

A couple of weeks ago Nelson and I purchased a Peloton Bike. Now this spin bike is high tech. It has a screen attached to it where you can choose to ride with other teachers and riders live, or you can watch a class that has already been recorded. I have not yet gained the courage to do a live class, but I have done a couple of the recorded classes. What is interesting is that riders from all over the world can be watching the same recording at the same time.

On the right of the screen is a leader board showing who is working the hardest. There is a ranking. I feel like I always start out well, then I keep getting behind the other riders, I cannot keep up with the correct cadence and output, but one thing is for sure. When I am done with my class, I have had a good workout. I am dripping with sweat and I feel like I have accomplished something good, even if I placed last. When I come upstairs after each workout, Nelson looks at me and with a chuckle he says, “So you rode the Peloton again huh?”

As we celebrate Transfiguration Sunday this Sunday, we look to Moses who had a similar experience. Now Moses was not glowing with sweat after a great workout, but each time he went to spend time with God on the mountain, when he came down his face was glowing. This is how it was obvious that he had been in the presence of God.

In our Gospel lesson for today we see that Jesus was transfigured, which means that he was shining bright white as he spent time on the mountain in the presence of God. This was also further affirmation that he was the Son of God, the one chosen by God to continue God’s covenant relationship with God’s people.

Both Moses and Jesus had the experience of glowing from being in the presence of God. This is also the calling that God has placed upon our lives. Although we may not outwardly shine bright white after we spend time with God, we must live such a way that it is undeniable that we spend time in God’s presence.

Today we continue our Sermon Series: “Blessed: The Wisdom of Jesus from the Beatitudes.” The verse we lift today is “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (Matthew 5:6-7). Each week we have talked about the attributes of God that Jesus longs to bestow upon us through our faith in Him. This week we remember we are called to be people who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

In his book “The Workbook on the Beatitudes” Maxie Dunnam shares: “When we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we desire for God’s will to be done in the world, and we place ourselves at God’s disposal in order to make that happen.”ⁱ

Through our Scripture today we see that both Moses and Jesus offered themselves to the will of God.

Moses was a servant of the Lord who pursued righteousness. He was an unlikely candidate because in his past he was a murderer. He saw one of his own people being treated harshly and he rose up and killed an Egyptian. Then he fled to Midian where God met him in a burning bush, and he surrendered his life to God by saying: “Here I am” (Exodus 3:4). God marked this experience as holy by telling Moses that he was standing on holy ground.

I would consider this encounter a glimpse of the kingdom of God. It was the groundwork for God to continue a relationship with God’s people through Moses. I think it is comforting to us that Moses was an imperfect person. When God first called Moses, he was not quite ready to accept this calling that had been placed on his life. He made some excuses like he was not a good speaker (Exodus 4:10). And God replied, well your brother Aaron can help you.

So often we are like Moses. We have been called to be a part of making God’s will on earth be done, and yet we come up with excuses of why we are not ready to help. We say things like Moses like “I’m not ready God. Are you sure you meant me? Are you really sure?”

And yet, God is calling each and every one of us to pursue God’s righteousness in the world. The beautiful thing about the Old Testament is that it is full of examples of the Israelites being told to pursue God’s righteousness. In the Bible this section is entitled “Social Responsibility” (Exodus 22:21-23, 25; Exodus 23:11) and reads:

²¹ “Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt. ²² “Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless... ²⁵ “If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal; charge no interest... During the seventh year, let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it...”

God’s people survived because they learned how to take care of each other and live in community. We are called to share all that we have and all that we are with God and the people of God. We see this same point is reiterated through the work of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Jesus came into the world and showed us how to continue to care for God’s people. Like the Old Testament, Jesus talked about social responsibility, of taking care of those who were poor, the outsiders, and widows. He broke down walls as he ministered to people that others thought were untouchable and unclean.

Jesus cared for all the people he met and those who sought him out. He showed us that hungering and thirsting for righteousness requires offering people mercy.

In Hebrew the word mercy is “chesed” and William Barclay explains that it means to literally “get right inside the other person’s skin.”ⁱⁱ I think this explanation is important because if we are truly able to understand where other people are coming from and their experiences in life, we will help them. So often we defer responsibility.

