

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners as we begin our journey with Jesus, God with us.

Two weeks ago, I mentioned that Bible scholars identify five discourses by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. My context then was that Jesus mentions the Kingdom of the Heavens in all five of those discourses. My context today is to remind you that the first discourse is called the Sermon on the Mount not to be confused with the Sermon on the Plain from the Gospel of Luke. Last week, Pastor Lesley began our two short weeks of looking at the three chapters in Matthew; 5, 6, and 7; that comprise the Sermon on the Mount. The discourse begins with Jesus talking about the Beatitudes, Salt and Light, Light of the World, Lamp under a bushel, The Mote and the Beam, Wise and Foolish Builders, and the Lord's Prayer. If you are at all remotely familiar with these discussions by Jesus, you might agree with me that they are about relationships, internally or externally.

For instance, The Beatitudes describe the character of the people of the Kingdom of Heaven, expressed as "blessings" or "happiness." The phrases used in the Beatitudes are also familiar from an Old Testament context, but in this discourse Jesus gives them new meaning. In this vein, I am reminded about learning that one of the best things to do for those struggling in our society is to name, see, and recognize them. I am sure many of us struggle with these actions, I know I do. In fact recently, our friends visiting from Alaska knew the name of and talked to a homeless man who often sleeps on the sidewalk near the Maui Coast. I have never talked with him. Now I could offer a defense around the fact that he is always still sleeping when I walk by him on my morning walks, but I still do not take time to know when he wakes and moves on and to where. I think one of the most important things from Pastor Lesley on the Beatitudes last week is that Jesus names, recognizes, and sees people. My friends, we should be doing that too.

Our gospel reading today moves us from the character of the Kingdom of the Heavens to the character of disciples. The two descriptions here, salt and light, do require **application**. Salt in a saltshaker does not season anything just like hidden light illumines nothing either. Jesus said we are salt and we are light which says to me that Jesus expects us to be active, to take **risks** on behalf of others. You know the phrase from Jesus that begins "No greater love." Well friends, that is what Jesus did and that is what Jesus expects us to do as well. Timidity and boldness are opposites. Light and salt when used are bold. Jesus expects us to be bold in speaking out against injustice. It is often not easy to be bold and the fact that Jesus expects us to be bold does not make it any easier either. Maybe that is why Jesus describes this phenomenon as taking up our cross?

You have heard our first reading twice already, and you are about to hear it again. It is important to me that you hear and understand that this is the relational theology I talk about all the time **right** in the **middle** of an Old Testament prophet's words. So hear again the words of Isaiah from chapter 58, verses 6 through 12: **"Is not this the fast that I, God, choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them and not to hide yourself from your own kin? When you do these things your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and God will say, "Here I am." If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your needs in parched places and make your bones strong, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in."**

The lectionary for today actually calls for reading the five verses at the start of this chapter as well. I did not think we really need to hear those words but I will share with you the words from Sundays and Seasons that summarize those first five verses which are, *“God reminds the Israelites that **outward** observance is no substitute for **genuine** fasting that results in **acts of justice, such as feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and clothing the naked.**”* Do you remember Jesus in Luke 18 talking about the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the Temple? The opening line reads, *“**To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable.**”* Friends, the basic meaning in both the Old Testament and the New Testament are the same – **show and tell** – do not get the job done. God and Jesus are only interested in what we actually do, **how** we treat others, **how** we relate to God and others, **how** we love others as we love ourselves or even maybe more so.

When preaching once on the Sermon on the Mount, Martin Luther said it this way, *“If our neighbor is hungry and we do not feed him when it is in our power to do so, we practically permit him to die of hunger. We should take this view concerning any perilous condition, any adverse circumstance, with our neighbors. How love is the fulfillment of the Law, we have now heard.”* The last sentence in this quote is a nearly identical expression of Jesus’ saying in verse 17 of our gospel reading today. A more modern cliché saying the same thing is, *“Actions speak louder than words.”* Again, Jesus expects us to be the light and salt of the world. We are to act and live in ways that make changes for the better for all.

Martin Luther expresses this idea of what is fulfillment of the law in his words in the small and large catechisms on the Ten Commandments. Martin Luther says that the laws not only mean we should not do something, for instance commit murder, but that we should also do all that we can to prevent anyone or anything else from killing our neighbor, in fact, our task is to make our neighbors life as good or better than our own.

Hebrew scholar Dr. Rolf Jacobson reminds us, that fulfilling the “law”, particularly the Ten Commandments, means effecting “your neighbor’s best life.”

And Pastor Brandon says it this way: *“Christianity is about helping others and controlling ourselves. When it becomes about controlling others and helping ourselves, it is no longer Christianity.”*

Hear then the good news:

God loves you.

God loves all of creation.

John 3:16 and 17 say it this way in a slightly modified Modern English version: **“For God so loved the world that God sent Jesus, that whoever believes in Jesus should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Jesus might be saved.”**

God has a lot of love in spite of our sin.

God wants us to **also** have a lot love for others in spite of their sin.

Grace and peace to you my friends, this week – have a whole lot of love, not just in words, but in **deeds** also.

Amen