**A MINISTRY OF INCLUSION**

***The Least Of These***

Mark 10:13-16 says, *“Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for* ***of such is the kingdom of God****. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it. And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them.”*

Jesus was making a point to His apostles that no one is to be excluded from His love and blessings. At worst they seemingly looked upon children as a nuisance, and at best a hindrance to more important matters. The Lord graphically made His point that nothing could be further from the truth. Everyone, even small children, are to be included in His ministry.

In this church, as in most churches, there are those who have some form of disability. Over the years I have seen here, and elsewhere, the handicap ranges from mild to severe. Some you hardly notice, while others are quite obvious. This becomes both a challenge and an opportunity for those of us who are not limited by physical or mental hurdles.

While the world just turns the other way, God’s children should not and cannot live that way. Our hearts are to be drawn to those less fortunate, and our hands are uplifted to do what we can to bless them.

Let me give you a little Bible quiz. The list could be much longer, but this one makes my point. Can you name the following people in the Bible who had disabilities?

1. Men who had vision problems?

2. A man who was crippled and another who limped?

3. A tribe in Israel who had a battalion of one armed soldiers?

4. A king, as well as a prophet, who had mental depression?

The answers are:

1. Samson and Eli (and possibly Paul).

2. Mephibosheth and Jacob (angel dislocated his hip).

3. Benjamin.

4. Nebuchadnezzar and Elijah.

Observe how Jesus had a ministry of inclusion to those who might be excluded by the general public. "*When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the* ***poor****, the* ***crippled****, the* ***lame****, the* ***blind****, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous*." [Luke 14:12-14]

Jesus did not speak this in a vacuum. It was obvious many were being excluded who Christ said must be included if we expect to be judged with mercy on the last day.

Speaking of judgment day, read the criteria by which all men will be saved or condemned:

“*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 25:34-36]

James had an interesting and challenging question and answer session in his epistle.

“*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.
Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.
Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord*.” (James 5:13-14).

This means we are ever on the lookout for those in need, whether to rejoice with those who rejoice, or to weep with those who weep.

“*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God*” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). What a powerful scripture for our ministry of inclusion. God has comforted us in our troubles so that we can in turn comfort and bless others.

On that last great day when we stand before our King He will say to those who are saved,

“*Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it* *to one of* ***the least of these*** *My brethren, you did it to Me*” (Matt. 25:40).

*“Mercy triumphs over judgment*” (Jam. 2:13).

– Rick