

Worship at home

Current sermon series: Stewards of Souls
November 15, 2020

Call to worship: Psalm 97:1, 12

Opening prayer:

Transforming God,
you take the night and give us day.
You take our strife and give us peace.
You take our sadness and give us joy.
You take our fear and give us courage.
You take death and give us new life.
You give grace beyond all expectation;
you give love beyond all imagination.
So, we praise and adore you as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
one God, three in one,
Now and forever. Amen.

Assurance of pardon:

The apostle Paul proclaimed that: Neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Let us rejoice that, no matter what is happening around us, no matter what we have done, God's deep love will always search us out.

To all who turn to God through Jesus Christ in faith, in confession, and in repentance it is my privilege to say: you are forgiven. Accept God's pardon. And enjoy his peace. Thanks be to God!

Hymn #352 "And can it be that I should gain"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29myH7xXI4M>

Stewardship of Souls: Self-Control and Gentleness

Thus far we've considered love, faith, patience, kindness and its related quality generosity. And we've looked at some essential root beliefs that need to be nourished in order that the Holy Spirit can develop within us those qualities:

- that God is love (*agape*)
 - that I am loved by this God
- that Jesus is the incarnation of this God (the Son of God)
 - that in Jesus God declares me righteous

- that in Jesus is an experience of life that exceeds the constraints and struggles of our present moments (eternal life)
- that despite momentary disappointments and frustrations, because of Jesus and his ministry to us, *it will be done and it will be enough*
- that this God is real, able, and willing to meet our needs which belief thus opens us to meet the needs of others.

As disciples of Jesus, it is our responsibility to nurture these root beliefs, regardless of our circumstances, as we steward the soul God has entrusted to us.

Next week we'll finish this series with the qualities from Galatians 5:22: joy and peace. Today we'll consider the qualities of self-control and gentleness (or, meekness depending on the translation of scripture you're using).

READ MATTHEW 26:36, 47-54.

Once there was a boy who was born into a loving and faithful family. His mother and father carefully taught him the inherited ways and beliefs of their family's religious tradition and cultural practices. They taught him the rules of the faith and the norms of society. As the boy grew in years, he began to ask questions. As young as 12 years old, he would go to the centers of religious teaching and ask the elders and teachers: Why do we do that? Why do we believe this? As he became aware of the teachings, and the root beliefs and values, he began to see that there was much to commend his inherited faith. And, as he became aware of associated behaviours, he also began to see that there was much that needed to be reformed and some things that needed to be rejected. He began to create for himself a different set of values upon which he based his choices for how to act.

Because of this, as time went on and people began to notice how he behaved differently than others and seemed to act according to a different set of values he began to feel pressure. People began to push back. Sometimes they would try and get him to conform, other times they would just ridicule and ostracize him. Yet he never wavered.

One night, when he was praying with some friends, a mob approached to arrest him. He could have recanted, he could have run away, he could have joined the

reactionary justice of his friends and fought back. But he didn't. Firm in his examined beliefs, he calmly asserted in the midst of the chaotic darkness that the sword isn't The Way. He would face much violence in the hours ahead, yet in the midst of it all he was a model of reserved power. He wasn't weak, and he wasn't reactionary or impulsive. He was a model of meekness. Of self-control.

He was Jesus.

Lynn Weiss is a clinical psychologist and expert on Attention Deficit Disorder in adults as well as children, she has related self-control to our embedded system of values.

Self-control is the ability to act in a certain way despite external pressures. And, the related quality of gentleness/meekness, is reasoned action. It's not weakness, it's action that doesn't bend under pressure and also responds to circumstances according to examined beliefs, rather than reacts. Self-control and meekness are defined by what we hold to be good and not good.

If you value something as good you will do that activity (even if you know it isn't good). It will be difficult, if not impossible, to restrain yourself. If you carry an embedded and unexamined value for an "eye for an eye" form of retributive justice as did Jesus' companion, then you will react to threats with violence, even if you know that's not the Good Way.

