



Broad Street Presbyterian Church

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“What Can I Do?”

Matthew 5:1-16

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If you were in charge of the world, what would you do to fix it?

If you had all the power in the world?

What would you do about? Global warming?

Earthquakes, raging fires, destructive tornados, melting Arctic, rising oceans.

What would you do about? Hatred?

Racism, anti-Semitism, bigotry.

What would you do about instability in the world?

Endless wars in the Middle East, devastating incurable diseases.

If you had all the power in the world? What would you do to fix it?

There are perhaps some who might say, there's nothing wrong with the world, it's just fine with me.

But if we just take a step back and look more closely, we would have to confess that some things have gone awry. Some things are broken. Some things just need to be fixed.

Many of us complain about the problems of the world, but that's all we do, complain.

But then some of us are fixers. We try to fix everything. But sooner or later you realize that there are some things about which you can do nothing. There are some things that you just can't fix. No matter how hard you try, some repairs are out of our physical and intellectual ability to accomplish.

So, since we are not like God who has unlimited power to fix all things, what can we do as humans to make things better?

The first thing we can do is LISTEN.

Our world and society have come to a place where we are so polarized that we don't hear what we are saying to one another.

Our communities and families have become so contentious that we talk pass one another. Many times, we are saying the same thing. Many times, we want the same things. But because we have issues with one another we don't listen.

And before you can fix a problem you must know what it is. So one of the first things we can do is LISTEN.

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Sometimes in our urgency to fix things we just implement solutions without listening to the person with the problem and asking them what they want or what they think will be best. But we must learn to first listen, then resolve situations and problems based upon the expressed needs of those who are experiencing the problem or trauma.

When you go to the doctor, they just don't give you medication. They first ask you what is wrong, and diagnose the problem. Then they prescribe medication based upon what your issue may be.

When we listen, we will come to understand that there are different ways to view the world.

The same practice can be viewed differently pending the perspective from which you view it. For example:

What does wealth mean?

When you're rich versus when you're poor

What does oppression mean?

When you're the oppressor versus the oppressed

What does injustice mean?

When you're the acquitted versus the victim?

Most often, the perspective from which we view the world determines how we act or react. Have you ever thought that someone is responding to you either positively or negative because of their life's perspective?

People act a certain way because of the experience in their lives. They talk a certain way, walk, think, act, dress because of their life experiences.

We judge others so quickly, not understanding that they may see things from a different perspective. But that doesn't always make it wrong, it just makes it different. And we sometimes have misunderstandings because we do not listen to gain an understanding of the life perspective or experiences of others.

Then when we listen, we may come to understand that there are always two sides of a story. The same story may have two different sides.

I think of children who sometimes get into arguments and fights. After a conflict, one of the children may run to the parent to tell on the other child, expecting to be vindicated.

While the one child complains, about an injustice done to them, the insightful parent might then ask, "Well, what did you do?" The child will say, "Well, Becky hit me!" And the parent repeats, "And what did you do?" "Well, well, uh, uh, I just threw a little water balloon on her head while she was sleeping."

And just like children, we often cry injustice and seldom take responsibility for the actions we have done that may have caused some of the problems that we face. But if we learn to listen and have sympathy and empathize with others, we might see things differently.

If we take a moment to walk in someone else's shoes and listen to what they feel is best, we might respond and act differently. If we LISTEN and hear the other side of a story before implementing solutions and passing judgement, we might come to a place of understanding and begin to make things better.

Then the next thing we can do is LOVE.

In Matthew 22:35-40

³⁵ An expert in the law, tested Jesus with this question: ³⁶ “Master, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷ Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”^[a] ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[b]

Just think, how much could we achieve in bringing healing and peace to our world if we just loved others as we loved ourselves?

If we thought about the well-being of others just as we think about the well-being of ourselves. If we did unto others as we would have them do unto us. If we were kind and respected others as we wanted to be respected, what a different place our world would be?

One might ask, who is my neighbor? Can I be selective about who I get to love? . . . NO!

There are a lot of people who need to see and feel the love of God

That don't look like you or me

That don't talk like you or me

That don't think like you or me

That don't believe the same way you do

Yet they need to experience the love of God and yes, they are your neighbor.

Yet too often we turn a blind eye to the needs of the world? We too often hold back our love because we have conditions. We don't display the unconditional agape love of God. As quiet as kept, there are many in the world who don't profess to be Christians who show more love and compassion than many of us who profess to be followers of Christ.

But when a need arises, we as Christians should be the first to show the love of God. Because God has commanded it and because we are all a part of the human family. We as believers should be the leaders in showing love and compassion.

And when we show the love of God and show His compassion, we will win others to Christ and bring healing and peace to the world.

So you can LISTEN, you can LOVE, then the next thing you can do is LEND A HAND.

So often, we see people struggling through life and we sit back and never step up to offer help. Perhaps it's your children, spouse, relative, neighbor, co-worker, or even a stranger. While people are sometimes too prideful to receive our help and while there are times when we don't feel it's our place to get involved or intrude into someone else's life, there are times when just lending a helping hand can help to avoid a tragedy. Too often, out of fear or pride, we don't step in to help. Then when a tragedy occurs, we all feel saddened or even guilty because we know we could or should have done something to help.

So, as we look at the many problems in the world, realize that some of them can be solved if YOU lend a hand.

YOU may have knowledge, wisdom and insight to offer a solution.

YOU may have resources to share that will resolve an issue.

YOU may have a talent or skill that can be shared to fix a problem.
But it's up to YOU to help! We need your hands!

