

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Matthew 5:13-20

Isaiah 58:1-12

Psalms 112:1-9

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

February 9, 2020

The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Our texts this week are long and full of big ideas. Complicated ideas that may come across rather preachy if we aren't careful. And, although these guidelines from our texts are some of my favorite words of scripture, I hesitate to provide you with a laundry list of things you should and shouldn't do. That kind of sermon would be easy to fall back on. Just listen to a few of the directives from our readings...

From Isaiah...

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness.

From Psalm...

Light shines in the darkness for the upright; the righteous are merciful and full of compassion. It is good for them to be generous in lending and to manage their affairs with justice. They have given freely to the poor, and their righteousness stands fast for ever;

From Matthew...

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

That's a hefty list of things we should do. Where do we even begin? Here is the thing...we all know who we are called to be. Right? We know what we should do. It's the execution of what's right that gets tricky. How we live into these words can be daunting and the fact of the matter is that we will all interpret differently how each directive should look.

I kept reflecting on the should and shouldn't's of our faith this past week as we watched the impeachment trial come to a close. Don't worry...I'm not going into a political conversation per se. I would, however, like to comment on what we are observing in our national narrative and ask you a couple of questions about all of these shoulds and shouldn't's.

What if everyone in positions of power listened and heeded those words from Isaiah...to remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of fingers, the speaking of evil? What if instead of back and forth rhetoric, we got down to the business of feeding the hungry and taking care of the afflicted? What if that was what we saw reported on the news each day? Good things. Not hateful things.

Isaiah was written to people coming out of exile and who were in the process of rebuilding their communities. It was a chance for them to create something new out of the hardship they had

experienced. The prophet is trying to help them see that the health of their community would come from their faithful care to love one another and care for one another. And, the prophet makes the point, you can't just do it once, you have to do it over and over again. Restoration, changing course, righting the wrongs takes consistent attention, faithful witness, and courage.

If we read Isaiah, we say to ourselves, of course that is what we should do. But honestly, I was left this week wondering, where are our examples of living the words of the prophet out because I didn't see much of anything resembling this kind of good and compassionate and faithful action this past week...at least not from our leadership and not from some of our neighbors in how we talked about one another. Things are just down right hateful no matter how you shake out the sides.

Are we that afraid to stand up for what we should do, what we should say, who we should be? Is it really easier to say and do things that hurt one another? Can we truly justify it all?

I was also reminded this week that as adults we really have muddled the waters and made living out the love of God a complicated debate of who understands that love or that justice or that peace better than the next person.

So my only response this morning is that we are going to take a step back and simplify a bit. We are going to put away the rhetoric and get down to basics. The basics from that wonderful poem...All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten. I think it sums up very nicely what the Bible is trying to teach us in words that maybe we can understand even if we aren't 5 years old. Here are just a few things from the list...

Share everything.

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Clean up your own mess.

Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.

When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.

The list goes on but you get the idea. I think the prophet Isaiah would approve. For kids, shining a light on the world comes so naturally. They give so innocently and with such love. Doing what they should do hasn't gotten complicated by the world around them. They aren't weighing the risks or the repercussions. They aren't worried about power or privilege. They aren't trying to cut down an opponent or secure their own place at the table. They simply share and play fair and hold hands.

Folks, when did we stop sharing and playing fair? Why is it so easy to forget those simple lessons we learned as a child?

It matters what you do, what I do, what we all do. God gives us agency and the ability to do good. We have a moral obligation to be a light to others and to allow that light to shine forth when we live into the simple yet oh-so-complex command to love our neighbors. God needs us to do just that.

So in the spirit of our kindergarten years, let's sum up our texts with a few songs that some of you may know.

Jesus loves me this I know
 For the bible tells me so
 Little ones to Him belong
 They are weak but He is strong
 Yes Jesus loves me
 Yes Jesus loves me
 Yes Jesus loves me
 The bible tells me so

Jesus loves the little children
 All the children of the world
 Red and yellow
 Black and white
 They are precious in His sight.
 Jesus loves the little children
 Of the world.

This little light of mine
 I'm going to let it shine
 Oh, this little light of mine
 I'm going to let it shine
 This little light of mine
 I'm going to let it shine
 Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

Jesus loves you. And, Jesus loves everyone just the same no matter who they are or where they are from or what they believe or how they vote. The Good News is that we all get to let that kind of incredible love shine out through our own lives in kindness and compassion and grace. Let it shine. Amen.