

Message: “What Does the Lord Ask?”

[video: “Test Your Why” by Simon Sinek¹]

If you’ve been around our congregation or leadership teams for a little while, you’re familiar with the question “What’s your Why?”

Brian Park, our lay leader, spoke on it several times. Simon Sinek, a famous author, speaks about this topic. In fact, he is building a career speaking to leaders in business, government and the church about the power and benefits positive relationships bring. I encourage you to spend some time watching his videos. You can find him on LinkedIn. Simon is sharing wisdom with anyone who will listen.

And I invite you to take the friend test. Find someone you know well in the next week or so and try it. Don’t tell them what you’re doing ahead of time. Be patient. Be quiet (listen). Don’t fill in the blanks. You can explain after you’re done. Then I encourage you to share what you learn with your small group or a close friend at church. I think we may learn good things and find some areas of life we can work on.

You’re probably thinking **“Sounds great. What does it have to do with our scripture readings for today?”** That’s a good question. Allow me to explain the connection.

I believe Simon is showing us something about our nature; what it means to be human. He’s codified a truth that’s been right in front of us. Simon is showing us another way to live. It’s not a new way. It’s an ancient way expressed in new terms. The way isn’t focused on numbers – income, attendance or the bottom line. It’s focused on the value of our relationships with other people. He makes the radical argument that organizations don’t exist for the purpose of achieving numbers – that’s a result. They exist for the purpose of valuing, educating and inspiring their members.

A group of people who are encouraged and inspired work better together. They can truly accomplish great things, particularly when we rely on God. When they do, their lives and the lives of those whom they care for are made better. I believe Simon’s message speaks directly to

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=8&v=m19ioL234zA&feature=emb_logo

the heart of God’s message to humanity, embodied best in Jesus and spoken through the prophets.

Let’s look at an example, the words of Micah the prophet.

These words are famous for Methodists. They lie at the heart of our call to social justice and the holiness we find in community. Micah said, *“God has told you ... what is good and what the Lord requires from you: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God”* (6:8 CEB). You may know John Wesley’s version, expressed as three simple rules “Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God.” Notice the great parallel.

The God who made us has expectations for us. Wow! Think about it. We aren’t just made to live without any care or consideration of God. God made us for a purpose and wants us to succeed, for our lives to get better. God wants the best for us. That’s why God told Jeremiah, *“I know what I’m doing. I have it all planned out - plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I’ll listen. When you come looking for me, you’ll find me. Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I’ll make sure you won’t be disappointed”* (29:11-14, MSG).

This sounds good, but it seems a bit over-simplified. Simple rules are good, but we live in a world filled with shadows, where things are grey. What I may perceive as an injustice you may see as just. We can disagree on how to show mercy – doing good. We strive to do more and become humble which is exactly the opposite of what humility is.

What is God asking us to do? Jesus tells us. Our second scripture today is Jesus’ first and most complete teaching. It’s called the Sermon on the Mount. After inviting the disciples to follow him, Jesus travels to ten different cities, teaching, healing and caring for people. He’s showing the disciples his way of life. Jesus quickly becomes famous. He’s the rock star of his day. People began to follow Jesus around. Some come from a long way to see him.

Why? Because their lives were made better.

One day, when he saw a huge crowd, Jesus decided to climb a hill.

His disciples and those who were committed followed him up the hill. They sat down and then Jesus sat with them. He began to teach them. This is the way rabbis taught, seated in the middle of those who gathered.

I think this is an interesting lesson on how Jesus' call works in our lives. Here's a modern-day illustration: when you go to a dojo to study martial arts, the teacher doesn't sit down and explain why you do exercises, stretching and so forth, do they? No! Once you're dressed and ready to go, you get in a group and do the techniques, over and over again. You're trying to build muscle memory, getting the fundamentals down. Then, after you've reached a basic level of understanding, the instructor will sit down and teach you. That's when you learn why you're doing it and what the teacher expects.

The same is true when we answer Jesus' call and follow him.

