

Evotional - 8/29/08

Do you ever find yourself questioning scripture? I find that I have many questions, but if I keep asking, each one will eventually be answered. To date, scripture has always been correct and I find myself, once again, humbled in the process by the wisdom of the Spirit working through the biblical writers - our ancestors of faith.

I began thinking about a particular question over a year ago. I thought, why does the Gospel of Matthew say, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit' and the Gospel of Luke says, 'Blessed are the poor'. Since my often tiny brain was not able to entertain the possibility that they could both be right and that's why they both made it into the final cut, my conclusion was that someone must be wrong. It's not unlike watching two of your children argue. You are able to see that they are both right, but they are coming from different perspectives.

'Blessed are the poor in spirit' is easy for me to understand because I am one of those followers who came to Jesus when I was at the 'end of my rope'. I was exhausted from trying to do things my way and I was in dire need of a Savior. But what about Luke's experience of Jesus. What about 'Blessed are the poor'? Everyone can be 'poor in spirit', but not many of us know what it means to be poor. Because I asked the question over a year ago, the Spirit helped me first to understand what Jesus was *not* talking about. As the months progressed, I realized that he was *not* talking about the addicted, the beggars, the starving or the mentally unstable who no longer have the ability to find medication. These are often the people that we perceive as 'the poor'. If that were the case, Jesus would have said 'Blessed are the addicted or those that beg' and because we know that they are exactly the ones that he healed, they must not have been the ones that he meant.

Perhaps, like me, some of you have seen those travel shows where the camera zooms in to show the face of a young child, covered in dirt in primitive living conditions and beaming from ear to ear. This child is clearly not starving. He or she is surrounded by other children who seem to have the same twinkle in their eyes. Bringing this scene even closer to home, many of us have experienced this type of joy in the faces of the children at Open Arms Daycare in Baja, California. This type of situation might begin to unravel the question at hand, but it wasn't until last week when Conley and Stephen Kipp, Nick Ramming, Alex Colvin, Eric Shamp and Jose and Luis from Boys Hope and I spent 24 hours at the Los Angeles Mission that I knew what Jesus was talking about.

The Los Angeles Mission is a Christian organization. All students in the rehabilitation program study scripture each day and attend worship three times a day before each meal for a year. I experienced the grounds as holy. We went to learn about homelessness and perhaps lend a hand, but what we experienced instead was the Gospel - a loving environment that filled our hearts to the brim. As usual, we received more than we gave.

So, back to the 'the poor'. Our second day, Conley and I talked to a man in the lobby named Gregory. He was a handsome, roughly 60 years of age, well-groomed African-American man with that same darn twinkle in his eyes. He had been attending worship at the Los Angeles Mission for ten years and he was currently a resident (not in the re-habilitation program) at the Mission. He looked around the lobby and told us that many of the people in the lobby had also been coming there for about ten years. My mind

began to calculate how many worship services they must have attended. We told him a story that had happened the day before about a man that we met in the courtyard that was amazingly intuitive. Gregory asked if we were familiar with the first few lines of Hebrews Chapter 13. “Never cease to love your fellow Christians. Do not neglect to show hospitality; by doing this, some have entertained angels unawares.”

Jesus only told one rich man to sell all of his possessions in order to follow him. I do not believe that many of us are called to sell everything in order to follow Jesus. I know that our own faith family is also filled with the same love of the Spirit that we experienced at the Los Angeles Mission. The main difference between us and the poor is not a lack of love; it is a lack of time. We do not need to sell everything, we just need to *buy* more time – time to love another as Jesus commands us to do.