

April 25, 2021    Revolutionary Idea    Matthew 6:1-4

My pastoral note today will be brief. Barbara and I are doing well. I finished my antibiotic a week and a half ago, and have experienced no pain since...just the aches that go with arthritis and age. I have had tests, including a bone scan, and will find out what if anything those tests uncovered next week. What I expect to learn is that I am no longer 25.

Secondly I do not tend to think of myself as having great insight or being any kind of genius. As I look back over the past 13 months I am astonished that the Session and I got it so right, as we made decisions to suspend in person worship, to open up, and then to close again. But we did...we got it right. We have consistently managed to keep the St. Andrew's family safe. By the grace of God, thanks be to HIM who saves us! When I suggested we should suspend worship again, we had no idea how terrible the variants would spread, and I certainly did not foresee the thousands of cases that have become the daily score in the GTA. Our own area has continued to have a trickle of new cases most days. The Lord has been with us and has surely led us through it all. Please, stay safe. I am comforted that so many of you have been vaccinated. Wear a mask, self-isolate, wash hands, and use sanitizer when you are, out and about. The message today is from Matthew 6:1-4. The Sermon From The Dining Room Table is also available. Please remember friends of ours who live the other side of Toronto, who are battling Covid-19. To God be the glory!

How often we have seen the newscast and heard the sound bite. We are told the name of the benefactor, and the amount, often millions of dollars, donated to a specific cause...the construction of additional facilities at a University, the provision of state of the art equipment for a hospital. The donation of a famous work of art that could have been auctioned for a king's ransom, donated to one of the Provincial or Federal Art Galleries. We are impressed. We are to some extent grateful. Most of us couldn't have done anything like it if we tried! Ordinary working people never have the means. But, man, are we impressed when someone who has the means makes that whopper of a contribution.

Jesus puts such events in perspective. He says what amounts to "don't do your actions of great charity before men to be seen of them." And don't accompany the giving away of your cash with a press release to ensure wide coverage of the event. You will have no reward from your Father in heaven. And then later in the passage HE says, that those who do so, have had all the reward they are going to get. I make the observation, we tend to recognize the contributions of people with means, by placing plaques on a wall. There the notice remains. And to be sure some will see it and read it, and they even think, "who was he?" or "who was she?" And "how did they ever get to be so rich?" The fact is we forget the great donor almost as quickly as we applaud their sharing of their wealth, to the cause they embraced. And, yes, Jesus is saying their five minutes of fame is the only reward they will receive for what they did, for what they gave.

That seems a little harsh. As a cancer survivor, I am aware that I have benefited from the charitable donations of others, and some of them probably made generous donations. My father died due to complications from the same kind of cancer I had. Forty years ago it was a strain of cancer that could not be treated with surgery. Gifts to Cancer Research in the years between his death and my diagnosis, are part of the reason I am still here. When it came my time to fall ill, surgery was a relatively quick and easy fix. As I said, I am still here.

What Jesus is saying to us is, “if it is the right thing to do, do it quietly, privately, and without the hoopla of publicity, at a champagne event, with the press invited to take pictures, and plaster the story across the media and around the world.” And you can be sure, what Jesus means when HE says if it is the right thing to do, He means, if you are doing it because you love God and are seeking to be a good neighbour. Jesus words go to the heart of the thing...the why we do give to charities and their work. Motivation. Motivation. Motivation.

He is clearly saying that if we do the right thing for the wrong reasons, it amounts to something like washing your hands. The soap, the dirt, the contaminants, go down the drain with the water. If we do the right thing, in order to be applauded by the crowd that witnesses our actions, their applause will be the only reward we receive. Underlying these statements about doing the right thing is another insight. We cannot add an eighth of an inch to our stature before God, by

trying to impress the world, the crowd, or even our family and friends. That is not how this “standing with God works.”

The idea of doing the right thing very privately, is the idea that it should have as its motivation, the desire to serve God’s will, and benefit others. End of story. Then Jesus says, “Your Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you openly.”

As in all things, Jesus is concerned to open our eyes to the things of the heart. It matters where our hearts are. It matters what is in our hearts. If we give quietly to Cancer Research, or the local church, which is about service to others, God who always knows what we are doing and what are motives are, will bless us for loving and caring about the well being of others. If our efforts are sincere, attention from those around us, for doing the right thing simply will not matter.

This portion of Matthew, chapter 6, is teaching which Jesus shared with the crowds in Galilee, early in HIS three years of public ministry. HE knew what the people in that crowd needed more than anything else. HE was more than a little aware of where HIS journey was taking Him. Jesus is not about ethics lectures because it is great philosophy. HE is about saving lives. As HE sat on that hillside, and I have stood on that hillside in Galilee, looking down the mountain, to the waters of the Sea of Galilee, HE was mindful that those people and we needed saving. HE was there, to lead them to Calvary where HE would save them. And us. And you know there was no applause. HE

was cursed, beaten, betrayed and broken. HE did what the Father wanted HIM to do. Why? Because HE loved and loves us. God's heart overflows with love for you and I and our neighbours, whether we see it, acknowledge it or not. We are called to imitate Jesus. In all things. Matthew remember, died a martyr's death in Ethiopia. There was no applause for any of them. But seen by the Father? Yes. Rewarded by the Father in heaven. Yes.

Jesus mentions the gifts we give to support our local congregation and its work. The Temple in Jerusalem was not a place where the down and out, the poor, or the sick were welcome. It was common practice for the wealthy and well to do, to give their offerings with all the ceremony of a parade. Charitable giving to the needy is described by Jesus in verse 2 as accompanied by trumpets, and parades in the streets. Similarly the giving of the offerings at the local synagogues is lumped in as a hypocritical display, more like the awarding of the Oscars than doing holy work, doing the right thing for the right reason before God. One of the reasons we use offering envelopes, and guard the secret of what people give to the church, is right here in this text. It is not to make a show before the gathered crowd. Doing the right thing for the right reason, means only the Lord God Himself, needs to know the details. It is an indication of where our hearts are. Caring about serving God, and serving our neighbours.

Let us pray.

Lord who redeems, Jesus our Saviour, Spirit of Holiness, with us and among us, renew our minds. Fill our hearts with desire to do the right thing for the right reasons, seeking only that your will and grace and holiness, might be served. See what we do in private. Read the reasons for our actions in our hearts and minds. And may your name receive the glory as we seek to serve YOU, YOUR people, and YOUR church. Grant us that heart that was in Christ when HE bore the cross, and gave HIS life, to save others. Lead us and guide us to YOUR kingdom. Amen