Initially, we need to spend time learning the basics: how to pray, how to read and study the Bible, participating in worship and small groups, volunteering and giving to support the work of our congregation as we care for our community. That's just as true today as it was in Jesus' time.

You see, after following Jesus around to ten different cities, helping Jesus with the work of caring for people, it was time. Jesus, their rabbi, sits down with his committed followers and tells them what God expects and why they're serving others. We have Matthew's narrative record of Jesus' words to teach and inspire us today.

I'll read the words Jesus spoke from The Message version of the Bible to give you a different perspective

"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope.

With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you.

Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

You're blessed when you're content with just who you are - no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

*You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God.
He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.*

*You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,'
you find yourselves cared for.*

*You're blessed when you get your inside world - your mind and heart -
put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.*

*You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of
compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your
place in God's family.*

*You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution.
The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.*

*Not only that - count yourselves blessed every time people put you down
or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me (Jesus). What it
means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they're
uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens - give a cheer, even!
- for though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know
that you're in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always
gotten into this kind of trouble" (Matthew 5:1-12, MSG).*

There's a LOT to being Jesus' disciple! I've highlighted a few phrases from each verse to illustrate. We could spend some time later this year going through this scripture in more detail. If you're interested in a sermon series on Jesus' sermon, please let me know.

For now, let's take a step back and consider what we've just heard. Jesus is telling us we'll receive God's blessings when we live in the way he has described. This isn't a divine "To Do" list. Reaching heaven isn't a milestone that comes at the end of a series of tasks. Neither is God manipulating us or giving us an impossible mission.

Jesus is giving us a verbal image of what it's like to become a person and a community that's committed to God. That kind of community is a family. We're close to God and each other. We aren't casual acquaintances. We aren't just friends, even best friends. We're the kind of people who'll get up at 3:00 am to help each other. And we don't make a big deal out of it. It's the normal way we are.

Others see and feel it. That’s why they want to come and be part of the community. That’s why people are happy when we come around. They know we’re trying to make life better for them. We want to help. Our “Why” is rooted and based in love that can do anything.

We can’t DO anything to become humble, but we can BE humble.

Jesus’ message is an invitation to become someone better. Jesus calls us and tells us what the image of God looks like when we see it in other people. They’ll see it us. It’s most present when we really, truly care.

One note: I believe we can only accomplish this when we’re part of a group. Few, if any, people have the spiritual gifts, skills and commitment to excel at all the characteristics Jesus shared. I believe only one person was able to do so. Jesus is describing God’s character to us. As we follow Jesus, we will become more and more like the God who created us; we will become the image of God. We can best do that as a member of a community of faith. When we gather as a community, our strengths and weaknesses balance, God’s family. When we are part of Jesus’ family, we can do amazing things together.

Can I get an “Amen”? Amen. Praise God!

Let us pray...

Micah 6:1-8 (CEB)

¹ Hear what the Lord is saying:

Arise, lay out the lawsuit before the mountains;
let the hills hear your voice!

² Hear, mountains, the lawsuit of the Lord!
Hear, eternal foundations of the earth!

The Lord has a lawsuit against his people;
with Israel he will argue.

³ "My people, what did I ever do to you?
How have I wearied you? Answer me!

⁴ I brought you up out of the land of Egypt;
I redeemed you from the house of slavery.
I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam before you.

⁵ My people, remember what Moab's King Balak had planned,
and how Balaam, Beor's son, answered him!
Remember everything from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you might learn to recognize the righteous acts of the Lord!"

⁶ With what should I approach the Lord
and bow down before God on high?
Should I come before him with entirely burned offerings,
with year-old calves?

⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with many torrents of oil?
Should I give my oldest child for my crime;
the fruit of my body for the sin of my spirit?

⁸ He has told you, human one, what is good and
what the Lord requires from you:
to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.

Matthew 5:1-12 (CEB)

¹ Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain. He sat down and his disciples came to him. ² He taught them, saying:

³ “Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

⁴ “Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.

⁵ “Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.

⁶ “Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.

⁷ “Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy.

⁸ “Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God.

⁹ “Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God’s children.

¹⁰ “Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

¹¹ “Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. ¹² Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you.