

Take Heart

Dr. Stephen D. McConnell



Mark 10:32-52

The story is told about a conductor on a train who is going down the aisle collecting tickets and he turns to this older gentleman with wild hair and a mustache and asks for his ticket. The old man starts to search his pockets but he seems to be having trouble finding his ticket. “I know that I bought a ticket,” the old man says, “but I can’t seem to find it.” While the old man is rummaging through his pockets the conductor realizes that it’s Albert Einstein. And he says to Albert Einstein, “Oh Dr. Einstein that’s all right, I’ll be back and forth a bunch and when you find it just pass it to me.” Dr. Einstein nodded while he kept on looking. About ten minutes later the conductor came walking back and Dr. Einstein was now on his knees on the ground looking for the ticket. “Oh please, Dr. Einstein, don’t trouble yourself, I’m sure you purchased a ticket.” The professor nodded. About fifteen minutes later the conductor walked through the car again ... and there was Dr. Einstein crawling down the aisle. “Please, please, Dr. Einstein, I trust you, I don’t need your ticket.” “I know you don’t need my ticket,” the professor said, “but I do ... I don’t know where I’m going!”

You can be really, really smart and not know where you are going.

You and I live in a part of the world where being really, really smart is a really, really important thing. Education is a big deal in America. We have endless debates on how to achieve the best education for our children. And for the most part we do – we have better schools than most of the world. A kid who grows up in this part of the planet is going to receive one of the best educations of anywhere in the world. Of the 6 billion people in the world ... we are probably up in the top 5 percent in terms of the accumulation of knowledge. If it is one thing

our kids have ... our parents have ...it is knowledge. We prioritize around knowledge. We buy more expensive houses because they are in good school districts. We pay for tutors. We send our children to classes in order to get better scores on the SAT’s. We aim our children to go to the academically best colleges. We buy the latest U.S. News and World Report of college rankings. We pay attention to our child’s class rank. Knowledge is a very important thing for us.

But you can be really, really smart ... and still not know where you are going.

In the early part of the Church’s history one of the first challenges they were faced with – was the rising movement called Gnosticism. Gnosticism comes from the Greek word gnosis – which means “knowledge”. The Gnostics believed that men and women were ultimately saved by what they knew. That we must all strive to attain a special knowledge and that knowledge separated us from other “believers” and it put us into communion with God. That there was actually a class rank when it came to discipleship. The more you knew, the better off you were. The Church deemed Gnosticism a heresy. “Our knowledge,” wrote the apostle Paul to the Corinthians, “is imperfect.” You can be really, really smart ... and still not know where you are going.

So the brothers James and John – disciples of Jesus – come to Jesus with a request. Actually, it is not a request it is a demand. Now it is hard to believe that anybody could be demanding of Jesus – but James and John had somehow convinced themselves that they were in the know. Just a chapter before in Mark’s Gospel it is James and John and Peter who get picked by Jesus to come up to the top of the mountain ... and they witness Jesus being transfigured before them and seeing the two great prophets, Elijah and Moses, standing at Jesus’ left and right hand. It is one of the most amazing spiritual encounters recorded in the New Testament. And now James and John and Peter are in the “know” ... they have experienced something that nobody else has experienced. They have a special knowledge and it has put them, in their minds, up at the top of the class.

So it is James and John who come to Jesus and they have

a demand. They want Jesus to give them what they want. And what they want is for Jesus, when he comes into his glory, to put the two of them at his right and left hand. Now notice that Peter is not with them. James and John

don’t think to include Peter in the request. They kind of want it for themselves. Knowledge does that sometimes. It separates us. It puts

one above the other. It excludes. There can only be one at the top of the class. So James and John are “smart” enough to see that they want to hitch their train to glory. They want a reservation at the head table. They want to stay in the know.

But you know you can be really, really smart ... and not know where you are going.

James and John make their pitch ... they make their play. And they think they can make their play ... because of what they know. They think they have rank. They are ready to book their ticket. You and me, Jesus!

And then Jesus says this: You do not know what you’re talking about.

Now I submit to you that that is a tough thing to hear from Jesus – “You do not know what you’re talking about.” It is tough when you think you are in the know ... when you think that you and Jesus have this special relationship ... that you have been with him the last couple of years everyday ... when you think you know the mind of Christ enough to put in a bid to be with him in glory – it’s tough to hear the Savior say, “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Now the reason Jesus says to these disciples that they don’t know what they are talking about – is that they

“It’s not about how much your brain retains, it’s about how much your heart breaks.”

don’t know where they are going. They got the wrong ticket. They got this idea that the train to glory has something to do with personal self-satisfaction, with getting themselves to the head of the class. That the

train to glory is about what’s in it for me. That the train to glory is the express train that ends me up at the head of the table on the right and left hand of Jesus. And Jesus says, You’re on the wrong train. Because what

they failed to pick up was that the journey for Jesus was a local train to the cross with lots of stops along the way – and every stop came when Jesus’ heart broke for someone. Every stop came when Jesus’ heart broke for someone. Jesus’ journey was a journey of the broken heart. The glory was the glory that comes when your heart goes out and breaks for the world. It’s not about how much your brain retains, it’s about how much your heart breaks.

