

Marks of Discipleship

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading
Giving Time, Talents & Resources ■ Spiritual
Friendships ■ Service In & Beyond the Church

February 2, 2020

Day 1: Matthew 5:1-3

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

In Matthew, Jesus is most often presented as the Teacher. The Beatitudes (and the Sermon on the Mount) are the longest section of teaching in Matthew. Poor does refer to literal poverty and the sense of one's own need. "Poor in spirit" is a characterization of the true people of God. The true people of God know that they do not control their own lives but are dependent upon God. Though poverty is not ignored by Matthew, the emphasis is not economics or spirituality, but the identity of the people of God. The phrase is descriptive. It describes the people of God and where they will end up - the Kingdom of Heaven.

Question: What reason can you think of for Jesus to go up to a hill to give His talk?

Challenge: Create a "Depend On" chart. This can be a chart that grows. List the things you need in life and put down if you get these needs for self, others or God.

Scripture: Isaiah 30:18-26, 32:16-20

Day 2: Matthew 5:4

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

They that mourn are the true people of God who lament the present condition of God's people. They lament that God's Kingdom is not fully experienced by all the people. It is not mourning for a death of someone or something. The sense of the verse is that those who mourn (truly feel bad that God is not experienced by all) will find their yearning satisfied. The satisfaction will come (the comfort) because God will allow them to participate in the Kingdom now even if it is just partial.

Question: How does one become a 'true person of God'?

Challenge: Think of someone this week that is having trouble hoping in general. Try to help them experience the hope you have.

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-11

Day 3: Matthew 5:5

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

This saying of Jesus is not a formula for success or reward. Meekness or gentleness is the reverse upon which the kingdom of the world is built. Power and pride are not the foundations upon which God's Kingdom is built, but rather love and humility. The inheritance of the earth refers to the giving of the land to the children of Israel. The land was the means by which they would find life. In this context inheritance means that they will have a key place in God's Kingdom.

Question: What is your impression of the term "meek" used in this verse?

Challenge: Think of another word for "meek" in this verse and still keep the meaning of the scripture.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 25:15-26:6

Day 4: Matthew 5:6-7

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.'

Righteousness is a state that a person finds themselves in when the judge has declared them innocent. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are longing for the coming of the Kingdom. They hunger and thirst because they have tasted of God's love and want more, not just for themselves, but for all people. Mercy is a sign that God is present. We all want to be treated mercifully because we know that if we received justice we would not be very happy.

Question: Are they "blessed" because they are filled or because they hunger and thirst?

Challenge: If one aspect of mercy is forgiving someone when they are guilty, have you ever shown mercy?

Scripture: Hosea 6:1-6, Matthew 18:23-33

Day 5: Matthew 5:8-9

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.'

Purity of heart is not avoiding impure thoughts but refers to a single-minded devotion to God. It is devotion that is undivided and moving in tune with the plan God has for the redemption of the world. Augustus' rule was sometimes called the Pax Romani or the peace of Rome. There was peace in the region but it came as a result of conquest and fear. Augustus was also called the "son of god." Jesus is purposing that "peacemakers" bring about peace by reconciliation. First reconciling us to God, then out of that reconciliation, us to each other.

Question: When you first read "pure in heart" what did you think it meant?

Challenge: What is the relationship between reconciliation and forgiveness?

Scripture: Psalm 86:11, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Psalm 138:1-6

Day 6: Matthew 5:10-12

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

Blessed is a declaration that certain people are in a privileged, fortunate circumstance. The people of God are in fortunate circumstances because they will be vindicated in the Kingdom of God. In Jesus' resurrection He showed the future of all believers. They would receive a new body and live with God and all God's children in eternity. They are fortunate even in the face of persecutions. This is not a martyr complex but a simple statement of the joy that comes from knowing, by experience, the love of God. If those in the community are persecuted it is a badge of belonging and shows the values of this present age, while the persecuted ones show the values of the age to come.

Question: Can you identify any of the prophets Jesus is talking about?

Challenge: Where are Christians persecuted for Jesus' sake?

Scripture: Romans 4:23-5:8

of Discipleship

February 9, 2020

Day 1: Matthew 5:13

'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.'

In the Bible salt had different meaning and functions. It connoted loyalty and covenant; it was seasoning, used for purification and sign of relationship. Salt loses its saltiness not by some chemical miracle but by becoming impure. If it becomes mixed with other elements it loses its function and usefulness. The disciples (and all who call themselves Christian) are warned that they too will become useless if they deny their mission. God's will, will be done, and if the ones God has first chosen do not act as God wants, then others will be found to serve God.

Question: Matthew uses the term "earth" instead of world. Do you think he means to say something different by using earth instead of world?

Challenge: Look up the Bible references below and write down what salt was used for and what it meant.

Scripture: Leviticus 2:12-13, Ezekiel 43:24, Ezra 4:14, Numbers 19:19, II Kings 2:19-22, Job 6:6 and Colossians 4:5

Day 2: Matthew 5:14

'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.'

