

The Weekly Word
Dec 10-16, 2018

The year is drawing to a close and Matthew's Gospel is nearing its amazing conclusion.
Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, December 10: Matthew 12- Rules v. compassion; no easy choice...

Immigration has been in the news lately. I am torn by all the rhetoric. My heart breaks for people seeking safety and hope, people who would travel with only the clothes on their back in hope of getting a chance at a safe life in another country. Then another part of me says we have laws, illegal entry is against the law. Compassion verses rules, I am torn.

With these thoughts floating in my mind I read this Jesus moment. It didn't give me a clear answer but it is making me think...

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (1-8).

Jesus and His disciples were in their predicament because they were essentially homeless. Gleaning from fields was not wrong. Jewish law allowed travelers and the poor to glean what they needed for food. The issue was the Sabbath. If they had a home and could have prepared the food the day before they wouldn't need to glean on the Sabbath. But they don't have a place to stay.

The Pharisees held a strict interpretation of the law. Jesus took a compassionate tact... saying the disciples were innocent because there was a greater law at work.

Were Sabbath laws to be disregarded? NO. But there are times when another law, probably best summed up in the law of love, supersedes some Sabbath laws.

I am wondering if the law of love supersedes some immigration laws as well. No easy answers, no simple solutions, just wondering what Jesus would have ME do.

Lord, I am far from borders so immigration issues are somewhat remote to me but living Jesus' law of love... desiring and acting for mercy, not sacrifice, is all around me. I am not exempt from the higher law of love because of where I live. Help me to see where I need to be applying it. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, December 11: Matthew 13- The kingdom of God...

One of the important themes of the Gospels is the kingdom of God... God's rule and reign on earth. The kingdom of God is all the territory God has claimed back from the enemy. The

kingdom of God is the church and much, much, more. The kingdom of God is all God's activity happening in the world today.

And the kingdom of God started small... with Jesus, then the disciples and now all believers and everything they are doing to advance God's agenda. Like a tiny seed it will grow into a large bush; like yeast a little affects the entire batch of dough.

[Jesus] told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches." He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough" (31-33).

I am not the kingdom of God but I am part of it... and I am wondering if I have planted 'kingdom of God' seeds in the world. I am wondering if I am like yeast, where my conversations and my actions have a positive affect leavening the world around me. Am I advancing God's agenda near and far? Am I???

Lord, am I advancing Your agenda? Am I helping Your cause grow? Lord, am I living as You would have me live? Lead me, Lord. Guide me, Lord. Have Your way with me, Lord. I pray in Your name. Amen.

Wednesday, December 12: Matthew 14- Jesus gave and gave, do I?...

The sentence immediately after recounting the beheading of Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, reads like this. *When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns (13).*

So when Jesus heard His cousin was killed *he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.* My personal reaction when I read this was Jesus was going away to be by Himself so He could grieve. My reaction is that He longed for space so He could be alone.

Jesus may be trying to find solitary space but people followed Him and the story of the feeding of the 5000 ensues. Jesus ministers to people even during His time of personal need.

I know Jesus is a giving person, but for some reason this little glimpse into Jesus' life touches and convicts me. Jesus gave and gave. Jesus gave and gave and then gave some more. Jesus gave all of Himself to people then and throughout the ages to people like you and me.

My heart is convicted because I can be so selfish. I have so much to learn from Jesus.

Lord, help me to grow, to be more and more like Jesus. I have such a long way to go in maturing. Help me, Jesus, to be like You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, December 13: Matthew 15- Majoring in the minors...

How often we emphasize the wrong things in life. We spend more and more hours at work but don't take care of those important relationships in our life. We get absorbed in the news, which is always sensationalized, and neglect to remind ourselves that the Lord is in control.

Jesus addressed this issue of majoring in the minors when he explained a parable he had just spoken:

"Listen and understand. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them" (10-11).

The Pharisees were getting all worked up over some food issue and washing of hands with Jesus' disciples. However, they themselves had created a mechanism where they could

“dedicate money to God” so they wouldn’t have to use it to care for their parents. Theirs was intentional deceit using ‘faith’ to disregard God’s direct law.

Majoring in the minors...

Of course one should wash before eating, but to put that on a par with cheating people out of rightful care... they are not even in the same league.

Thinking about Jesus’ words caused me to wonder about my life. Do I major in minors? Do I emphasize rules and regulations above how I treat people?

I desire mercy not sacrifice... God has said in a number of places.

Major in the important things...

Mercy, compassion, caring for others.

Love God and love neighbor...

Lord, show me the important things on which to focus my attention. Show me what truly matters for me to be faithful to You. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Friday, December 14: Matthew 16- Deny myself living?!...

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (24).

I find myself staring at this verse, wondering and wrestling with what Jesus expects as He speaks the words *deny themselves*. What does that mean for me, a person living in 2018, living in the USA, on the east coast in Greenwich, CT?

The thoughts I am wrestling with are... How far does Jesus want me to go? Should I, like Francis, sell everything, give the money away and join an order of some kind???

Assuming that is not Jesus’ life expectation for me, how do I relate to my family with a ‘deny myself’ attitude? How do I relate to commercialized Christmas and possessions in general in a ‘deny myself’ way?

These are not easy to answer questions, but I cannot simply dismiss them either. Jesus did say, *Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*. And I want to be His disciple, so as uncomfortable as these questions may be, I have to keep asking and answering them if I am going to be a true disciple.

I don’t have any good answers today, but I must keep wrestling...

Lord, lead me... lead me to faithful following of You. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Saturday, December 15: Matthew 17- Listen to him!...

Reading the account of the transfiguration I noted what the Father said to Jesus for all to hear. *While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (5).*

As I read this, I said to myself, I have heard that spoken to Jesus before. So I looked it up and sure enough God spoke the same words to Jesus at His baptism. *And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17)*

The words are the same, except on the Mt of Transfiguration, God spoke to the disciples so God added an additional directive to the disciples ... *Listen to him!*

I sat with this Word from the Lord...

“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

First the Father affirmed His relationship with Jesus, identifying Him as ‘my Son,’ ‘my beloved Son’. God then added, to this statement of Jesus’ identity, a statement of pleasure in Jesus, *with him I am well pleased*.

Here comes the addition. *Listen to him!*

I tried to picture the scene in my mine’s eye. The disciples must have already been awed by the transfiguration of Jesus. Then to hear a word spoken to them from the heavens was like the topping on the cake. There is nothing ordinary about Jesus. And He is so much more than a rabbi/teacher/miracle worker. He is God’s Son! Finally God gives a simple 3-word directive. *Listen to him!*

How those words must have hammered in the experience of the day.

Listen to him!

Oh, God—Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit—I pray I do listen to Jesus. I pray I do. Amen.

Sunday, December 16, 2018, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the Living Hope Community Church website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@LivingHopeCT.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.