man, raise a girl from the dead, and send THEM out to heal the sick and cast out demons. Then they watched him feed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish.

Here we encounter the second boat story. Let’s look at Mark 6:45-52:

> 45Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. 47Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on the land. 48He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before the dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, 49but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, 50because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” 51Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, 52for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

You’ve got to love how real Mark keeps what is going on with the disciples. They watched all that Jesus had done. They went out and with power did the things that Jesus had done. They even watched Jesus effortlessly walk on water as they were struggling against the wind with their oars. Even still, Mark tells us their hearts are hardened.

After this account, Jesus heals a man who was deaf and could hardly talk and feeds 4,000 people with seven loaves. This is where we get the third boat story. Let’s look at Mark 8:13-21:

> 13“Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side. “The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat.” 15“Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.” 16They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.” 17Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t
you remember?  

19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketsful of pieces did you pick up?” “Twelve,” they replied.  

20 And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketsful of pieces did you pick up?” They answered, “Seven.” He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

I know this may come as quite a shock, but Jesus was more than a little frustrated with his disciples. I’m sure he wondered (on more than one occasion), “you mean, this is what I’m leaving behind to build my church? Father, is this all you have?”  No wonder those that were outside of Jesus’ inner circle of disciples, got it. They came to faith. They rejoiced! It was Jesus’ own disciples who didn’t get it....whose hearts were hardened.

This didn’t change much. Jesus went to the cross abandoned, rejected, and alone. Yet, who were the first he wanted to visit when he was raised from the dead? Those hard-hearted disciples of his! It seems like redemption of the hard-hearted; those who don’t understand, is what God has been about since Genesis 3.

Jesus teaches us a very important lesson through his own life: in order to serve God faithfully, we have to trust God with the results.

Now, I know some of you in corporate life are thinking I must be crazy right now. “What do you mean sacrifice results? Results are what my whole work is based on. If I don’t achieve the objectives that are set forth, I might lose my job.” Teachers, I can almost hear you thinking, “that is easy for you to say. If my students don’t do well on their TAKS, my evaluation isn’t going to look so good.”

I can see this in myself as a parent. I want so badly for my children to be well behaved, do everything they are supposed to, and be smart and talented at an extracurricular activity so they can get a full-ride to college and support me in my old age. At some point, I realize that the more I try and control my child’s behavior, the more they will push the other direction.

I pour myself into everything I do. ...and I am results driven. I like to have lots to do, and I like everything I do to bear fruit. There are many times in my life that I have had to let go of my drive for results. Maybe you have been there too...

You pour everything you have into your children. You give them every opportunity to try things to discover and hone their gifts. You point them to Jesus, teach them to pray, and equip them to reach out to God when things get tough. You realize how little control you have over the ultimate direction their lives will take, but you pray and trust God.

You transition from one job to another. You have been working hard to achieve results, but now have to turn over leadership to someone else. At that moment, you have to lay down all that you have been striving for and the results that will be achieved after you are done.

How do we control our anxiety in all of these scenarios? One way, I believe, is to view all of life as ministry. Yes, there are objectives you are expected to achieve for work, but God has placed you in a mission field filled with people who need to know God’s love. You are the one God has placed right where you are to shed God’s love.
Maybe this example hits closest to home. You are friends with someone that you know hasn’t placed their hope in Jesus. You pray for them, find key opportunities to share your faith, and even gave them a bible. You can try everything you can, but the truth is you can’t save someone; only God can. All you can do is point them in the right direction and leave the rest to God.

I know this doesn’t sound right; especially to those of us (me included!) who like to be in control. We have to acknowledge that in this world, things aren't the way they are supposed to be. The world, as God created it to be, is broken. Yet, God is working behind the scenes to make it right again.

Instead of striving for results and controlling outcomes, we should follow the advice of Hebrews 13:15-16: “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

One sacrifice that is pleasing and acceptable to God is a sacrifice of praise; that is openly proclaiming his name. It is giving God praise and honor and glory rather than trying to hog all of the glory ourselves. God is pleased when we do good and share with others. We don’t do the good that we could do when we are so busy trying to use others to accomplish our own ends, to feed our own ego, to help us get ahead.

**Conclusion**

No matter where the hearts of his disciples were, Jesus continued to teach them and empower them. He continued to send them out to be in ministry. He never gave up on them, as frustrating as they could be. He called them to follow in his way, equipped them for ministry, and left the future of the movement to them (trusting God with the results). Even when we was frustrated with them, he placed all of his focus on doing good – healing, feeding, casting out demons, and teaching. May we too sacrifice results, and place our focus on doing good. As John Wesley said: “do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”

*This sermon was preached by Pastor Lance Richards at The Watershed Church in League City, Texas on Sunday, March 18, 2018.*