The function of light is not to be seen but to allow other things to be seen clearly. We are not the ones to be seen but the ones to illuminate things around us so that what is real can be seen. Something made by people in the midst of a natural setting stands out from the surrounding area. An act of love can be seen and stands out in the midst of an environment of hate and death.

Question: Who is the 'you' Jesus is addressing?

Challenge: If you are in a community that has mostly man-made things notice the natural things around you. If you are surrounded by natural things notice the man-made things around you.

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-10

Day 3: Matthew 5:15-16

No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.'

Jesus, by using the images of salt, light and city has made it clear that God is not the private possession of a few. God's Kingdom is open to all people and that message cannot be proclaimed if we hide our religion. The churches (and individual Christians) are not a secret societies hiding our beliefs and shielding ourselves from the world, but a city set on a hill. Our life of faith is not hidden but open for all to see.

Question: Why would people who see our good works give glory to God?

Challenge: How would people know that you are a Christian? That you are a member of First Methodist?

Scripture: Romans 4:15-25

Day 4: Matthew 5:17

'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.'

The purpose of the Law was to invoke faith, not replace it. The Law was not a charter of national privilege but a means but which the people of Israel could be the light to the gentiles and bring them to God. Jesus fulfilled the Law's purpose by being obedient. By Jesus' baptism, temptation, miracles, preaching and teaching, He took upon Himself Israel's destiny and mission. In Jesus the new covenant was revealed and fulfilled.

Question: What is the purpose of our laws today?

Challenge: As you know them, to what degree do our church rules invoke faith?

Scripture: Genesis 26:1-5, Galatians 3:1-11

Day 5: Matthew 5:18

For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.'

Jesus became the light to the nations, the glory of Israel by dying for the sin of the world and rising again. Jesus demonstrated that sin had been dealt with on the cross. Jesus is the New Covenant, yet the New Covenant came from the same God who created life and who set in motion the plan of redemption. God had in mind a way to deal with sin - to eliminate it - by offering Himself. The same God who could not allow sin to go unpunished was the only one who could punish it. Just as Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden because of sin, so sin, by the obedience of Christ, is cast out from creation.

Question: Is it all accomplished?

Challenge: What are a few things that you believe God wants us to do until the kingdom comes completely?

Scripture: Acts 1:1-11

Day 6: Matthew 5:19-20

Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'

Jesus does not insist that the Law be done away with but that its place in the Christian faith be the proper place. It is still God speaking and so ought not to be ignored. Jesus fulfills the Law so that we don't need to look for some other kind of fulfillment.

Question: What do you think He means by our righteousness exceeding the Pharisees?

Challenge: What do you teach by the way you act in daily life?

Scripture: James 2:22-3:6

of Discipleship

February 16, 2020

Day 1: Matthew 5:21

‘You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder;” and “whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.”

Trusting in God to guide your life can be difficult at times. Jesus is asking us to be in this world but not of the world. Our values and ways of acting, in community, are to come from a different way of thinking than the rest of the world uses. We are to build our relationships on love and humility, not power and pride. Jesus, in this section, is calling us to show mercy instead of punishment, to examine not just our acts but our intent, to make sure we are right with our neighbor before we offer something to God, and to place importance on what is truly important.

Question: Is there a difference between murder and killing?

Challenge: How does this verse connect with the ‘eye for an eye’ concept in the Old Testament?

Scripture: Exodus 20:13, Deuteronomy 5: 17

Day 2: Matthew 5:22

But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool”, you will be liable to the hell of fire.

Anger here is not just an internal feeling but one that causes us to act in a negative way toward our brother or sister. God not only wants us to refrain from killing each other but wants there to be no hostility. It is impossible to completely control our emotions, especially anger. We can though control our response to that anger and not become violent.

Question: Do you think this is the same kind of judgment referred to in the above verse?

Challenge: Can you control your feelings of anger? What do you do to prevent yourself from acting with that anger?

Scripture: Luke 6:17-38

Day 3: Matthew 5:23-24

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

The bold statement that Jesus makes is that being reconciled with our brother and sister is more important than worship. In Jesus’ day when you brought an offering it was not money but an animal. One could not leave the animal and travel back home (many times home might be days away) to make up with your neighbor. Jesus is recalling the words of the prophet (Micah 6:6-8) - that the Lord wants justice, not offerings. David in Psalm 51 also declares that God takes no delight in burnt offerings.

Question: If we think of whom we have to be reconciled with - who would you include in the category of brother and sister?

Challenge: Would you not come to worship if you were angry with someone at church?

Scripture: Psalm 51

Day 4: Matthew 5:25-26

Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

This worldly wisdom has become, in this context, a testimony of urgency for reconciliation before arriving at the end times. Jesus does not threaten people but gives warnings. Jesus urges us to not put off being reconciled. He has given us advice on how to prevent angry demonstrations and violence between people.

Question: Why do you think it is better to reconcile than to go to court on any issue?

Challenge: Think of a time you were really angry at someone and it did not get resolved. How did you feel and how long did it affect you?

