

# Marion weekly update

JUNE 12, 2022

## FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



### SERMON June 12, Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:1-18

Continuing our series on the Sermon on the Mount, we see the pattern we observed in chapter 5 continue. What we noted is that Jesus is often doing double duty as He unpacks the rules of the Law. It's important for us to keep in mind that Jesus illuminating the Law as if the old covenant is in place doesn't go against the push of the gospels towards the covenant of grace. The new covenant arrives as Jesus goes to the cross, is raised, and ascends. This hasn't happened yet. Jesus is an observant Jew teaching other observant Jews here. He is helping them understand the intent of the Law over the letter of it. At the same time He is doing this, He also makes larger points that take "rules" that may not initially seem tied together reflect a bigger, significant point. These verses continue that trend.

Jesus observes three different spiritual disciplines. While we just had a series through Lent on these disciplines, we'll take a moment to briefly note them and perhaps why Jesus dials in on them.

Particularly noteworthy is Jesus' clear sense that they are and will continue to observe these disciplines. He doesn't say "if" they do them. He says "when". "When you do this". The assumption is that as faithful people of course they will prioritize giving to those in need, prayer, and fasting. For this to be the case, it reminds us here and now that spiritual disciplines are important to our faith journey. Clearly Jesus is taking the time to highlight them here.

The first one mentioned is giving to those in need. Jesus goes further with this one later in Matthew's gospel with the famous discussion about the sheep and goats. Works of mercy done to anyone are done to Jesus. Neglect shown to anyone is neglect shown to Jesus. In that particular case Jesus is even harsher. Here He mentions simply reward or not being rewarded. With the sheep and the goats Jesus hangs salvation, entry into eternal condemnation or glory on whether or not we care for those in need.

These deeds are far more than simply how we get into heaven. They are reflective of our heart and whether or not we genuinely believe in Christ and have allowed Him to transform us. How we treat others, especially those in need, is a powerful means of evangelism. It is connecting us to one another and to God. God's love and grace are felt through these relationship and actions. Not only does the other experience God's love in the love we offer, but we too experience God's love as the Spirit warms our heart because we've done what is correct before God.

This discipline is faith in practical action that changes lives and the world. It is essential if we call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ.

The next discipline is prayer. Prayer connects us directly to God. It is simply communicating, which means both talking and listening. In fact, if we're honest prayer is more listening than talking. It raises our awareness of God's movement in our lives and the world around us. As we communicate our needs we become more attentive to them, and hopefully more present and diligent in looking for God's answers. As we uplift others we are more aware of their circumstance and may be more likely to be moved beyond the words of the prayer to acting in a way that is helpful.

The discipline is significant enough that Jesus not only instructs to be direct in our communication, but if anyone is confused gives them a model to go off of. This is the Lord's Prayer. In it He finds cause to double down on a portion of the prayer. Forgiveness is essential. This to the degree that if we are unwilling to do so we shouldn't expect to be forgiven ourselves.

Fasting is the final discipline highlighted. Again, this is another means of connecting to God as we sacrifice something in our lives. As a fast wears on, the temptation may become greater to break that fast before the time has passed. Each temptation reminds us why we've committed to giving up whatever it may be. We replace the time normally spent or resources used on what we've relinquished with something more closely tied to our faith. Perhaps it's study or service. Whatever it may be the practice intends to deepen our relationship with God.

We also do well to remember that fasting on food or drink or anything else means nothing if we aren't engaging in a much more significant fast. Have we fasted on wickedness, callousness, bitterness, anger, abuse, and so on? To observe personal discipline for the purpose of connecting to God but refusing to replace those darker parts of who we are and how we feel with grace, love, and compassion renders those other acts meaningless before God.

In His teaching on these three disciplines, there is something that weaves through all of them even though they each are stand alone ideas.

One that is a bit latent is how service, prayer, and fasting are tied together in the above sense. Prayer and fasting are great, but if they don't result in active, practical love towards one another there's not value to them in God's eyes. They are intertwined. Yes we pray. Yes we fast, on all the stuff. AND yes, that lands into a life that is given over to serving and loving the other, particularly when the other is in need.

Jesus instructs that God's pleasure in these works isn't just the work itself. Our attitude and intention is equally important. Common to all of them is ensuring that our spirit is correct as we give, pray, or fast. What is our purpose? Is the work something motivated by love of God and the other? Or is it more focused on wanting others to view us in a favorable light? Maybe to be perceived as more "good" or "spiritual"?

The issue at hand is whether what we do is about self or the other. If we go into the discipline fully focused primarily on self, we very well may get what we're looking for. We may get the praise, the sense that others look up to us. We may get that euphoria of being uplifted as somehow on a level beyond what other people have achieved. If that's what happened, then we got what we were looking for and that superficial reward is all we get. A reward that lasts for a moment but then fades just as fast. There is no eternal value.

On the other hand right intention puts the focus where it belongs in God's sight. We focus on God, and that relationship. We listen for God. We focus on the other for the sake of the other, not ourselves. This is the spirit that God is trying to cultivate in our hearts. It is so counter to a world that is increasingly all about self. We are asked to be all about the other, to be selfless over selfish.

In other words we are seeking God's way for the sake of seeking God's way because it is correct. We're not looking for the transaction or the treasure on the other side. The result is that in not seeking self, we are rewarded beyond what we could possibly dream. That's right. Not looking for the selfish reward is what brings the grandest reward our selves could ever imagine.

God's economy is always backwards from the world's. The world would say always put self first. That's how you get ahead. God tells us to do put others first, and that's how we find ourselves in paradise.

But it requires patience. So much of our world revolves around instant gratification. If there's a reward we want it NOW. But again, that isn't God's economy. God is a long game, long haul Father. We do over time and are rewarded both in time and after time. We get both the grace, peace, and warmth of the Spirit now, and then we reap the blessing of eternity in the presence of God eternally.

Short term yields only short term reward.

God isn't looking for us to merely look after ourselves. God is desiring us to look out for one another. In so doing we please God and please God in God's fullness and perfection. This is the one we seek to love and satisfy. This is the one whom we love because He first loved us. This is the one that, through us, will change the face of humanity more into the image of love and compassion. This is where we have the hope of both the Kingdom of God waiting for us, and even arriving now here in our hearts and lives.