I wrote a song called "He's Counting on You." The words say,

Tell me who will who will stand
Tell me who will lend a hand
Extend a hand to help someone in need
Can't you hear the Lord calling out
To you, and you, and you, and you
You're the one that for some man, woman, boy, or girl,
We can make a difference if we lend our hands
You can make a difference if you lend your hands
I can make a difference if I lend my hands

Well I hear someone ask, where do I start?

In Matthew 25:35-40 Jesus gives us a starting place.

³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?' ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?' ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

There are plenty of people and situations waiting for someone to lend a helping hand. Whether given openly or anonymously, know you have hands that can help. Whether young or old, know that you have hands that can help. And when we lend our hands to a problem, we can help to bring healing, hope, and prosperity to our world.

Then finally, you must LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE.

In Matthew 5:16 Jesus states, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven.

In this well-known passage, Jesus suggests that we are the light of the world.

He declares that as lights we must not be hidden.
But as lights we must be held up to shine as hope for the world.
By shining and reflecting the love of God, we bring glory to God.

That sounds easy enough, so why don't we just shine? Because it's easier said than done.

Shining requires action (the Beatitudes).
Shining requires being a covering for something or someone else (salt to season or preserve).
Shining requires being connected to a power source.

You ask, what do I mean? We have to go back to the earlier verses in this chapter.

In these passages known as the Beatitudes, Jesus declares that a host of blessings will come upon certain people. However, each blessing is attached to those who display specific behaviors. Many of the behaviors are not always easy to perform. Many of the behaviors are not always comfortable. For example:

It's not easy to be a peacemaker.

It's not easy to be meek in a prideful world.

It's not easy to be merciful in a judgmental world.

It's not easy to keep your heart pure in a hedonistic world.

It's doesn't feel good to mourn.

It's doesn't feel good to be persecuted or reviled.

So, when humans display these behaviors, they reflect the character and light of God in the earth. They shine and bring glory to God.

Then in verse 13, Jesus declares that we are the salt of the earth. Salt is used to both season and preserve. When you eat something that tastes bland, salt will help to draw out more flavor. Then in days past, salt was used to preserve things that might otherwise decay.

Jesus is saying that we should be like salt and bring a different flavor to our situations that changes the atmosphere and preserves peace and harmony. When we do act as salt, we shine and bring glory to God.

But then in verse 16, he says, let your light shine. As easy as that sounds, sometimes it's difficult to shine. I began to wonder why we don't shine.

It came to me that sometimes we don't shine because:

Our lights are blown out, we are broken.

The cares of the world have caused us to give up on God and we've stop shining.

We decide to no longer exemplify behavior that reflects God.

Then some of us don't shine because we're covered by a lamp shade. Sometimes there are things, people, circumstances, that overshadow us and cover our light and cause us to stop shining. Or to not shine as bright.

Then we don't shine because we have no power. Although many of us have the ability to shine, we have no power. Although we are in the light socket, we're not glowing. Why is this?

You have to understand that the light bulb by itself has no power to shine. While we are wired to shine, while we have the ability to shine, while many of us are even sitting in the light socket, we are not shining because the light switch is cut off. There is no power coming to our light. We are not connected to the power source.

We often come to worship but never connect with God. We come to a place and sit, but leave without connecting. Leave without hearing His voice speak to us. We depart to serve without being empowered by God's spirit.

But in order to shine for God we must be connected to God's power. We must connect to God's power by giving our hearts to him. We must stay connected by listening to God's voice and obeying.

If we are to shine, we must start by looking at ourselves and asking the questions,

What behaviors am I displaying?
Are they showing the characteristics and light of God?
Are they in line with God's will and purpose for my life?
Are they drawing people to God or turning them away?
Am I doing things in my natural human power and ability?
Or am I relying on the wisdom and power of God?

If we purpose to stay connected to God, hear His voice and obey His commands, His light and love will flow through us in every situation and reflect His love to a dark and dying world.

No, we can't change others but we can change ourselves. What we can do is change our response. We can change our tone. We change our minds and attitude.

So we must say to God, FIX ME.

Fix me so that my actions reflect you.
Fix me so that I can be salt in my situation.
Fix me so that I can be a light that shines for you.

We can say like David in Psalm 51:

² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.

I hear someone saying but the world is so dark, shining my little light won't make a difference. We must know that it's not about how big or small the light is. It is important that we shine whatever light we have and shine it wherever we are because even a match can bring light to a dark place.

As the old spiritual says,

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

We must turn on the power of God in our lives so that we can SHINE.

Because when you listen, you shine.
When you love, you shine.
When you lend a hand, you shine.
When you make peace, you shine.
When you show kindness, you shine.

When you forgive, you shine.
When you show mercy, you shine.
When you show understanding, you shine.
When you promote peace, you shine.
When you reconcile, you shine.
When you fight for justice, you shine.
When you feed the hungry, you shine.
When you clothe the naked, you shine.
When you visit those in prison, you shine.
When you minister to the sick, you shine.

And when we shine, people will be drawn to God. What a day of healing it would be if we'd let our lights shine.

So, you ask me, what can you do?

You can Listen to someone else's side of the story or perspective to get understanding and bring peace.

You can Love Your Neighbor as yourself and bring unity.

You can Lend a Hand to help someone else and bring prosperity and hope.

But, most importantly, you can Let Your Light so Shine before men, so that they might see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven.

And when we do these things, we will glorify God and make the world a better place. Amen.