Scripture: Galatians 5:15-25

Day 5: Matthew 5:27-28

‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Adultery was (in the Old Testament) an act committed by a married woman by having sexual relations with a man other than her husband. Adultery was a violation of the husband’s right to his wife and the assurance that children born were his own. Both men and women were considered guilty in an adulterous situation. The law prohibition against adultery is one that helps stabilize a community. Jesus is maintaining that a man’s intentional lustful looking at a woman who is someone else’s wife can cause community upheaval similar to having sexual relations.

Question: Do you think adultery is a moral issue or one that destroys a community?

Challenge: What are the reasons for adultery?

Scripture: II Corinthians 12:15-13:4

Day 6: Matthew 5:29-30

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell

In both of these incredible sayings Jesus is telling us that if we cannot control something it is better to do without it. If I cannot control my urge to drink alcohol (and I am an alcoholic) I better not go anywhere where it is served.

Question: Do you think Jesus is serious?

Challenge: Think of this verse not so much in body parts but in attitudes. Do you have to change any of yours?

Scripture: Ephesians 4:21-31

Marks

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February 23, 2020

Day 1: II Peter 1:16

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Jonathan Edwards was a well-known preacher in America in the 1700's. To read some of his sermons would cause us to be afraid to actually hear them, because they spoke so powerfully of God's judgment. So that his congregation would not be moved by the power of his voice he delivered his sermons in a monotone, not looking at people. He knew that the power of the Gospel to change people came from the proclamation of the message, not from the craft of the speaker. Those who have experienced the Love of God can proclaim how they felt and what change happened to them in a simple fashion. It is God who does the work (through the Holy Spirit) to convince someone that Christ is Lord and God.

Question: What do you think is meant by "myth"?

Challenge: Look up Edwards' sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

Scripture: Matthew 24:1-31

Day 2: II Peter 1:17

For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

There are two times in the Gospels that this saying, "my Son in whom I am well pleased" is used. One is at Jesus' baptism and the other was at the Transfiguration. The first was to announce to the world who Jesus was and the second was to assure the Disciples that He would return. Just as Jesus was born in God's time so too will the establishment of the kingdom, in its fullness, come in God's time. The Transfiguration gave the three disciples (Peter, James and John) a glimpse of what Jesus looks like in glory. The designation - Son - revealed that Jesus had all the power of God to give life, to heal, and to forgive. The Disciples saw in a sense the real Jesus - the Christ - the Son of the living God.

Question: At the Transfiguration both Moses and Elijah appeared. What did their appearance mean?

Challenge: Think about why Jesus chose just Peter, James and John.

Scripture: Psalm 2, Matthew 3:13-17, Matthew 17:1-9

Day 3: II Peter 1:18

We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

It was Peter, James and John who were with Jesus when he was "metamorphosed" before them. He was changed by God and allowed to be seen in that fashion, by God, to the Disciples at the scene. In that change the Disciples were given a glimpse of the power and brilliance that Jesus possessed. It hurt their eyes just as Moses seeing a bit of God's glory on Mt. Sinai hurt his eyes. It was more than a bright light. It was a seeing of the reality of God's power and might. The sight was so convincing that it changed Peter, John and James. What they saw was the Resurrected body that Jesus was to gain after his death.

Question: Why do you think they went to a mountain and not to just anywhere?

Challenge: Think back to a time when you felt the presence of God. Where were you?

Scripture: I Corinthians 15:1-11

Day 4: II Peter 1:19

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

This vision of a transformed Jesus was given to the Disciples just after Jesus told them he would suffer and die in Jerusalem. They needed something to give them hope that God was in charge of all that was happening and God would be with them when Jesus was gone. Jesus' death did not mean an end to the movement. His death was the signal of the new age beginning. For all those in Christ, death is not the end but the beginning of new life.

Question: What do you think the term "morning star" refers to? Does the image help you?

Challenge: If someone you cared about told you they were going to die soon, what would give you some hope?

Scripture: John 14:1-6

Day 5: II Peter 1:20

First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,

A prophet in the Old Testament was one that spoke the "Word of God." It was not a teller of the future. The prophets' words were often warning about what would happen but they were not telling the future. In the New Testament church a prophet was still a spokesperson for God but the message was coming from Jesus via the first Disciples. There seems to be a conflict in the community that Peter was writing to about the second coming of Christ. The writer is reminding the congregation that they saw and heard Jesus themselves and their reports do not come second hand. In short, they were not making it up.

Question: Why do you think the word "prophecy" has come to mean a teller of the future?

Challenge: Look up the term Parousia and see what it means.

Scripture: Matthew 24:1-31

Day 6: II Peter 1:21

"because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

It is true that now, as in the first century, it is hard to tell when someone is speaking God's Word or just making it up as they see fit. Preaching comes from the Holy Spirit, when in humility and love Jesus is proclaimed as both Lord and God. Preaching is real when we act toward each other with the same example of Jesus' self-sacrificial love that He showed by going to the cross.

Question: Does one have to be in a different state of mind to "speak from God"?

Challenge: Think back over your life and see when you believed you "spoke from God."

Scripture: John 14:25-31