

“God Is With You”

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UCC at The Villages, FL
Aug. 19th, 2018
13th Sun./Pentecost

Genesis 37:18-36

Matthew 6:1-34

[Jesus said,]

*But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door
and pray to your [Abba] Father who is in secret;
and your [Abba] Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to listen to those verses of your Word that are familiar to us
and hear them in a new way.

Help us to agree on what the challenges are before us
even when we don't agree about how to solve them.

Help us to be patient with one another's suggestions in the process.

Amen

The Sermon on the Mount is actually a classic '3-point sermon'
that has this basic message:

*You have heard that it was said, 'One Way',
but I say to you, 'God is still speaking';
So, don't pray, donate, serve just for show,
because God is with you wherever you go;
Therefore, do unto others as you would have them do unto you –
or else!*

Today's message includes the Lord's Prayer

and that vision of a 'Kingdom' as an achievable 'beloved community'
we pray for every Sunday when we say:

“Our Father Who art in Heaven; Hallowed be Thy Name;
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven...”

My goal is to equip you with a starting point for talking about
principles that go beyond arguing and a vision for what we hope for.

Another goal is to present this text in a way that is easily understandable –
and allows for discussion, alternatives, and consensus.

I hope to do this by using Biblical storytelling and then asking you to consider:

*What did you hear that was familiar? Was did you hear in a new way?
Do you agree? What do you suggest?*

Willard, p.2

Overall theme –
Our relationship with God

Three sets of three:

Religious expression of spirituality

- Offering
- Prayer
- Fasting (or service)

Personal spirituality

- Heart
- Eyes
- Belly (greed)

Personal concerns

- Life
- Food
- Clothing

Therefore, inferences about God

- Reward in the time to come
- God knows (omniscient)
- God sees (omnipresent)
- God is just
- God is merciful

Amen

*The text from Genesis 37:18-36 describes how Joseph's brothers
planned to act on their jealousy against him, with murder.
Reuben talks the other brothers into sparing Joseph,
but in Reuben's absence, things go from bad to worse
This story of Joseph stands as an example of someone
who does not lose faith despite their outward circumstances...*

- ¹⁸ ... before [Joseph] got there,
they saw him coming and made plans to kill him.
- ¹⁹ They said to one another,
“Look, here comes the hero of those dreams!
- ²⁰ Let's kill him and throw him into a pit
and say that some wild animal ate him.
Then we'll see what happens to those dreams.”
- ²¹ Reuben heard this and tried to protect Joseph from them.
“Let's not kill him,” he said.
- ²² “Don't murder him or even harm him.
Just throw him into a dry well out here in the desert.”
- Reuben planned to rescue Joseph later
and take him back to his father.
- ²³ When Joseph came to his brothers, they pulled off his fancy coat
²⁴ and threw him into a dry well.
- ²⁵ As Joseph's brothers sat down to eat,
they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead.
Their camels were loaded with all kinds of spices that they were taking to Egypt.
- ²⁶ So Judah said,
“What will we gain if we kill our brother and hide his body?
²⁷ Let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not harm him.
After all, he is our brother.”
- And the others agreed.
- ²⁸ When the Midianite merchants came by,
Joseph's brothers took him out of the well, and for twenty pieces of silver
they sold him to the Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt.
- ²⁹ When Reuben returned to the well and did not find Joseph there,
he tore his clothes in sorrow.
- ³⁰ Then he went back to his brothers and said,
“The boy is gone! What am I going to do?”
- ³¹ Joseph's brothers killed a goat and
dipped Joseph's fancy coat in its blood.
- ³² After this, they took the coat to their father and said,
“We found this! Look at it carefully and see if it belongs to your son.”
- ³³ Jacob knew it was Joseph's coat and said,
“It's my son's coat! Joseph has been torn to pieces and eaten by some wild animal.”
- ³⁴ Jacob mourned for Joseph a long time,
and to show his sorrow he tore his clothes and wore sackcloth.
- ³⁵ All of Jacob's children came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted.
“No,” he said, “I will go to my grave, mourning for my son.”
So Jacob kept on grieving.
- ³⁶ Meanwhile, the Midianites had sold Joseph in Egypt
to a man named Potiphar, who was the king's official in charge of the palace guard.

Let us be challenged and guided by these words...

Matthew 6:1-34

[Jesus said,]

¹ “Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

² “Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵ “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁷ “And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ Pray then like this:

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

¹⁰ Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread;

¹² And forgive us our debts, As we also have forgiven our debtors;

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil.

¹⁴ For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you;

¹⁵ but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,

¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal,

²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.

²¹ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light;

²³ but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life?

²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin;

²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?

³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

³² For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day.

Last Sunday, I spoke of a reference to passage in the book,
Jesus Through The Centuries by Jaroslav Pelikan
describing Jesus as “Christ the Liberator”
and that this way of interpreting him was ‘rediscovered’ during the 1800s
in response to Biblical literalism that was used to justify slavery.
This was evident in the writings of Russian author, Leo Tolstoy,
and the words and deeds of Mahatma Gandhi,
and later Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in their respective struggles
for civil rights through nonviolent direct action.
The common thread between them was Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount
and his challenge to ‘resist not evil’ – with violence, that is!

I want to acknowledge the irony of my use of an sed last week
about our ‘response-ability’ to work for social transformation.
I used the example of what a motivational speaker said
about his experience during the Vietnam War.
When his US Army unit trapped between
North Vietnamese troops at the top of a mountain they were attacking –
and an enemy force coming up right behind them
5 soldiers were given the terrible task of remaining behind to slow down
the approaching threat, with the challenge that they had
the responsibility – the “ability to respond”.
I did say that apparently they were successful,
because the person telling the story was one of the 5 –
though I didn’t say how they did it.
It was a combat situation and most likely required the use of deadly force,
so, painting signs as a diversion that said,
‘Hey! The Americans went thataway!’
probably wouldn’t have worked! <wink! wink!>

But the point remains that confrontation does not always have to be violent,
and when it is done in the form of nonviolent, direct action,
it still requires a warrior’s courage –
like the courage of King, Gandhi, and Christ.
So, a confrontation strategy that is clever and even uses humor,
ought to be the first thing we try,
to avoid the arena of violence in the first place.