The apostle Paul captured this dilemma beautifully in Romans 7:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... I can *will* what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.¹

Part of healthy human development is to become aware of these values and then to choose which we'll retain and which we'll discard. Often this happens when we become aware of certain patterns of behaviour we'd like to change:

I really like coffee. I like the ritual of grinding beans. The smell. The look. The taste. However, over the past year or two I've become aware of how coffee affects my mood, cognitive ability, and my ability to respond to circumstances in a reasoned way instead of reactionary. I now am careful as to when, how often, and with what foods I

¹ Romans 7:15, 18b-20

drink my coffee. However, that hasn't always been my practice. It wasn't until I started to be mindful of the real effect coffee has on me and began to unpack why I drink it that I started to uncover my embedded beliefs. I began drinking coffee when I was in Scouts. All my leaders drank coffee. So much coffee was drunk that we would attach our coffee mug to our belts with a bit of rope so that we would be ready to have a cup at whatever campfire we happened to stop. Those experiences, together with good marketing, resulted in coffee becoming entangled with my understanding of what made for an adult. A rugged adult. As I began to unpack these embedded beliefs, I could then choose whether or not to believe them. I still drink coffee. I still like the ritual and paraphernalia that comes with coffee. Yet I've realized that by drinking less coffee, and drinking it with more discernment, I can actually act more mature than by consuming great quantities. And I've come to appreciate things like flavour as well as the environmental and economic impacts over quantity. Thus, changing my root beliefs, I change my desire. Changing my desire, I am able to choose whether to say "yes" to another cup or "no."

As Paul wrestled with his dilemma, he came to the conclusion that he would never be able to exercise self-control apart from the grace of Christ:

So, I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Self-control is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Our job as disciples of Jesus is not to make ourselves more self-controlled. Our job is to tend the soil in which lie the root beliefs. And discern which are healthy and which are not.

If you're a disciple of Jesus, he is the plumbline against which you compare your values. He is the model of reserved power. Of meekness. He is our example. His word is our teacher. His Spirit is our enabler.

In the words of the hymn:

May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day,
 Jesus' love and power controlling all I do or say.
 May the peace of God my Sovereign rule my life in everything,
 that I may be calm to comfort sick and sorrowing.

May I run the race before me, strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus as I onward go.

And to him, with the Father and the Spirit belong all glory, honour, and power,
now and forevermore.

Amen.

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession:

We thank you, God of all life and each life,
that you are with us every day, in each challenge and opportunity.
In our weakness, you are strength.
In our darkness, you are light on the journey.
In our questions, you are wisdom for our choices.
Stay with us in these days when so much seems uncertain,
and help us to serve you faithfully, when and as we are able.

God of loving kindness:

we give you thanks for moments of joy and celebration in our lives
even amidst the ongoing pandemic,
for love given and received,
for friendships which bring us meaning and happiness, even at a distance,
and for family members who show us glimpses of unconditional love.
In all our relationships and interactions,
keep us mindful of your call to see you in one another.

God of the nations,

we pray for our country and the countries of this world,
as we all struggle to face the choices COVID-19 sets before us.
Guide those who frame laws and shape policy,
and those who keep the peace and administer justice.
There are so many new challenges to consider
and we pray your wisdom will open our leaders' minds and hearts
to develop more equitable ways of ordering our communities.

God of peace,

we remember with sadness the dangerous divisions between nations
and the games leaders play to get the better of each other.
By your Holy Spirit, move in places torn by war and violence,
to protect the vulnerable and those who advocate for justice to prevail.
Show us how to be peacemakers in troubled times.

God of healing:

we pray for those who are suffering in these difficult days of pandemic,
for those who mourn the loss of someone or something dear.
Draw close to all who fear the future.
Surround each one with your love
and show us how to bring comfort and support into situations of hurt and pain.

God of life:
you hold all souls in your loving care, the dead as well as the living.
We thank you for your saints of every age who continue to inspire us,
and for all who have meant the world to us and now live with you.
Keep us in communion with them
and, at the last, bring us all to dwell together in your light.

Hymn #644 “May the mind of Christ my Saviour”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_ZBhSxWots

Blessing:
The Lord bless you and keep you,
the Lord be kind and gracious to you,
the Lord look upon you with favour,
and grant you peace.
Amen.