

May 10, 2020 We Are Witnesses Pt. 4 Matthew 5:5

Dear Friends, Brothers and Sisters in Christ;

I am not always as swift as I should be. It took several weeks of life in the season of Covid-19 for me to realize I was not simply posting the sermon the way I have done for years, but writing a pastoral epistle each week, which included a sermon for the those wanting and able to get one by this particular means, The St. Andrew's Web Page. Thank you for participating in this exercise with me, and before the Lord our Redeemer.

To all the mothers in our church family at St. Andrew's and the mothers who choose to read this message, may Jesus bless you on this very special day. As with Easter, this is the first Mother's Day in the life of the Mitchell family that we have not been able to be together for a meal, laced with laughter, memory sharing, hugs and the creating of yet more memories. Rev. Rebekah and I did a Zoom Special yesterday morning which you will be able to access through the Web Page on Sunday morning. The conversational sermon in which I participated with her is all about mothers and Mothers day.

In this epistle I am going to continue the "We Are Witnesses," series, which I will be the first to admit will not be primarily a Mother's Day message. I do want to say HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY! To all the mothers in our church family and beyond. Your gifts and commitment are enjoyed by the churches you participate with. I am mindful of my mother, Pearl

Mitchell, Barbara's mother, Verna Irvine, and my faith mother, Mrs. Brown who led me to God and midwifed me into eternal life through faith in Jesus. She taught me by word and deed how to read the Bible and bring its teaching to bear in real life. And because I was an unexpected experience, she learned what our relationship meant when I announced the Lord had called me to ministry. My mother, Barbara's mother and Mrs. Brown, all helped me become the believer I am. Praise be to God. The sermon may be shorter this week...in part because I have already done one, with Rebekah.

In the midst of the sermon on the mount, Jesus turns the world upside down. The Pharisees were certain that the inheritance of eternal life was the birthright of the Jewish nation and attained by doing good works. Remember the answer that the "Teacher of the Law gave to Jesus? He had asked Jesus, "What must I do...to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25) Doings are by their nature works. Jesus responded with a question of HIS own: "What is written in the Law?" We would interpret that to mean, "What does the Bible say?" The Pharisee replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind. And love your neighbour as yourself." What the Pharisee assumed in that answer was, the Bible says I must be religious. A religious life defined in Judaism's terms means doing good works. And it has to be noted Jesus praised the Pharisee for his answer.

In Matthew 5 Jesus turns the world upside down. HE makes what to the Pharisee's way of viewing the world are astounding statements. I am paraphrasing for the sake of economy of space. The balance of this message is not about the Beatitudes as such. Jesus says, "Blessed are the spiritually poor (who struggle with the whole faith thing). They will be in heaven. HE says, "Blessed are those who have cherished loved ones who have died. God will take it upon HIMSELF to comfort them. "Blessed are the meek...the humble and submissive types. They get to inherit the world in which we live." HE said, "Blessed are the hungry and thirsty, they will get food and drink." HE said, "Blessed are those who show mercy. They will receive the mercy of God. He said that the pure in heart would "see God face to face." HE said, "Blessed are the peace makers, for they will be called the sons of God."

We are witnesses by the nature of where faith in Jesus takes us. We have heard HIS words and we have witnessed HIS power to keep HIS word to those who hear HIM and listen to what HE said.

I want to focus my attention this morning and your attention as you read this message on verse 5, the verse about Peace Makers. But I begin with this insight which applies to every one and each of the statements in the list. The Pharisees mouths dropped wide open as statement built upon statement. They did not think any of these things...the poor in spirit, the meek, the hungry and thirsty, (poorest of the poor), the merciful, the peace makers, had any merit in the sight of God

for which they should receive HIS blessing. These people whom Jesus suddenly named on a shoreline hillside in Galilee as a bouquet of God's flowers, were seen by the Pharisees as useless weeds. Jesus says, that when it comes to HIS Father's love and grace, His Father has taken notice of them as being very special.

The Pharisee's question is 'but what have they done to merit the attention of the Living God who took this people to be the apple of HIS eye? In Lerner and Lowe's "Camelot," it is Mordred who wants to see the destruction of Arthur's Round Table, who sings, as sarcastically as possible, "Its not the earth the meek inherit, it's the dirt!" The Pharisees would not only agree; they would say it is juste. Jesus turns things upside down. Samaritans count. God loves them too. God loves Gentiles as well as Jews. "He's got the whole world in HIS hands." And those hands are scarred with the nail prints of crucifixion, and cleansed with the reality of resurrection.

I want you to consider the importance of peace makers in our world. And I am not talking about the Colt .45 that Roy and Gene and Clint too, carried into battle. Peace maker! Jesus said, "They will be called the sons of God." He places their importance parallel to HIS own. Not the same as. Parallel. Running side by side. Because people who make peace when others would like to fight, change lives.

I like what Prime Minister Trudeau has done and is doing through this Covid-19 plague in Canada. It is not politics as

usual. He addresses us daily as an instrument of calm, dare I say, blessed assurance, at a time when people's lives have been tossed into turmoil and their livelihoods vaporized. And he is not alone. Premier Ford has likewise blossomed as a caring servant of the people. Did you see the shot of him in jeans and a jacket putting cartons of PPE on the back of his truck to deliver to a hospital or a care home? Did you hear the complimentary things said by both of these men about the other parties and the fact that they were acting as a team? Peace makers for the greater good of Canada and Canadians.

We are witnessing one of the brightest (most illuminating) moments in Canadian politics in my life time. I do not believe for a moment they have done everything right. But both of those men are trying to walk in the shoes of citizens who are suffering.

There have been moments in the life of the church when people would rather take sides and fight over an issue, than find a common ground that one and all could occupy and be reasonably comfortable. Blessed are the Peace Makers. They will be called the sons of God. Did Jesus mean what he said? HE would not have said it otherwise. And part of what Jesus said, is there will be those who try to crucify them for bringing fighting parties to the peace table so that war and division does not occur.

I cannot help but grin when I say this next bit. Believers could learn something significant if they took Jesus words

seriously. And I have to confess I have been at times guilty of the very judgementalism I am calling into question here. Lord forgive me, for not recognizing the Peace Makers as people who were....like you, more like you, than I wanted to be. I thank God for those who can call people to a higher cause, and get them to put their differences behind them, to get the job done. There are moments in our lives, and our lives as a church, where the cause of unity is more important than standing on what we think are important principles. As we age, sometimes we get wiser. Like being able to recognize that peace makers being called sons of God is not a slight against women. It means peace making women can be just as much like Jesus as any one else. Peace Makers are Christ-like. He made peace between HIS HOLY Father, and "a wretch like me." Thank you John Newton for putting that idea into words we sing with gusto through our tears.

We are witnesses. We have seen how Peace Makers operate. Praise God.

Let us pray;

Lord we give thanks for things we can see with our own eyes. We give thanks that YOUR Holy Spirit, works in us, such that like Mary your mother we might ponder on these things in our hearts. We thank you for blessing us such that we grow as we see and ponder and try to process what we see. Here at home we have boots on the ground. Make us mindful of others and the miracles of grace they manage to share. In Jesus name we pray. Amen