

Psalm 118:19-24

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Matthew 13:10-17

Then the disciples came and asked him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' He answered, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. The reason I speak to them in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand." With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: "You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them." But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

Matthew 21:45-46

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

“A Plumber’s Aha”**Rev. David Dalke****January 10, 2010**

I think Robert Frost was absolutely right when he said that he had three words that would describe life to him, and he said the three words are, "It goes on." It just goes on. I think that's probably what the woman meant when I asked her, "Have you lived in this community all your life?" and she said, "Not yet." It just goes on. It just goes on, and as long as life goes on, we're going to have all kinds of experiences. We're going to have a lot of experiences that might be what we might call epiphanies. You know, sudden insights about life. We can call the "Aha"s, some "Aha"s. As long as we're living, we're going to have them. Not long ago, I'm standing outside, and the neighbor two doors down, I thought, "They haven't lived there very long, they just moved in" and he drives by and has his window down and I think, I'll be nice, and I shout, "Welcome to the neighborhood," and he says, "Well thanks, we've only lived here two years." That was embarrassing. But it was also an "Aha." And the "Aha" was, we just don't get out very much. We don't know our neighbors, even.

I've had a couple "Aha"s through the years, and I want to share with you. The first "Aha" that I had that means something to me, and we'll see where you are with it, is that I just don't have to have life all figured out. I used to think I had to have it all figured out, every little detail, and I had an "Aha" one day that said, "David, you don't have to have life all figured out." A few days ago there was a commotion. It was January the 6th. I think there was a party. It was what we call in the Christian tradition, in church, it was Epiphany. The party was for a little Jewish baby boy, and I know at least three people who attended, there were three fellows and they had some kind of funky outfits on. They came to the party, and of course when you go to a party sometimes you take gifts, so they had some gifts, and I don't know how long the party went on, and they found a house there was a young girl and an older man, and there was this little boy, and it was a party. It was a gathering. Well, I don't have any idea how long they stayed. I know they must have stayed overnight, because one of those fellows had a dream, and the dream was this. "Don't go home by way of a man named Herod, because Herod wants to know where the party is, and he's going to come, under the pretense of bringing a gift, to worship a little Jewish baby boy, but don't go that way." In the dream what he saw was that Herod had murder in his heart. He had murder in his heart, so he said "Go another way." Chuck mentioned that a week ago. They all went another way back home to their land.

Now, I don't have to have that story all figured out. I don't think any of us have to have it totally figured out, what that story was all about. But maybe the best I can do is to say, when they went back to their Gentile land - did you catch that? They went to their Gentile land. They were visiting a little Jewish boy, and they were Gentiles. My goodness, maybe that's one of the first times in recorded history that the walls of racism, the walls of being in different cultures and different belief systems, maybe the wall started to crumble just a little bit. And to think that they didn't go by way of a person who was going to come by to the party, and destroy a little boy. So when they went by their own way to the Gentile land, they saved that little boy, who maybe in turn saved us. "Aha." I don't have to have it all figured out.

You know, I've been doing counseling for a number of years, like 37 or 8, or 9, I don't know what it's been, and haven't done as much the last two years, but up to that point, I thought I had this counseling business all figured out down to the minute. I knew exactly how to respond to people. Until a woman said to me one day, "Do you know why I like to come here?" And I said to myself, "Sure, because I remember, when she came in a few months ago, she was just distraught. She just didn't know how to face the world, she had low self-esteem, and now she's ready to tackle things. She's had a love affair with herself. She hugs herself, she's ready to go out into society. That's why...." And I was wrong. I was dead wrong. Because she said, "The reason I like to come here is because there's nowhere else I go for one hour during the week, there's nobody that I spend time with, who looks at me, really looks at me, who listens to me, really listens to me, and gives me feedback without being critical, who affirms who I am in my struggles." She said, "There's nowhere else I go. I don't know where else to go."

