

2/6/2011

THE CALL TO WORSHIP

Psalm 111

Lay Minister: 1 Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly.

People: 2 Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them.

Lay Minister: 3 Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever.

People: 4 He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate.

Lay Minister: 5 He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.

People: 6 He has shown his people the power of his works, giving them the lands of other nations.

Lay Minister: 7 The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy.

People: 8 They are steadfast for ever and ever, done in faithfulness and uprightness.

Lay Minister: 9 He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever-- holy and awesome is his name.

People: 10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.

Lay Minister: We gather in the presence who is gracious and compassionate, whose precepts are trustworthy.

People: We gather in the name of God the Father, and in the name of God the Son, and in the name of God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord, keep us walking in your word and living our faith in deeds and actions.

May Your

Church be light to a darkened world and salt to a world in need. We pray through Jesus

Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God,

now and forever. Amen.

"Growing in God's Grace"

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Isaiah 58: 3-9a

(Isaiah describes a true life of faith.)

3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. 4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a

man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? 8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

THE GOSPEL LESSON Matthew 5:13-20

(Jesus has come not to abolish the Law, but fulfill it.)

13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. **16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.**

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. **19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

INTRO - The story is told of the owner and CEO of a large successful company who was growing old and knew it was time to appoint his successor. He used a rather unique method. He called his Junior executives to him and gave them each a seed. His instructions were that they were to plant the seed and water it and bring their results back the following year and he would then choose his successor. One young executive named Jim received a seed with everyone else. But no matter what Jim did he could not get his seed to grow. He planted it in good soil. He watered it and used fertilizer. He kept it in warmth and light. He listened as others described how their plants were growing, and flowering, and taking on size. No matter what he did he could not get his to grow.

I. I don't know if you ever feel like you are trying to do the impossible task. Jesus gives us one in today's lesson.

A. Jesus calls his disciples to righteousness.

1. In verse 16 Jesus says that as a lamp is put on a lamp stand our lives should be the same. **"16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."** Jesus is saying that our lives are the best witness to give God Glory. He calls for lives of good deed, lives that love God and love others.

2. In verse 19 Jesus says, **19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**

3. In verse 20 he tells us how important this is. **20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

4. The last verse of chapter 5 says, **48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.** Jesus is serious about this righteousness.

B. Let's consider Jesus' words.

1. The Scribes and Pharisees spent their whole lives working to keep God's law.

2. When Kathy and Jamie and I were in Israel we were told that orthodox Jewish men do not have jobs. They spend their lives working to learn and keep God's law.

3. Jesus says that if our lives are not more righteous than the lives of the scribes and pharisees, those whose work is law keeping, we won't enter heaven.

C. Jesus is calling us today to righteousness.

1. Jesus is calling us to good deeds that shine. He is calling us to lives that seek to keep the smallest part of the law. He is calling us to live lives that honor God.

2. No one enters the kingdom of heaven without righteousness greater than that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

3. This may seem like an old fashioned idea. Does this make you wonder about your ultimate future?

II. Back to the young executive, Jim, and his plant. He was supposed to do all he could to cause the plant to grow. He tried everything but could not get it to grow. The day when all the other executives were going to bring in their plants was upon him. Others were talking about the growth of their plants. His did nothing. His wife asked what he was going to do. He didn't even want to go to work.

A. Jesus calls for our righteousness to shine and glorify God. Scripture gives us truth.

1. Romans 3:10-12, quoting Psalm 14 says, **10 As it is written: "There is no**

one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

2. Romans 3:23 says, **"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"**

3. Romans 7:19 says, **"19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing."**

4. In today's Gospel lesson Jesus himself says, **20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

B. We may not like to admit it, but we are not righteous as we need to be for God.

1. Our lives serve ourselves many times instead of glorifying God.

2. We have put other things in our lives ahead of God.

3. Not only have we failed in being righteous as God wants, we have lived lives that have not always been pure, or loving, or good.

III. The young executive, Jim, didn't want to go to work, but followed his wife's advice. The CEO met with a room full of young executives each with his plant, looking big and green, and sometimes with blooms. The CEO saw all his other young executives, but in the back of the room saw Jim, sort of hiding with a pot that looked empty. He called him to the front and Jim confessed, "I did everything I could but I couldn't make it grow. Look at what everyone else has done." I failed. The CEO looked at Jim and said, "Jim, I see your empty pot and the plants in everyone else's pot. However, the seed I gave you and everyone else was boiled. It could not grow. Gentlemen, meet your new CEO."

A. The call for righteousness is a real call.

1. But for those who have been born into this world, no matter how hard we try we are corrupted by sin. There is a natural selfishness and corruption in us. We cannot be righteous or perfect.

2. We can try to keep God's law, like the Pharisees. But even they failed.

3. If our righteousness has to exceed that of the Pharisees on our own deeds, we fail.

B. But, there is a difference maker in our text.

1. Jesus shows himself in our lesson to be someone who knows God's law, and all that it really means, the Son of God,

2. There is one whose life and actions and deeds have been righteous and loving and brought glory to God, that is Jesus.

3. Jesus knew our sin, but the righteous Son of God died on the cross to pay for our sin so that our righteousness might be based not on deeds, which are sinful, but on the forgiveness He won.

C. Jesus the great Teacher has worked in such a way that sinful people who do not deserve heaven are made more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees by His grace, by his sacrifice, by his love, by his forgiveness.

1. Do you realize what this does? God changes our hearts with His undeserved love.

2. The love of God causes selfish hearts, yours and mine, to want to serve, not ourselves, but God.

3. When we know our failure and sin, and know God's undeserved love and grace that makes us righteous, we want to love God and share His love with others.

CONCLUSION - Jim didn't deserve the job of CEO because he caused the seed to grow. He didn't. In this story he was recognized for his honesty. But it was the decision of the CEO that made him the new leader. We are children of God by the grace of the Son of God, by the grace of the speaker of God's truth. When we live in his grace, by His forgiveness, God's righteousness lives in us and through us. And when sinners live for God rather than selves, that glorifies God!