

Community Church of Issaquah

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What Is a New Life Like?

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Life is interesting, to say the least. We are told that things can happen in the blink of an eye that changes our life forever. Sometimes those things are minor, sometimes they are overwhelming. We don't often think about life in those terms, and yet that's exactly how life moves along. Let me give an example of this principle from the life of a young friend of mine. At the age of 44, she went to the doctor for a usual check-up for her ongoing heart issues. At the exam, she was told that she had stage 4 breast cancer. Totally unexpected. But at that one moment when the doctor read her diagnosis, her life was changed forever. Chemo, radiation, hair loss, and so much more were things she would have to face every day of her life.

That story is one that has a rather sad outcome to it and certainly, the Scriptures we read today are not at all like that. Actually, it's the reverse. Each example of these given in Matthew begins with a sad life experience and ends with a joyful one. As I was reading through the Gospel of Matthew recently, I got hung on these verses and the message each story has for us.

A ruler comes to Jesus with some tragic news. His daughter has just died. We don't know from the story how old the daughter was nor how she died, but that isn't really

the point. Here is a grieving father desperately trying to bring her back to life. As a parent, I felt the pain of this ruler. Parents shudder at the thought of losing a child. We never want to have our child die before we do. It is evident that the ruler has heard about Jesus's power to raise the dead, and he rushes to beg him to come and restore his child and to make their family whole again.

The response of Jesus was surprising to me. He didn't say one word, but the verse says he got up and went with the father, along with his disciples. Can you imagine how relieved the ruler must have been that Jesus answered his request and was going with him to bring his daughter back. And then the unexpected happened, his journey was interrupted by a woman with a serious health issue who met Jesus on the way. She had been dealing with a bleeding issue for more than 12 years and believed that if she only just touched the tunic that Jesus wore, she would be healed. It wasn't her intention to stop Jesus from his mission, but just to touch his garment and she be cured.

Jesus felt the touch and turned to the woman and said, "Take heart, daughter, your faith has healed you." One simple outreach of a hand to touch his garment and her life was changed forever. There is a strong message there for all of us. If we have faith in Christ, our lives also might be changed for the good. But the passage continues. Jesus got to the home of the ruler and was not exactly happy with what he found. There was already a celebration of the life of the child going on. Musicians were playing and a crowd was being noisy. They were simply following the tradition of how society dealt with death and funerals.

It was not quite what Jesus wanted and he quickly changed it. “Go away,” he said, “this girl is not dead, just sleeping.” Their response? They laughed. After the ruler had moved the crowd outside, Jesus went to her room, took her by the hand, and she got up. Life was changed forever for the girl, her father, her family, and those who were present for her return to life. As I read this passage, I kept asking myself, “What would their new life look like?” I imagined that the father likely would hug his daughter every time she came near to him and utter a silent thank you to Jesus. I imagined the daughter telling all her friends and others about how she had died and then came back to life. I envisioned a sweet and happy scene for their collective new life.

The Scripture doesn't stop there; there's more to tell. After Jesus left the ruler's house, two blind men followed him and called out to him. That portion of the verse struck me. They called out, meaning they were not close to him. For me, I thought about how mired down I might be in my own problems sometimes and God seems so far away that I have to call out loudly to be sure He hears me. Perhaps each of us has encountered a situation like that. We think we have to call out loudly or the Lord won't hear us. This story tells us that is not so.

Jesus went indoors. I assume that means he went into a house or some other structure which puzzled me, but it's not pertinent to this story, just my curiosity. The two blind men followed him and were encountered with a question right off the bat. Not how long have you been blind? Not how did you find me? Nope. Jesus asked them, “Do you

believe that I am able to do this?” Their response was simple. Just two words, “Yes, Lord.” Then Jesus touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith it will be done,” and they gained their sight.

Do we ever think that Christ is asking us, “Do you think I can do this?” More than likely, we assume that whatever we ask, it’s going to happen. Jesus promised that when he told us to ask, and it will be given. Yet there are surely times when our doubts overcome our hopes and we fail to hear the Holy Spirit asking if we believe He can do it. As Christians, we must keep our lips ready to always say, “Yes, Lord.”

As you can see, I wear glasses. My eyes aren’t that bad and I can actually read most things without them. So, I don’t know what it would be like to not be able to see anything and to rely on my sense of hearing or touch to guide my life. But I have spent a good bit of time with those who are deaf or hearing impaired and it seems to be a similar story. How would life be changed if sight or hearing were restored? Do you think those two blind men had a life changing experience? Imagine what it would be like for them to turn to each other and actually see in detail someone they had known but had no idea what they looked like in person. Imagine a deaf person having their hearing given to them and to be able to hear the voice of a loved one.

While I was working with the deaf, I would often see videos of young children and sometimes adults who had a hearing device implanted and their hearing was restored. It often

brought tears to my eyes to see the startled look of a toddler when their mother would speak and they heard her voice for the first time. Or an adult with the same situation who would cry and immediately wrap arms around a loved one there beside them. Life for each of them changed forever. They had a new life and with it comes adjustments that will require hard work, a lot of work.

But there's another story. As Jesus and the disciples were leaving, a man was brought before him. The verses don't tell who brought him there, but it must have been caring family or friends. The man had an affliction that in the Bible is often called demon possessed, but today we would likely say he had some mental health issues. Sadly, he was not even able to speak. When Jesus healed him, his illness disappeared, and he was even able to talk. Those present were amazed and thought nothing like that had even happened before. I try to imagine how the man must have reacted but imagining is the best I can do because nothing else is said in this short verse. Mentally ill, unable to speak, and Jesus gives you a new life. How remarkable is that!?

I do understand that these stories in today's Scripture passages are about healings that restore life or a life function. That type of new life isn't what might happen to us. Our "new life" might come in a variety of different ways. I can't begin to know how many "new lives" each of you have had, but I would be willing to bet there are many. For me, the list is endless. The birth of my son, the birth of my grandson, the end of a marriage, my calling to various ministries – each one resulting in a new life. Each one

bringing with it the question from the Lord, “Do you believe I can do it?” That’s a question each of us must answer with our own new life experiences.

As followers of Christ, each of us is blessed with new beginnings, new life milestones, and new opportunities to celebrate our “new life.” We would be naïve to think that every new beginning is a joyful one. Losing a loved one and having to adjust our life to that change is not the new life we would like, but it can be our reality. Yet, even in those days, Christ calls us to answer the question, “Do you believe I can do it? Help you, or comfort you, or make the journey with you?” My hope for me and for you is that we can always answer the Holy Spirit’s question with the same answer that the blind men said, “Yes, Lord. Yes, Lord.”