

Jesus tells us today to “learn from me.”

Probably good advice?

And yet, we are in the age of youtube where if you have a problem you just look that up real quick, and boom, you’re self-taught.

You go to the bookstores and there are whole sections on Self-help. This is how you can kick that bad habit, really get motivated, get your life in order, combat depression, and get into shape!

And we in America, coming off our 250th, we celebrate this autonomy, our strength of will, and our drive. And in the civic sense, why not? Really, why not celebrate these things?

But this self taught, self help, strong will mindset can only carry us so far. Eventually there is a problem youtube, the books, or even the trained experts can’t fix.

And where does that leave us?

I think it can leave us angry. “This life isn’t fair. Others have it better, and I didn’t ask to be born into a broken world as a sinner to struggle and see death all over! Not fair God.” Did we learn that from Jesus? Think he might know something about what is fair? As he goes, so unfairly, gentle and lowly, to a cross? Or is our anger at the “supposed” injustice of God, self taught? Self taught by our constant measuring ourselves against others, by our constant evaluating of who’s getting what they deserve based on what we think?

When youtube and the books, and the experts, and our own will and autonomy fall short, it can leave us scared. “God, are you real if this much pain is in the world? And if you are real do you care about someone like me who is just trying to get by? Is there some goodness for me? Any hope that this will ever get better?” Did we learn that fear from Jesus who, as prophesied, is the

King of all, yet does not come to shed the blood of his enemies, but gentle and lowly, rides into Jerusalem on a donkey knowing full well he will be tortured and killed but bravely, and for the joy set before him in the resurrection and with you (by the way), bravely sets his face to the cross? Did we learn hopelessness and depression from Jesus, or is that self taught? Self taught by the constant demands we put on ourselves, and the constant grind of the world to keep up appearances and put on a happy face. “Clean those cupboards, moms; lift those weights, boys; and make those powerplays with your authority, professionals! And you better do that or else no one will care about you and you will let everyone down...”

When youtube and the books and the experts and our own will and autonomy fall short, it can leave us exhausted. “God, I can’t do it, I am so tired, I can’t handle all these demands, and bills, and there’s not enough time, and everyone is mad at me and I am trying!” Or when we get the really bad news in life, we might say, “I can’t beat this cancer! I can’t handle this persistent grief and this chronic pain and I am so tired of fighting it!” Did we learn this from our God who gives us a sabbath rest, did we learn this from the Savior asleep on the cushion in the storm, did we learn this from the One who promises he will care for the sparrows and you. Did we learn this from the One who, after dying in your place, rests 3 days in the tomb? Or was this self-taught? Self-taught by demand after demand we place on ourselves, self taught by our thinking we have to beat it all, self-taught by thinking death is the end?

We want to celebrate a strong will, self teaching, and self help and there is a time and a place for that, I suppose. But if that is all you have... What do you do when you find a battle you can’t win? When you find something you can’t master? When you need help?

Paul in our epistle is an apostle, he has seen the Risen Lord, and he lets us in, in chapter 7, to his struggle and admission that even he is not strong enough, good enough, or smart enough to win

all his battles. “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is , in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.”

“What a loser, what a beta! Be a man Paul! Do better, try harder, get stronger!” All the people who say those things, So “wise and discerning” with it all figured out? Guess what? They still die.

Paul asks, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” And answers: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” May we, like Paul, learn from Jesus the great Deliverer.

And when we do this. Then, in this cryptic Gospel lesson, we learn from Jesus that our strength, autonomy, and pride actually make it *harder* for us to enter the kingdom. “I have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to INFANTS.” The littlest!

This life is scary, seems hopeless, and is exhausting. And we can’t beat it. Nor death. Which means we, like infants, NEED, not just a little help, but a Savior to sustain us and to carry us to safe places.

For if the power of God is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9), if he comes to seek the sick not the righteous (that’s in Matthew, Mark, and Luke), and if he comes to the little children as he promises here...

Then, when we see such brokenness on our screens and in our lives about poor children abused, diseased, drowned, trapped in earthquakes, and lost – we want to think they are abandoned by this Savior? Oh, I don’t think so at all.

No, it is the able-bodied and the “really smart” folks that need to watch out! It is the contentious, the ones who have a bone to pick, who think God should do it their way, who think if those

people over there shaped up then maybe they could earn something from God like they have... it is they who must look at the Cross and answer, “why’d he have to die if you are so strong you can do it all yourself?”

May we learn that our will, our teaching, our strength, is nothing before death, nothing before the God of the universe. And then, maybe, then learn again from Jesus.

And learn what? “That (oti) that I am gentle and lowly in heart.”

We might read that and think, “OK I guess I have to be gentle and lowly in heart now – more work for me.” But the text doesn’t say learn HOW TO be gentle and lowly, it says the HE IS gentle and lowly.

Which means: Is he going to scream at you for failing his commands when you’ve been trying? Is he going to chide the sad and tired mother for not being a better mother and dusting that counter more (and by the way, whose standard of “good mom” is that)? Is he going to conscript the father to suffering because he is working full time still isn’t providing enough by someone’s standard? Is he going to shame the young men for not being as pure in mind as they ought, when they do long for a wife? Is he going to patronize you, sick and dying person, because “if you realllly believed you wouldn’t be sick or dying”?

No!

Learn, learn, that Jesus is gentle and lowly in heart. And for all of these, he, gentle and lowly, lifts up the yoke of the cross upon his shoulders. And there, dying unfairly for sins he never committed, there, teaching the true meaning of sacrifice and love, and there, showing the Will of God that you might be his forever, there he dies that death might be undone and life go forth.

And he, risen, continues to come to his people where they are gathered, in the body and blood, in the waters, and in his own mysterious revealing to the infants, that we might receive the benefits of His Work. And if he has done the Work, if “It is finished” as he cried from the cross. Then what is there for you to do, when you are angry, scared, or tired? Nothing. So rest.

Sure, If you’re just fine and don’t need any help, you got it all figured out, and you don’t need to learn from his good law or gospel... then keep walking past this teacher – but it won’t end well.

On the other hand: If you know you need help for meaning, life, and salvation or if you are weary and heavy laden - tired of the games of trying to make God like you, tired of the games of trying to find meaning on youtube or in possessions... come sit at the foot of the cross, come take a little blood shed for you, and rest there in His finished work until he sees us, or rather, carries us like infants, to the full sabbath rest in his Kingdom. He will do so because he is gentle, lowly, and faithful. Amen.