

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR SUNDAY – OCTOBER 15, 2023 @ CAPC OAKLAND

Matthew 6:1-18

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION UPDATED EDITION

[Jesus continued teaching saying,]

¹ “Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² “So whenever you give *alms*, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell 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, ⁴ so that your *alms* may be done in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵ “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever 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 “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard **BECAUSE OF THEIR MANY WORDS**. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ “Pray, then, in this way:

Our Father in heaven,
may your name be revered as holy.

¹⁰ May your kingdom come.

May your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our *DEBTS*,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Matthew is one of four gospels – telling the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings. Matthew is the only one of the four to include the larger sermon on the mount (Chapters 5 to 7) with which we’re wrestling this fall. The context of the Sermon on the Mount is radically important, without it the teachings can seem like disparate moral teachings, as opposed to a radical reinterpretation and recreation of the world.

Jesus has invited everyone to “repent. Change the Way they live. Because the kingdom of heaven is here.” Those that respond in chapter 4 are fisherman, the sick, the broken, the marginalized - those who are overlooked and unimportant in the Roman Empire and the way of the World – but blessed and included in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus has told people that they are the light of the world and the salt of the earth – demonstrating God’s radical love and breaking-into-the-world-reign through their actions. Here Jesus seems to circle back and talk about the visibility of faith, what we call practice. He talks specifically about alms (giving to the poor), prayer, and fasting. They were likely among the most common spiritual practices of the Judaism of his day and the early church.

reward:: μισθός (misthos) meaning (1) pay, wages, salary, & (2) reward, recompense, punishment. It signified "wages" paid for work; or a reward given for an action. This is hard. Jesus has already clearly articulated that relationship with God isn’t a quid pro quo, with rewards and incentives. (Matt 4:23-5:12) So what is he saying? Could it be that practicing one’s righteousness (which means being like God) is reward in itself? A deeper, better life connected to the unending mercy of God?

alms:: ἐλεημοσύνη (el-eh-ay-mos-oo'-nay) - meaning: mercy, pity, alms, charity, (acts of charity), the word come from ἔλεος (eleos) - mercy, pity, compassion (as exercised towards the poor)- like that of God freely given. To a large extent *alms* is the opposite of *reward*.

your ROOM:: ταμείον or (tameion) it means an inner chamber, closet, granary, pantry, or barn... a place that is purposely not visible and out of the public eye.

¹⁴ “For if you forgive others their TRESPASSES, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

¹⁶ “And whenever you **fast**, do not look somber, like the hypocrites, for they mark their faces to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- Jesus talks of spiritual formation, how we are rooted and grow in our relationship with God. This is an interior work, needed along with the exterior work of doing justice, showing God’s love in the world. Which do you find more challenging in your life of faith? The interior life or the exterior one?
- How do you pray? What do you find challenging about seeking to practice prayer in your daily life? What help might you need to grow your prayer life?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – *or to us, as a church* – to act, speak, be, or change, through this word of scripture?

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

BECAUSE OF THEIR MANY WORDS :: The contrast Jesus is making is between a prayer of the heart, that’s simple bringing a passionate ask for help and deliverance, contrasted with a prayer that seeks to make the one praying look good, or to use flattering language to pressure or manipulate God to do what the one praying wants.

Our father in heaven:: We’re so used to this expression that we don’t see the inherent tension. **Father** is highly intimate, giving the connotation of family bonds, that we are God’s children. **IN HEAVEN** Invokes the God above all things who rules over the universe – distant, all-powerful, seemingly unapproachable. So together Jesus holds this tension of who and how God is.

Your name be holy:: in a sense it’s daring God to show the world who you are.

Your kingdom come:: asking, imploring God to make salvation visible in the world. It anticipates the reign of God when heaven and earth are united in harmony (the day of the Lord).

Your will be done on earth :: recognizes that only God can save the world, making it like heaven (God’s realm). It draws us connection between God’s actions and ours as God’s will and kingdom is to be accomplished on earth – in our world – through us.

The prayer then transitions from the three phrases directed toward aspects of God’s character (*your name...your kingdom... your will*) to three phrases that ask God for help (*give us bread. forgive us...rescue us*).

DEBTS | TRESPASSES :: these are the words used for sins. Jesus makes the point that forgiveness is not a matter of bookkeeping; it is part of a living relationship with God and others. Is Jesus saying that God won’t forgive you if you don’t forgive others? Or is Jesus saying that because you’ve been forgiven, trained in the school of forgiveness and know God’s abundant freely-given mercy through no merit of your own, you are called to be citizens of that kingdom of heaven here on earth, serving and forgiving others.

Fast:: practiced less today than in the past, fasting is a form of not eating in order to have a different focus, with the hope of being able to listen more clearly for God in listening less to our body. Jesus’ saying echoes Isaiah 68:1-9 - “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and break every yoke?” not to impress others, but to live as God calls us to.