

Scripture Readings:

1 Corinthians 3 10-11, 16-23

Matthew 5:38-48

Perfection

“Be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect.”

Did I really hear that in this weeks scripture?

I have to admit that that brings up a whole lot of stress for me as a recovering perfectionist. I can accept most of this text. Although it is difficult I accept the request to turn the other cheek, to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Yes it's hard, but I am more than willing to give it a try (most days). But “Be perfect?” If he were here I would ask Jesus “Why do you persist to ask us to do the impossible?”

In my struggles with the texts in the last weeks I have found the commentator David Lose to be very helpful. This week he suggested rather than ignoring the “Be perfect” request we should start there. So I am, because I know I am not the only one in this room that finds it hard to be perfect even though I have tried countless times. Perhaps like me when you hear those words you hear an “injunction to a kind of moral perfectionism. But that's not actually what the original language implies. ✧"Perfect," in this case, stems from ✧ *telos*, the Greek word for ✧"goal," "end," or "purpose." The sense of the word is more about ✧becoming what was intended, accomplishing one's ✧God-given purpose in the same way that God constantly reflects God's own nature and purpose.”¹

To be honest once again I along with several other commentators feel Eugene Peterson's *The Message* gets closer to the mark. Let's read the text again in that translation.

38-42"Here's another old saying that deserves a second look: 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.' Is that going to get us anywhere? Here's what I propose: 'Don't hit back at all.' If someone strikes you, stand there and take it. If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, gift-wrap your best coat and make a present of it. And if someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

43-47"You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.' I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless:

¹ Lose, David workingpreacher.org “Perfect” February 2011

the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that.

48"In a word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you."

Do you recall the scriptures we have heard before this one?

Blessed areyou.

You are the salt of the earth

You are the light of the world

Choose life... live into who God has created you to be.

Live generously and graciously

That doesn't make Jesus' requests simple, but it reminds us that we have it within us.

I had a wonderful opportunity this week to attend the grand opening of the Paradise Valley Health and Wellness Centre and at that event we were blessed by the presence of Dr. Deepak Chopra. As he spoke I was refreshed to hear someone else speak about how we have been created for wholeness. We forget that Jesus came to remind us that God desires for all of the earth to live abundantly. We have been created to live fully.

In his talk Dr. Chopra spoke of the reality that we all have addictions. We all have things that get in the way of us living into our identity. That is a part of life. These may be fears, obsessions, past hurts, or any variety of vices. But we also all have potential if we are willing to align ourselves with The Holy, or goodness, grace and love.

Lose says it this way "We can only do these other things – repaying evil with good, forgiving and praying for those who harm us – to the degree that we can live into our God-given identity as blessed and beloved children. You can't give what you don't have, and so only those who have experienced love can in turn share it with others.

Which is why it matters *who's* saying these things in the first place. It's Jesus – Jesus, the one who not only talked the talk of love but walked the walk."² Jesus lived a life of rejection, and ridicule. He knows that we live in a world that wounds us and yet he invites us to abundance.

Once again Jesus through Matthew is urging us to live into our God-given identity as blessed, beloved children of God, who in knowing and believing we are loved might then be able to live as children of the kingdom.

² IBID

I am not saying it is going to be easy. We have addictions and wounds. Life has not always treated us abundantly and quite frankly it still doesn't much of the time. But we are blessed, loved, chosen, and identified by The most Wholly as light.

If that is true then what is stopping us from living as Kindom subjects? Generous and Gracious to all? What gets in the way of you being the kind of person God has created you to be?

I know I have been pushing you a bit lately but for the most part you have been responding well, so I am going to push you once again.

You are already sitting next to someone new - perhaps you have figured out which part of the scripture spoke to that (if not Peterson said it this way) "If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that...Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you." I am not suggesting you are sitting next to someone who is unlovable or an enemy but I am suggesting that at times we need to stretch ourselves to be a little more welcoming. I know that is easier for some than others but it is how we are called to live.

So let's go back to the question at hand "what is stopping you from living as Kindom subjects? Generous and Gracious to all? What gets in the way of you being the kind of person God has created you to be?" What is holding you back?

You will see in your bulletin you have a page that says ✧"Believing I am God's beloved child, I know that I am called to live abundantly. But I find it hard because..."

I am going to invite you into a time of silence to respond to this. Once you have had that time we are going to sing together Spirit open my heart.

If this question is confusing for you I invite you to write down a ✧ fear, memory, hurt or resentment that keeps you from embracing and becoming the person God wishes you to be.

At offering time I invite you to place these challenges along with your gifts in the offering plate. In a sense we are giving God not only our treasures but some of our struggle or tragedy, trusting that God will receive both willingly transforming not only our strengths but also our struggles into salt and light for all the world. I assure you that I will not read these confessions and I will ask those who collect the offering to have the same respect. These are prayers, confessions or offerings between you and God, not for others to see. I will dispose of them appropriately after the service. I will not see them but God will see them, and you will know them more deeply and perhaps in giving it to God in this way you may feel a little less burdened by the limitations you have placed in the love of God. And perhaps it will also assist to transform us into people who are closer to who we are created to be.

✧Augustine said "Receive who you are. Become what you've received."

May it be so...