February 10th, 2019 LPCC Matthew 7:1-12

“Planks, Pearls, and Prophets” by Rev. Roberta Howey

A fun fact about my journey into ministry is that this was not my first plan. I was in the middle of my program for Teaching English as a Second Language for adults when I heard my call to ministry, and well, well God calls you, God will not let you go. It has also made me realize that Jesus, well, he was not a great teacher.

Jesus, for all of his amazing moments of compassion, miracles, and that whole resurrection bit, was a bit of a lousy instructor. This isn’t to say that what he said was *wrong*, but rather, how he was trying to say it was maybe not the most effective way of telling people to not be jerks to each other. Picture, a crowd of people surrounding the Messiah on the Mount of Olives, ready to hear the secrets to life. He tells them they are all blessed children of God, then jumps from one topic to another, like a frog on a pond.

“Don’t pray like hypocrites!”

“Don’t fast like hypocrites!”

“Don’t bother with your possessions! You cannot serve God and wealth!”

“Don’t worry about your life”

“Don’t judge others, like hypocrites!”

“Seek and ye shall find”

“In everything you do to others as you would have them do to you; this is the law of the prophets”. And so on, and so forth.

I have had a few professors like Jesus, trying to get as much knowledge to us before the lecture ends and we trudge out of the class. The idea of trying to connect everything is not as important as cramming our brains with the important stuff. Especially when it appears that Jesus is answering people’s questions at the same time. Matthew does not record these questions, but I think we can take a guess;

“How exactly should we pray?” “What about fasting, how to I tell others I am fasting?” “So, do I really have to give up all my stuff? I need to eat!” “I am worried about what lies ahead”, “But what about *those* people?” “Rabbi, what is the meaning of life?”

Jesus, getting showered with questions like rain on an umbrella, would finally shake them off with the most important take-away from his sermon on the Mount; Do to others as you would have them do to you.

This is not a new concept. It is in every religion and ideology out there. Many followers forget it sometimes, but well, we are human. It is the basis of philosophies and political policies. Whether it is how things like our public education system are formed, or the basic idea of free speech, or the concept of manners on the TTC, something we rarely see but pray for fervently. It is why when we share the Peace of Christ with others, we don’t punch them on the shoulder, because we wouldn’t like it. It is how we help teach empathy to children, by showing them how we don’t yell at others because they don’t like being yelled at.

It is how we try to teach adults, by reminding them to not yell at others because we don’t like being yelled at. I will say children grasp it better and leave it at that.

The Golden Rule is about awareness. Jesus is reminding us that we need to be willing to take out the plank in our own eyes, before you deal with your neighbor’s speck. It is about knowing that we already know what to do, how to love, and how to be the followers of Christ in the world. That compass that points to spiritual north is built into us, a part of our creation just as much as the starlight that crashed into this planet and made us all. When we redirect our course, we are remembering that we are not just impacting cardboard cut-outs in our lives, but real, living beings, with loves and fears and hopes and doubts. The Golden Rule draws us back from the self-destruction of “what can I do to rise the most out this?” to “what can I do to see everyone rise?”

Jesus tries to get to this idea a few different ways; telling us to take out our own logs, to “make sure our house is clean before complaining about other’s dust”, as my grandma would say. He tries to remind us that judging others is fruitless at best and destructive and unholy at its worst. He highlights that these are not random ideas, like the messages in fortune cookies. They are holy and sacred, pearls that should be shared. He reminds us that this is the law of the prophets, set out centuries before and they should all know it by now. And while his disciples, and us, can be caught up in the details of who exactly are the pearls, the swine, and who is giving little kids snakes when they need bread, we can all understand the idea that we should treat others how we want to be treated. Treat others, how we need to be treated.

Where does that take us from here?

First and foremost, don’t worry about the kids. I promise you, your children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and everyone else in the younger generations get the Golden Rule, almost far more so than our generations and earlier. The idea of caring about others, because we want others to care about us, is ingrained into most of our children, or will be as they grow. So yes, the kids are alright.

It is us, our generations, that Jesus is lecturing to about planks, and pearls, and the words of the prophets.

Here is my argument; we are pretty good at the smaller, everyday actions on treating people the way they want to be treated. But Jesus is not talking about the smaller stuff. Jesus came here to bring in God’s Kingdom. We gotta think big. And when we think big, we are all doing Christianity, being disciples, and establishing the reign of God’s love.

When we think big, we start thinking about how we, as humans on this spinning blue ball, need a lot of care. Food, clean water, accessible health care, safe places to live, education, opportunities to simply be, spiritual care, the arts, recreation, loving friends and family, a decent night’s sleep. We need these to not just live, but thrive. And so, following the logic our teacher lays out, if we need these things for ourselves, we must need these things for others. We must treat everyone, on the large scale, as humans in need of love. We are called to care for everyone. For refugees seeking asylum, for trans and nonbinary folk seeking affirmation. For people of all religions seeking the freedom to worship. For First Nations communities seeking justice and reconciliation, for people of colour seeking action. For the homeless and the people who can’t go home, for the vulnerable and people with illnesses of the mind, body, and spirit. For all people, seeking fairness, we must seek out fair play together.

To treat others the way we want to be treated, to love others as we are loved, to seek others as we are sought, and to call for God’s Love, here and now, in institutions large and small, is to take on the most important teaching of Jesus’ ministry; by doing this, you are disciples of Christ, ministers of Love Incarnate and followers of the way of compassion that will bring about God’s Kingdom here and now. A kingdom where no one starves, or suffers, or feels terror. Where no one freezes on our streets because there is no room for them. Where no one is left alone through their illnesses, and all are welcomed to the table. Where the question is not “How can I rise the highest?” but, “how can we all rise together?” This is the scripture, the pearls set before us. This is the Golden Rule. This is the Gospel of Jesus our teacher, the Gospel of Christ the Liberator. That Love is here, everlasting and constantly changing our world. That when we do unto others as we would have them do unto us, we are giving, and receiving, the grace of our Creator. May she smile down on us every day, as we strive to be disciples of her wisdom. Amen.