

New Testament: Matthew 7:21 - 23

Old Testament: 2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:13

Please join me in prayer. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

It is interesting how we can be so blind to our own hypocrisy. How we can get so caught up with concepts like righteousness or values, that we completely overlook how our pursuit of these concepts run roughshod over actual living, breathing people. Yes, you heard me correctly. Righteousness and values are concepts; ideas that people have argued over for centuries. And harm has been done to billions of people over the centuries in the supposed pursuit of these elusive concepts of righteousness and values. And in that reality, there is hypocrisy that goes totally overlooked by many of us. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

See, when we prioritize concepts, even ostensibly good concepts like righteousness and values, over people it becomes so much easier to overlook or outright ignore how we might be harming people in the process. I think this is what Jesus is alluding to in our reading from Matthew this morning. It is never the will of the Father in heaven that people come to harm; that’s why we are in the Easter season singing about resurrection power and Christ being risen. God the Father does not desire harm to any of God’s good creation. So when Jesus teaches that many will come and say to him, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” and his response is “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness”, I’m wondering if in their enthusiasm for righteousness and values they harmed the actual people they were supposed to be helping. What if we are not supposed to do these ostensibly good things without thinking all the way through the potential ramifications for them? Could there be times when prophesying or casting out demons or doing mighty works or pushing righteousness or pushing values all supposedly in Jesus name create more harm than good?

What is also under consideration in these passages and in thinking through concepts like righteousness and values is our motive in pursuing them. What’s the why behind concepts like righteousness and values? Is it because we are trying to offer some good or care for our fellow human beings? Or is it because something someone else is doing is making us uncomfortable or feel icky? And so in the name of “values” we demand that they stop. It’s a fine line we are trying to walk here and it always starts with self-assessment and self-awareness. Examining our why. Examining our

motivation. In this same Sermon on the Mount Jesus says “why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” Without this kind of self-awareness or self-assessment, that we need not fear because we live in the light of the resurrection, as the analogy that Jesus offers indicates, we have far more potential to cause a lot more harm than good.

This ties into the lesson that David learns from Nathan. David is sitting on this throne and undoubtedly ruminating on a hundred big and little things that kings surely ruminated on, food, war, betrayal, taxes, etc., etc. But he’s likely not ruminating over what has just transpired with Uriah the Hittite and Bathsheba; he does not seem to be overly concerned or stewing in his own guilt and complicity in the matter; the harm that he has caused. After all, as previously mentioned, he’s got other kingly matters to attend to. And so here comes Nathan along, David must have known he was a prophet of God, and so when Nathan tells him he has a story to tell, as a man after God’s own heart, David is immediately on board with storytime; to his credit. Nathan recounts the story and what’s amazing, upon reflection, is that there is no indication that David even gets a whiff that it might be an analogy about his own actions and behaviors. The log is so firmly lodged in his eye, and his indignation so great because of his righteousness or values that he condemns himself to death! He creates his own harm after causing extensive harm to Uriah and Bathsheba. So, Nathan rips that giant log out of David’s eye and leaves no doubt. He recounts everything David has done and leaves nothing done unsaid. David takes a drubbing. Can you imagine how some of our leaders today might respond if they took a drubbing like David took from Nathan? They certainly wouldn’t respond like David did, to his credit, when he simply said, “I have sinned against the LORD”. “The purpose of Nathan’s story, and the purpose of the story God gives us, the Jesus story that we call the gospel, is not to make us better *accusers* of others, but better *assessors* of ourselves.” Self-awareness, self-assessment further equips us for the work of doing the will of our Father who is in heaven. Self-awareness, self-assessment equips us, enables us to fulfill the golden rule: treat others like you would like to be treated. If you don’t want to be harmed; don’t harm others in the name of righteousness or values. If you don’t want to be scared or fearful; don’t cause others to be scared or fearful. And on and on.

Why is there no fear in self-awareness in self-assessment? We must acknowledge the reality that in doing this work we will come across times we have failed; times we have done wrong. But there is no fear in that acknowledgment because we confess with the Apostle Paul that neither height nor depth, nor powers nor principalities, nor

anything else that is in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. He is Risen and that means we need not fear. Amen.