That was an "Aha" for me. The "Aha" was that we don't sit together enough, and listen to one another, and look at each other, and really look at each other. We don't do that with

people in a way that's accepting and loving. Bob Newhart was a counselor. Remember his show, the Bob Newhart show? He was a counselor, a therapist, and a woman came in one day and sat down. He looked at her and he said, "So, why are you here?" She said, "Well, I have a fear that I'll be buried alive in a box." He went, "Wow, be buried alive in a box?" She said, "I don't like anything that's boxy. I don't like elevators, and I don't like my house. It feels like a box." He listened, and listened to her, and she talked, and he listened, and finally he said, "You know, I'm going to help you. I'm going to give you two words. You may remember this. I'm going to give you two words that will really help you. Now you have to listen carefully to me, because here they are." And he looked at her, and she said, "Stop it. Stop it." And she said, "Stop it?" And he said, "Stop it." She said, "But I have felt this way since I was a child." "We don't go there. We don't go there. Stop it!" And she went right on talking about all her other phobias that she had. She said, "You know, I'm also bulimic." "Well, stop it." "My mother told me when I was little that I was going to be fat." "Stop it! We don't go there. We don't go there." "And I'm also into self-destructive behavior." "Stop it!" "But I hate to drive." "Stop it."

Well, that was sort of an insight for me. Because Mary came in. Mary was an active alcoholic, and we talked for two months, and I didn't think we were really getting anywhere, and she said to me one day, "Now, David, I want you to know that I refuse to go to AA. I also want you to know that I will not go to a treatment center for 26 days. The only thing I'm willing to do is come here, and try to figure out why I can't quit my drinking." And I looked at her and I said, "Now, Mary, are you saying you will not go to AA?" "That's right." "You're saying you will not go to a treatment center for help." "That's correct." "And the only thing you want to do is come here." "That's right," she said. And I said, "Well, Mary, if that's the way it's going to work, then I've got two words for you. And let's all say them together. Stop it!" That's right, I looked at her and I said, "Stop it." It's kind of interesting. I told her, "If you don't, I'm going to walk with you to the next AA meeting." I don't know that I could have done that. I'm not sure I would have. But I wanted her to know how important it was for her to treat herself, her emotions and her body and her spiritual side with reverence, and I wanted her to know that.

Well, that was kind of an "Aha" for me, and the "Aha" was that I don't think we have to have everything about life all figured out before we can make changes. Before we can change our behavior, we don't have to have everything figured out. In fact, regardless of what your past has been, you are still responsible for what you're going to become. Let me say it again. Regardless of what your past has been, we are all still responsible for what we're going to become. I do not think Jesus wanted us to sit around and dwell on our past all the time. I think he spoke more about the present moment and more about what our future could be in relationship to one another. Well, that's an "Aha" for me. We don't have to have it all figured out.

The second "Aha" is that blessings come to us when we least expect them. When we least expect them, we have blessings in our lives. It was 3:30 in the morning, a.m., and I was restless, and I by my restlessness awoke Cheryl, who looked over at me, and she said, "Well, where shall we go?" And I thought she was hallucinating from lack of rest, and I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "Where shall we go?" I said, "Well, how about back

to sleep?" She said, "No no no, let's go see what's open." I said, "Do you mean, get up? Dress? Get in the car? And go see what's open?" She said, "Yes! Let's go."

