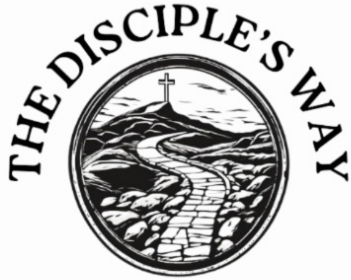




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Christian Formation
at Christ Church Cathedral

Week of May 27, 2024:

“A Sheep or a Goat? Loving Your Neighbor in Need”

– James 2:8 (CEB), 14-17 (NRSV) and
Matthew 25:31-40 (CEB)

MONDAY, May 27, 2024 - Luke 10:25-37

The parable of the unexpected “neighbor”

“Go and do likewise”? Jesus wasn’t saying the legal expert (or you) are off the hook as long as you don’t ignore a man thieves have beaten and left in a ditch. Jesus’ story said the Samaritan’s far-reaching mercy cost time, money and emotional energy. He used his resources to relieve another person’s suffering. In the story, he wasn’t even finished when he got the broken man to an inn—he had to go back and pay the innkeeper. So, Jesus’ call—“go and do likewise.” Offer extravagant, practical mercy that costs something.

- Jesus used religious officials (priest, Levite) to represent those who claim a relationship with God, yet don’t act on it. Where do you see yourself in this story? Are you the priest or Levite? Are you the Samaritan, from a group the priest and Levite looked down on? Do you feel battered and helpless? Jesus called us to become like “the one who demonstrated mercy.” How do you (or could you) act on your relationship with God by offering compassion and healing?
- Has helping someone else ever cost you a significant amount of money, time, or energy? If so, reflect on your inner responses as you were showing mercy. (Don’t hurry—let yourself feel those feelings and thoughts again.) Then recall your inner responses after the crisis when you knew you had helped someone heal. Do you believe giving help when it costs something is worth it?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, place someone in my path who will give me the chance to act like the Samaritan. Teach me that I’m here to help others. And in all the broken places of my life, show me mercy, Jesus. Amen.

TUESDAY, May 28, 2024 - Micah 6:6-8

Not ceremony, but justice, faithful love, and humility

The prophet Micah spoke to the kingdom of Judah's urge to keep religious ritual and "conspicuous consumption" side-by-side. On God's behalf, he urged a different agenda: "Do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God."

- Micah kept ironically proposing bigger and bigger sacrifices in verses 6-7 to try to please God. He ended with child sacrifice, a ghastly practice among some of Israel's neighbors. What do the three divine requirements Micah listed tell you about what God is like? "To walk" was the Hebrew way to identify a person's lifestyle. In what ways does your lifestyle reflect your choice to "walk humbly" with your God?
- In what ways do your culture and community fall short of doing justice, embracing faithful love, and walking humbly with God? Scholar Gary Smith said, "Micah's delineation of God's requirements... includes no negative statements about what is forbidden to the Israelites. It presents a positive case of what God thinks is best for humankind." * How can you actively move yourself, your family, your workplace, and your community toward God's best for humankind?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, my goal is to walk humbly with you. Lead and guide me into the newness of life that you died and rose again to offer me. Amen.

* Gary V. Smith, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hosea, Amos, Micah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001, p. 555.

WEDNESDAY, May 29, 2024 - Amos: 5:21-24

The ever-flowing stream of justice

Amos was probably the first of the Hebrew "writing prophets." Sent by God to preach to the northern kingdom of Israel, he observed that many people's outward religiosity had no effect on the way they treated others. On God's behalf, he urged those who profited by exploiting others to stop trusting in showy religious ceremonies, and instead to "let justice roll down like waters."

