

Sermon: Shine Your Life
Scripture: Deut. 30 and Matthew 5
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
Date: February 16, 2020

There is Land of Pure Delight

Moses, the great figure of the Hebrew people, stands upon the mountain that overlooks Canaan, the Promised Land, separated only by the River Jordan. It had been 40 years since the Hebrew people were freed from slavery in Egypt, 40 years wandering in the desert having to hold fast to that promise that something, something better was to come. Except for 2 of them, all the original liberated Hebrew slaves had died in the wilderness and those standing on the brink of the promised land were their children. 40 years, with Moses doing his best to lead them through and yet he himself would not be allowed to enter. He could see it from where he stood and the speech he gives in Deuteronomy chapter 30, the laws and commands that he shared with those who would cross over, was to prepare this motley crew of Hebrew desert dwellers for becoming the people of Israel inhabiting the holy land. There were a lot to the laws packed into Deuteronomy and Leviticus but the point of them all was clear and simple, they were all to help the people: “love the Lord your God and worship no other.”

There was to be no king appointed over the Hebrew people through Moses because that could lead to the worship of the King instead of God. There was to be no accumulation of land by individual families because then the land and their wealth would become more important than God. There was to be a meticulous keeping of dietary laws based upon the order of creation to curtail human use of the land and keep it aligned to God’s

original purpose and design. There was to be a Sabbath day where no one – slaves, animals, children, no one – did any work but rather a day set aside for remembering and honoring God. It was all about keeping the Hebrew people’s eyes trained on God even as they became more comfortable and more settled than they had been in generations.

The concern was that they’d forget... who they were and whose they were. The fear is that they would fall asleep from the weight of this world and lose sight of the less dense but equally real connectivity and accountability and expectation of the heavenly dimension, of God. They were a people meant to be shining through with the light of God to others; in their saltiness to give the God-flavor to humanity. As they returned to the Promised Land of their ancestors, the Land of their Souls, they were to be God-bearers to the rest of the world. Moses commanded just before he died: “love the Lord your God, walk in obedience to Him, keep his commands, listen to His voice, hold fast to Him, for He is your life and God will grant you blessing.” For they could only be God-bearers and let their lives shine, if they returned again and again to the land of their souls and when they got off track, return again and then return again....

Return again, return again, return to the land of your soul.

Return to who you are, return to what you are, return to where you are,

Born and reborn again.

A couple thousand years later, a descendent of one of those Hebrew people would invite his people to return again, saying that the religiosity of the day had become too cramped and tight a space and He called for returning to the heart of the faith, the original vision of being God-bearers for others for their lives had been covered over by too many layers of

tradition and practice and laws devoid of direct God-experience. Jesus came to give them that God experience again that they knew so well in the wilderness, reminding them of what was essential, what was most real, and who sat at the heart of the land of their souls.

As he spoke to them from the mount, he laid out the beatitudes, explaining to them that the blessed ones are those who turn to a greater dependence upon God, saying, as Eugene Peterson translates, when you're at the end of your rope, there is less of you and more of God. SO blessed are those who mourn and are meek and poor in spirit. And then he goes on in his sermon to bring them to that impoverished of spirit place if they were not already by speaking a series of "you've heard it said, but I say"... like "you've heard it said you shall not murder, but I say anyone who is angry with his brother or sister is liable to judgment." And "you've heard it said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you!" And also "you've heard it said, do not commit adultery but I say you look at someone lustfully and you've committed adultery in your heart." So that those who didn't think they were so poor in spirit when he began pretty quickly changed their minds and turned humbly towards God.

Jesus took the law of Moses and offered a commentary on them in the Sermon on the Mount that cuts beyond the surface and superficial neatness and clean-ness of our lives and invites us to look at the deeper motivations that drive us. And we realize that inevitably, if we are honest, our lives need a shining. Too often in a day's or week's or year's time our lives can become dull and tarnished and distorted and in need of a shine so that we can better shine the light of God through. But how do we do the shining of what has become tarnished? Well, our scriptures are pretty clear how and there are three primary practices among others:

Worship is one way we shine our lives and can help make our lives shine – to praise and sing and hear the sacred scriptures again and turn ourselves toward God in this weekly practice of adoration. We pull back our adoration of sports heroes and Hollywood stars and political giants and remember where our true devotion and allegiance lies, not to them but to God and God's purposes.

Secondly there's prayer which shines our lives. Jesus is always going off by himself cause he's tired, because he's sad, because he needs to be restored and healed himself and the quiet and stillness, the pause of prayer does that for us. Just a little plug here to remind you that every Wednesday morning at 6:30am a few early morning risers gather into the darkened but warm Ripley chapel for 20 minutes of sitting in a circle with candles in silent prayer. Then we get up and leave mostly in silence too and go on about our day with hopefully our light shining a little clearer and brighter.

And finally, how we shine our lives, the scriptures are clear, we orient ourselves towards others in their need and we give, generously, what is needed... even if we don't feel like it, especially if we don't feel like it: A dollar and a smile on the street. A hot meal for someone who is sick or grieving. We stand up for someone being mistreated. We reach down and pick up someone who has fallen. We recognize injustice and take a simple step to address or correct it. We offer blessing especially to those we feel like cursing. And so on and so forth. Let me close with this little tune that I'll line out for you to repeat and then we'll sing it together.

*In All I do may I act freely and simply from the depths of my heart
moved by love, moved by love!*