I think we can all relate to this. We see someone pulled over on the side of the road with a flat tire. Our first thought may be, “I should pull over to help them.” Then the second thought comes...the differing of responsibility: “Someone else will come and help them.” We have all done it for one reason or another. We have all had moments in our life, through our free will where we have decided to not take part in the will of God.

Just like God continued to pursue Adam and Eve in the garden, God continues to pursue us and use us for the glory of God. We see the call to mercy uplifted by Jesus Christ when he shares the parable about the Good Samaritan. Jesus shared that a Samaritan who belonged to a group of people hated during that time period, was the only one to stop and help someone who desperately needed it.ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus shared that we are neighbors to others, that we love them the way that Christ has called us, when we show them mercy.

Each and every day we have opportunities to serve God. They range from being big and small. Maybe you are able to smile at a stranger when you can tell they are having a hard day. Maybe you are able to fill up the gas tank of someone who cannot afford gas for themselves. Maybe you are able to sit with a friend shadowed by darkness and offer them the light of Christ.

Sometimes the big ways to make a difference in the world are to be part of breaking down systems of injustice and oppression. Just like Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King was able to do this as a peacemaker, we also are called to be part of pursuing God’s righteousness in the world where all people are treated as children of God.

In our community how are each of us called to use our gifts to help the lowly be exalted? We do some of this by our discretionary fund, but there are other ways that God is calling us individually to serve, like the call of Moses. We are called to go out of our way to show mercy to others. We do this when we recognize those who are hungry and thirsty for God.

There are some people in our community who are literally hungry and thirsty, and there are people in our community who are hungry and thirsty for the living God. There are many people who have had a bad experience with church or God. Perhaps they felt judged or not cared for, or perhaps they lost a loved one and can't understand why. We have the opportunity to show others that God is continuing to pursue and love them as we welcome them into a community of love and grace.

We must remain vigilant to those in need in our community. Those in need of mercy do not always present themselves the loudest. Usually those most in need of mercy are ones who think they do not deserve it. We also must be aware of those in need of mercy who are closet to us.

How are we showing mercy in our families? How are we caring for those who may seem like “prodigals” to us? How are we being patient with those who are difficult? How, like the Good Samaritan can we salve the spiritual and emotional wounds of those who have been battered by this life?

I think the answer is simple...we offer them Christ.

The founder of denomination, John Wesley, was passionate about sharing Christ with others. He made a big impact in England, but he knew that God's mission was bigger than that. So, he ordained two men to take the good news of Christ to America: Thomas Coke, and Francis Asbury. As they were leaving for America, he told them to “offer them Christ.”^{iv}

When we offer people Christ, we show them that Christ is the only one who can fill us and quench our thirst. Christ is the only one who provides bread, his body, to offer us the means of grace. Christ is the only one who offers to us living water and saves us from our sin.

It is Christ and not us who can change people. I think this is the message that Moses finally understood. He would be able to answer God's calling upon his life because God was with him, God would go before him, God would equip him, and God would continue to forgive and save the Israelites from harm.

We participate in the will of God when we recognize that God is the primary actor of God's will and we get to participate in it. Jesus knew this. In the garden right before his crucifixion he said, “Let not my will, but yours be done.”^v

We find these same words in “The Lord's Prayer” when we say: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done...” So, the question before us today is are we living a life where God's will be done through us?

God is trying to use us to pursue righteousness, but are we listening? The next time the Holy Spirit works in your heart to do something whether it is an action to help a stranger, friend, co-worker, or family member, be open to continue to participate in the will of God.

The good news for our lives today is that God continues to offer God’s presence to remind us that God goes before us, behind us, and beyond us. May we be strengthened by the presence of God so that we can bestow mercy on others and pursue righteousness for the glory of God. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Maxie Dunnam. “The Workbook on the Beatitudes.” Self published. 2004. P. 116.

ⁱⁱ Maxie Dunnam. “The Workbook on the Beatitudes.” Self published. 2004. P. 116.

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 10:25-37. NRSV.

^{iv} <https://wesleyanrudy.com/2015/10/22/offer-them-christ/>

^v Luke 22:42. NRSV.

Additional Reference

New Interpreter’s Biblical Commentary. Vol. 1. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 1994. P. 953.

New Interpreter’s Biblical Commentary. Vol. IX. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 1995. P. 206.