- How can you be alert for opportunities in everyday activities like your work, leisure activities, shopping and other pursuits to make choices that bring about righteousness and justice? What risks or costs might you face to make those choices? To what extent are you willing to act consistently for justice and righteousness?
- Amos itemized God's charges against Israel: "They have sold the innocent for silver, and those in need for a pair of sandals. They crush the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way." (Amos 2:6-7). If Amos wrote today, rather than in 700 B.C., what issues do you think he might list for our culture? How can you be an active change agent whose words and actions move our society toward God's ideal of justice and righteousness?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, there are hungry children and desperate people facing injustice. They are all your people—help me to care about them as much as you do. Amen.

THURSDAY, May 30, 2024 - Isaiah 58:2-10; James 2:8, 14-17

Words without actions can't "love your neighbor"

Isaiah 58 likely spoke to Israelites who returned from exile in Babylon. Too many of them saw the return as a time to resume "business as usual," and wondered why God didn't honor their feasts and fasts. Like Amos and Micah 150 years earlier, the prophet said instead of showy, external fasts, they needed to "fast" from oppressing others. Jesus' brother James saw that some early Christians had the same spiritual problem. A "faith" unwilling to actively help struggling people, he wrote, is no faith at all.

- Jesus, as prophetic as any of his servants, echoed Isaiah and Micah (and quoted Hosea 6:6) when he said, "Go and learn what this means: I want mercy and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13). How has experiencing more of God's mercy changed your heart and led you to a life of greater service? Are you growing in showing mercy to others? To whom can you extend mercy today?
- James wasn't suggesting a good "balance" between faith and works, as though we need a 50/50 mix of the two. We need 100% of both—100% merciful actions growing out of 100% faith in God's gracious acceptance of us, for which we show gratitude. What are some of the faithful actions in loving your neighbor(s) you have seen grow in your life as you respond to God's grace?

Prayer: O God, I want to live a life that honors and pleases you. Help me to offer you my heart, my inner being, before I offer you anything else. Guide me today and each day. Amen.

FRIDAY, May 31, 2024 - Matthew 25:31-40

Finding Jesus in the hungry, the sick, and the prisoners

People who don't have enough to eat or wear, who can't afford good (or any) care if they're sick, who are in prison, who are outsiders in your community—most of us are willing to do a little something to help "them." Jesus called people like that "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine." Joining in Jesus' work to renew the world means seeing that the poor, the sick, the prisoners, the aliens are not "them" at all—they're "us." Jesus called us to build a legacy of loving our neighbors, his brothers and sisters, as one human family, caring and sharing the way he did.

- In Jesus' story, the "sheep" he said had helped him were surprised: "When did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink?" They saw the need, not a chance for reward. What can help you learn to see in the faces of the people you meet, especially the outcast or hurting, the face of Jesus? When have you felt the freedom and joy that comes from blessing others because you know God cares about them?

Prayer: O God, keep my eyes and my heart open to see your face in the faces of hurting people around me who need your touch through me. Amen.

Persistent, indomitable love for all neighbors

In these passages the apostle Paul said God calls us to be people who live in loving community with our neighbors. Contracts or policies, though some of them are needed, don't make that happen. Loving your neighbor grows naturally as we commit ourselves to living as Jesus' followers, letting him show us who is our neighbor and how to love each neighbor. "Love, which is the perfect bond of unity" is the mighty force that overcomes prejudice, hatred, distrust, and all the influences that divide us from one another. "Love your neighbor" reaches well beyond "tolerate your neighbor" to create genuine caring and community, even in places where to human eyes that seemed impossible.

- Colossians called all of Christ's followers to show five qualities: "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." When have you shown those qualities toward a neighbor, or had a neighbor show those qualities toward you? What other responses might you or they have chosen? Would those alternatives have made things better or worse? Colossians went on to make a sweeping statement in 3:17 about loving your neighbor: "WHATEVER you do, whether in speech or action, do it ALL in the name of the Lord Jesus." How can doing whatever you do in Jesus' name shape your way of life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, please keep shaping me into a person of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Give me the grace to love as you have loved me. Amen.



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