And sure enough right after this little humbling conversation with his head of the class disciples, Jesus enters Jericho and lo and behold there’s a blind man. Mark names him Bartimaeus. A blind beggar. One of those guys to whom life has dealt a bad hand. He’s one of those guys sitting on Main St. in town with a bucket and a sign. He’s one of these guys that I pass and you pass all the time. And he’s calling out to Jesus. And the crowd tells the man, Sssshhh! Don’t bother him. He’s on the express train to Jerusalem! But surprise ... this is the local train of the broken heart and this train makes stops. It makes stops when Jesus’ heart breaks. And Jesus calls for the man. And the people who have been spending all their time trying to shush the man, see that the rabbi has stopped and they say to the man, “Take heart he is calling for you.”

Take heart he is calling for you.

Take heart. The rabbi has stopped. Take heart. The man of God has paused for you. Take heart. The great physician is calling for you. Take heart. This isn't the express train of holiness speeding through town. Take heart, he's calling for you.

Are there two sweeter words in the lexicon of the church than "take heart"? It is a pretty tough world out there – filled with all sorts of problems. A lot of Bartimaeus's in this world. And a lot of people pointing fingers and blaming and SSSSHHHing. But the rabbi stops ... and they say, Take heart. Are there two greater words for us to share with this hurting world, than "take heart"?

When a Stephen Minister sits with a grieving widow and hears her pouring out her soul about her broken heart and the big, big hole left in her life and wonders how she can go on – and this companion she has, this Stephen Minister holding her hand says the words, "Take heart," for my heart and the Master's heart break for you.

When a mom and a dad sit with one our youth advisors and share their deep concern over their son's drug use and poor performance in school – and they hear the youth advisor say, "Take heart," for the master's heart and my heart break for you.

When an unemployed father and his two children step up to the food pantry door and he tells the story of all his efforts to find a job and he seems always to be the #2 candidate and not the #1 – and the pantry volunteer hands him some bags of groceries so he can feed his kids and she says, "Take heart for the master's heart and my heart are breaking for you."

When a Honduran man walks into the eye clinic down in El Progreso and receives an exam and gets told of his eye condition and why he can't see correctly and then gets told that there is something that can be done about it. There's a surgery to be performed. "Take heart," says the doctor, for the master's heart and my heart are breaking for you.

You see the Church is that gathering of people who share the broken heart of Christ. People who have boarded the

local train and find that the glory comes when we take on the heart of Christ and find our hearts breaking for a world that wonders if God really cares.

Because the truth is 9 people out of ten don't want your brain. That may be hard for you to comprehend. They don't want what you know, they want your heart. What a joy it has been to witness this political campaign. Uggghh. What a joy to watch the express train of candidates making their way through town and town and town. A quick speech and they are on their way. We're three weeks from the Florida primary and they will likely speed through this town telling us what they know. What they know. And I get it. I understand. That's just the way that thing works. But the Church takes its cues from another campaigner. The one who says you don't need to know the destination, all you need to know is who is right in front of you.

I mentioned earlier in the service that a few weeks ago we had a tornado or two skip through our town and destroy some homes. That was a Saturday night.

The next morning one of the first people on our campus was George Jenkins who leads our Emergency Preparedness Ministry – and George was at the ready along with his team to respond to any of our people who had any needs. George with broken heart was ready to say the words, Take heart.

One of our church members lives in the neighborhood where one of these twisters touched down and leveled a couple homes and in his early walk through the neighborhood to see if anyone needed any help, he came upon a group of men who had appeared uninvited with the sun's rise and were starting to clean debris and damage. Who were these men who appeared out of nowhere? It turns out they were Mennonite – a group of Mennonite men from across town who just imagined that some folks might need some help. And so they came and they cleaned. Take heart, they said. And when their work was over they left as quietly as they came. Take heart, the Master's heart is breaking for you.

Martin Luther imagined Jesus putting it this way: "Discipleship is not limited to what you can comprehend

– it must transcend all comprehension. Plunge into the deep waters beyond your own comprehension, and I will help you to comprehend even as I do. Bewilderment is the true comprehension. Not to know where you are going is the true knowledge."

You can be really, really smart ... and still not know where you are going. But it is the risen Savior who says to you and to me ... join company with me. Join company with me. Join company with me. And I will take you somewhere that you do not know and teach you things you do not yet comprehend.

Maybe that's the company Walt Whitman, the great poet, joined when in the throes of the Civil War when reports were coming to the comfort of his home in Washington, DC – the perch of his success -- that men were suffering terribly at the front – he could bear it no more. So he went. Plunged into the deep waters -- the field hospitals behind the front lines and made it his mission to comfort the sick and tend the wounds of the wounded. Take heart, he said and later reflected in his poem, Song to Myself: "I did not ask the wounded person how he felt, I felt myself become the wounded person."

So why would we want to expand our ministry? Why would we challenge ourselves to create a new connector into our community for people who do not yet know what we know – that the Savior is calling? Why would we want to create a space for children, youth, seniors – anyone who might not think to come first into a space like this? Because this is a church whose heart has always broken for the world. This church is a train that has stopped for 59 years right here in Sarasota and has wondered how can we come along the hungry one, the blind one, the distant one, the deaf one, the grieving one, the addicted one, the confused one – if only to say with our deeds more than our words – Take heart, he is calling for you.



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Church of the Palms

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