

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Sermon Reflection Notes

This scripture is a continuation of the Sermon on the Mount which began last week with what is commonly referred to as The Beatitudes. This week, we heard what is often referred to as the 'salt and light' part of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is reminding his audience, which includes all of us, that we must have our hearts right. He also refers to the Law and the Prophets, saying that he has come to fulfill them, but Jesus' focus is not on the 'letter of the law' for the sake of the law itself, but rather to spirit of the law; in other words, when Jesus says things like: "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." (Matthew 5:22) he is not equating insults with murder; however, Pastor Andy pointed out, Jesus was addressing the heart, the place where the seeds of division and anger can be sown.

The world does seem full of division. Study after study shows that fear, distrust, and anger dominate the ways in which we think about others. We believe we are trustworthy and have good intentions; we just don't believe that about 'others.' A Chapman University "Fear Study" finds that we are afraid of more things now than we have ever been, and additionally, we are more afraid of more things. The nation's top fears reflect legitimate concerns, but perception outweighs reality. For example, we fear crime, and yet long-term crime rates are down and continue to fall. We have access to more information than ever before, and yet we are more exposed to commentary and imagery designed to provoke emotions, not facts. And fear, throughout history, has been used to stoke division. We believe politics divides us; we believe that 'other people' don't share our values; we believe we are the ones holding truth and light as the world seems to fall apart. But we are falling for an optical illusion.

Research and data show that in our country the population shares 15 out of 20 'shared hopes and priorities,' things like: individual rights, leadership accountability, a thriving middle-class, and equal opportunity for all. Research has found that 97% of people polled say they want their life's work to be filled with purpose and meaning, rather than just a quest for fame and fortune. And yet, we believe that others don't think like us. Our brains fill in blanks and assume the worst, grip tightly to the fear, re-tell the division stories.

The issue is with our hearts, and Jesus calls us to remember who we are and whose we are. When asked, 93% of people believe that they are trustworthy; trustworthiness is part of our self-image. But we do not extend that image to others. Theologian Jurgen Moltmann said: "According to experience, we are told that the appropriate attitude is not trust, but calculated distrust.... Divine trust has another side too. It is not just human trust in God; it is also God's trust in human beings whom he created in his own image. Trust is always mutual: We trust God because God trusts us. In spite of all disappointments, and human faithlessness, God believes in human beings, hopes for humanity, and waits for them." This foundational covenant of trust allows, even demands, that because God trusts humanity, we must too. Because God trusts not just us, but other people too, we also can place our trust in our neighbors. Trust begets trust.

This Little Light of Mine

We have real problems and we often don't agree. But we also have the example of Jesus, who forgave while on the cross. We are called to love God and love neighbor. That means we are also called to trust God and trust neighbor. We cannot fix the world if our hearts aren't right. We have to remember we are ALL created in the image of God. We have to trust that...and continue to let our lights shine.

Scripture

Matthew 5:13-20

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It's good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴ You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

¹⁷ "Don't even begin to think that I have come to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I haven't come to do away with them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I say to you very seriously that as long as heaven and earth exist, neither the smallest letter nor even the smallest stroke of a pen will be erased from the Law until everything there becomes a reality. ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever ignores one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called the lowest in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps these commands and teaches people to keep them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ I say to you that unless your righteousness is greater than the righteousness of the legal experts and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Discussion Questions

1. Jesus did not ever reject or denigrate the law of God. Rather, he taught that the law is always a 'heart' issue that has to do with loving God and loving neighbor. So, when a neighbor says to us: 'But the Bible says...' followed by a belief that is harmful to others, how do we respond with the heart?
2. Jesus calls his followers to be salt and light. How do those images inform how we love God and love neighbor? What qualities do salt and light have that we can invoke?
3. Pastor Andy talked about a study from Chapman University that found we are afraid of more things now than we have ever been and that we are **more** afraid of more things. What are we fearful of? What are some of the things we might do to address our fear? What are some of the things God does to address our fear?
4. What does it mean to say that "trust is mutual"? How do we express our trust in others?
5. God trusts me. What does that mean?
6. What role does vulnerability play in trust?
7. As we draw ever closer to Lent, we often think about the practice of giving something up for Lent. Frequently, we make it something tangible like chocolate or coffee. There might be more productive options though; what practices/habits/beliefs might we work on giving up for Lent this year?

Closing Prayer

Holy God, you mark us with your water, you give us your name, and you brand us with your vision of how the world is supposed to be. You call us to be salt and light, necessary for the well-being of all your people. You trust us to live up to the call to love you and to love our neighbors. And yet, here we are—downing in the chaos of division and violence, and eager to blame the ‘other.’ Forgive us for a fickleness to our covenant with you. Teach us to let go of our fear. Lead us, once more, to write Jesus’ words on our heart and to follow him in all we do. We pray this in his name. Amen.

“Trust that we are ALL created in the image of God.”