

0Loving Our Neighbor

Scripture: Leviticus 19:15 – 18

Matthew 5:3 - 12

Lent #4 – 3/19/23

Martin Luther King Jr. said these words from a jail in Birmingham, Alabama – ‘I cannot stand by and sit idly still in one city and not be concerned about what is happening in another city. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality which is tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects us all indirectly!’

Martin Luther King Jr. spoke a lot about justice and non violence protest. Let us look back on our pandemic – Covid 19.

The Covid 19 pandemic highlighted our connectedness as around the world cities and countries closed to stop the spread of the virus. What affected one city could soon affect another. What affected one country would soon affect another country.

In our scripture reading from the book of Leviticus it says that many centuries ago, God instructed his people how to show concern for others. Through Moses, God gave the Israelites the law to guide them and help them live together. God told his people through Moses to not do anything that endangered your neighbor’s life. And God said to not seek revenge or bear a grudge against others. God told them to love your neighbor as yourself.

How are we doing with these instructions? How are we doing with this direction from God?

God instructs us how to show concern for others. Our instructions mainly come from Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, God gives us the law to guide us and help us live together. But Christ restated these laws on the Sermon on the Mount when he share the new laws.

God told his people through Moses to not do anything that endangered your neighbor's life. And God said to not seek revenge or bear a grudge against others. God told them to love your neighbor as yourself.

God knew that their community would unravel if the people did not look out for others. The community would unravel if they did not value each other as they valued their own lives.

We too can embrace the wisdom of God's instructions. As we go about our daily activities, we can remember how interconnected we are with others as we asked God how to love and serve others well.

Jesus gives a very bold and profound message on the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus presents the foundational ideas that describe life in his kingdom. Because these landmark ideas are so counter-cultural to the way life is pursued in this world, scholars have referred to Jesus teaching as the presentation of an upside down King for an upside down kingdom!

However, it is our world that is upside down! It is our value system and mindset of the surrounding culture that has turned the world thinking on its head!

Jesus gives us the 'Beatitudes'. It was a profound message in his day and it still is a profound message today. Let us look at Matthew 5:3 – 12. A copy of this passage of scripture is in your bulletin. Let us read it together –

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed be those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'

In these nine things, Jesus has rewritten the Ten Commandments. He has given us a new calling to follow these Beatitudes. It will not be easy but it will be very rewarding. It will be eternal life!

These statements of blessings do not constitute a path into relationship with the King or citizen in the kingdom. They describe the person who is already living under the influence of the one true King!

We need to take the 'Beatitudes' seriously. They will challenge our thinking and values. What Jesus calls blessed, the world calls foolish. How can we describe the poor, the grieving, and the persecuted blessed? Well, Jesus did and let us do also!

A personal story – many years ago in Williamsport Pa at First Church of Christ Disciples we had a LOGO program and one week our Pastor had invited two teenagers to join our group. I taught the high school group Bible, so during our Bible time I ask one of the new teenagers to reading the passage from Matthew’s Gospel 5:3 – 12. He started out be saying – ‘I will be sharing the Beauti-attudes’. Some of the other youth in the class snickered a little. He ask – ‘Why are they laughing?’ I told him that this reading is called the Beatitudes! But the more I thought about this passage, I wonder if we could call them the ‘Beauti-attudes’?

In the right side up kingdom of Jesus, Jesus assures us that his response to whatever we encounter will always be more than carry us through. When we see that our state of blessedness comes not from life’s circumstances but rather by the faithfulness of the King who cares for his people, we can begin to live life right side up!

Your fourth challenge for Lent is to seek out a neighbor and invite them to come to church during Lent. Yes, you heard me, invite a neighbor to come to church during Lent.

Maybe you could take the copy of the Beatitudes that is your bulletin and give it to a neighbor with a note on the back telling them about our church and our time of worship or you could encourage them to watch us on YouTube.

I hope you accept this challenge!

Let us pray:

O Jesus, let us echo God's law when he told us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Let us put your instructions into action today. Let your new law – The Beatitudes – be our guide in this world.

O Loving Creator, help us to share your love and grace today.
AMEN.