Well now, my first impulse was to say, "I'm not going to do that." My second impulse was, "Well, why not? My goodness, we've never done that. Why not?" So we got up and we got in our car, and now it's 4am and we're moving south on College Avenue, looking for something that's open. And you know what? We found Walmart. You know the one, the new one. You know they're looking for business. They're open. And we pulled in to the parking lot. Needless to say, we had no problem parking. We were the only car there. The only car in the parking lot, and we approached the doors, and the strangest thing happened to us. The doors flew open, and a woman greeted us and said, "Welcome to Walmart. Here's your basket." She said, "Take two, because there's nobody in here, and you can race around and have a good time." And we did. I got permission to tell that. Well, we finished at 5:00 and we walked out of there, and she said, "Let's go see what else is open." We found a little place to eat, and we went home. And I thought, "That was kind of a blessing in disguise." I would never have guessed that. It was an "Aha" for me, it was an epiphany. When we least expect it, those things happen to us. It's kind of like what the parables were all about, and are all about. Jesus presented those parables, and he said there are some people who are going to get them, and some are not going to get them, and you've got to be open. Those who have ears to hear, they're going to get them. Those who have eyes to see, they're going to understand them. And he said, there will be some that won't. Some will be like the Pharisees, and the chief priests, who said, "I think he's talking about somebody else," until one day they'll have an "Aha," and they'll realize those parables were for them as well.

I experienced a parable not long ago, it was like an "Aha." That parable started to unfold as I sat with a group of eight people. They were all plumbers. One was a woman. She'd been in this company for four months, and the other seven were men, and they had been there forever. But they weren't getting along very well, and they had to work together. So we were trying to figure it out, what's the dynamic here, what's going on interpersonally. You're doing good at your tasks, but why aren't these relationships working? What do we need to do? We had a couple sessions together, and it seemed to me like it was still kind of floating up here somewhere, so the third one, I just got a flip chart out and I wrote the words up here that said "I wonder....." I thought, maybe they could wonder around a little bit, and something will come out and then we'll see how they are with each other. Pretty soon one of the said, "I wonder how long we're going to be employed here." Someone else said "I wonder about the economy." Someone said, "I wonder who the next person will be running this company," and finally one man who missed the silence looked over at the woman. He said, "I wonder why you go home at 3:00 every day and we work till 4." And she said, "I don't want to talk about it." He said, "I know, but you know, when we all go out, we have to come in and we come in early so you can leave. You leave at 3 but we work till 4, and you've never told us." She said, "I know, and I've asked my supervisor not to say anything because it's pretty temporary, but I just don't want to talk about it." And he said, "Why won't you talk about it? I just wonder about that, why don't you want to talk about it?" and she said, "Because I'm embarrassed." And he said, "Why would you be embarrassed? I don't know what it is, but I can't think of anything that

would be embarrassing around us. I don't think you could say anything or do anything that would be embarrassing around us." She said, "I just don't want to talk about it." "But we want to know, this doesn't feel right." She said "I'm just too embarrassed to tell you because I go to school. I go to school." She put her head down and he said, "Why would you be too embarrassed to tell us you go to school? We all go to school. Look at these patches on our arms - Master Plumber. We've all been to school. Why would you be so embarrassed to tell us that?" She said, "Because I take reading. Do you know," she said, "how difficult it is to be the only woman in this group of you guys, and also not be able to read? Don't you notice when we go out on our jobs, you read the instructions but I help do the work?" They said, "That's right." She said, "And I come in at 3:00 because I clean up in the truck on the way over to Front Range Community College so I can be there by 3:30 in the afternoon to take my 3-hour reading class, and I'll do it for four more months, and I hope I'll be better then, and that's when I wanted to tell you that I could read."

It was an "Aha." It was an "Aha" for those plumbers as they sat there and surrounded one another and talked to each other about honesty and openness and how we judge people, and talked about how the things that we don't say will create as many issues for us as what we say. That what we don't talk about can create as many issues as what we say. It was an "Aha" for everybody, as they put their arms around each other, literally, and said "We're sorry. We're going to be here for each other." It was a parable, and I call it the Parable of the Wondering Plumbers.

Well, you know, those are a couple of "Ahas" for me. I just don't have to have everything all figured out. And blessings can happen to us when we least expect them. I guess Robert Frost was right. "Life goes on," he said. "It just goes on." And while it does that, all of us are going to have some more experiences. We're going to have some more epiphanies, and we're going to have some "Ahas", and I guess the thing that we have to do is just soak them in, just take them in here, and then bow our heads and say "Thank you, God. Thank you, God. Amen."