



GPS GUIDE: AUGUST 29, 2021

Grow. Pray. Study

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon: Go Be Reconciled

Matthew 5: 21-24

“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

Monday: Read Leviticus 19: 1-2, 9-19

Holiness is a matter of great concern to the priestly writers of Leviticus. Not because of a need to “earn” personal salvation but because holiness is the attribute of God. Here in chapter 19 we find the most famous verse in the whole of Leviticus: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”. When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus, who is a good Jew, quotes this passage. What does it mean to love your neighbor? Well, if we take the context of this verse into account, then loving your neighbor has more to do with action than with emotion. You must be honest in your business dealings — don’t put your finger on the scale. You must not defraud or slander your neighbor. You must render just judgments. Leviticus is more than a list of sometimes arcane rules and customs. It is a profound theological statement about life with God. The laws and rituals are grounded in the reality of who God is and who God has called us to be: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.” Holiness is not something we can achieve ourselves, of course, and when we try to do so, we often fall into sin, adopting a “holier-than-thou” attitude. Holiness is the work of God in us, for the sake of Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. The phrase “You shall be holy” is just a command, it is a promise. And to believe that promise is to begin to be formed into the people God calls us to be, a people living out our day-to-day lives in genuine love for God and for our neighbors. Have you ever thought about

holiness as related to how you treat others? In what ways does this text help you understand what it means to live a life of holiness?

Prayer: As I put my faith into practice may I remember to live in your holiness, O God. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Psalm 119: 33-40

Verses 33-40 of Psalm 119 contain a series of petitions to God. The psalmist implores God to “teach me the way of your statutes,” “give me understanding,” “lead me in the path of your commandment,” “turn my heart to your decrees . . . my eyes from looking at vanities,” “give me life,” “confirm your promise,” and “turn away the disgrace.” Why? Because, the psalmist says in verse 40, “I have longed for your precepts.” The writer understands the difficulty of properly following God and asks repeatedly for instruction and guidance. To say, “Teach me, O Lord,” is to acknowledge that God is teacher, leader, turner, confirmer, and giver - giver of understanding and giver of life. Our God is not a God of arbitrary rules and regulations. God graciously gives us a means for living as God’s people, not to restrict us, but to free us to truly be the people of God. Living as God’s people is often difficult. When you examine your own life where do you need to ask God for instruction and guidance? What do you need to let go of so you can live more fully in God’s ways?

Prayer: Turn my eyes away from looking at worthless things. Make me live by your way. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Colossians 3: 12-17

As ones God has chosen, set apart as holy and loved, Paul reminds the church that they should make sure their behavior matches up with their identity; their outside should match their inside. Knowing who they are helps them to clothe themselves with behavior that fits. Just as ill-fitting clothes detract from the beauty of a person, so too do ill-fitting behaviors detract from the image of Christ that believers should exhibit. The qualities Paul recommends paint the picture of a gentle person. Too often in our culture gentleness is regarded in a negative way. We have a tendency to think of gentleness as the opposite of strength. Yet conducting oneself in a gentle manner requires great spiritual strength. Kindness, humility, patience, and forgiveness are garments of gentleness, and love is the belt that binds them together. When you are getting dressed for church on Sunday mornings do you remember to put on kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, and gentleness? What about during the week?

Prayer: Dress our congregation in the garments of your holiness, O Lord. Amen.

Thursday: Read Isaiah 52: 7-10

Peace in the Hebrew is Shalom; it is way more than the absence of war! Shalom means health and wholeness which encompasses all of creation. Perfect shalom brings with it a harmony and unity of all peoples and all of creation. Shalom is

living in a right relationship with God, with one another, and with God’s creation. That is why in Isaiah we are given that beautiful vision of shalom where all natural enemies shall live in harmony with each other; all suffering, sorrow and tears shall come to an end (Isaiah 11:6-9). The writer of Isaiah 52 proclaims, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace...” It is often said of Christians that we are the only hands and feet of Jesus in the world. Have you ever thought of your feet as beautiful? Do you consider yourself God’s messenger? How do you proclaim the good news of the gospel to others? In what ways do you live out a sense of Shalom in the world?

Prayer: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Amen.

Friday: Read Micah 6:1-8

The Good Samaritan who dares not pass by another human being, even when that other was considered an enemy - The father of the elder son in the prodigal son who did not choose one son over another but found his two arms wide enough to embrace both his sons - Mary and the other women standing at the foot of the cross no matter how painful and frightening - Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah weeping together in their grief - The woman with her alabaster flask who broke it open and poured it out without holding back - and Jesus who wept, prayed, broke bread, touched, and healed the people: all of these are real flesh and blood examples of lovingkindness, loving tenderly, loving steadfastly. And yet in our society, to love kindness does not come easily. Perhaps this is because loving tenderly involves one knowing confidently one is loved and is able to take the risk to be moved, to be vulnerable, and to be able to see another person's suffering as one's own. When has someone shown you lovingkindness? How did it make you feel? To whom might God be calling you to act with loving kindness in this next week?

Prayer: Holy God, strengthen me to live as you require. Amen.

Saturday: Read John 17:20-26

As it was for the disciples then, so too is it crucial for us today to return to Jesus’ prayer, for it describes his hope, his vision, and his picture of what we, his followers, are to look like and how we are to live our lives together. It is a prayer for community. Jesus prays that, “all may be one.” Within that community the prayer is for unity: “that all may be one.” Does that mean we all have to get along all the time? Agree all the time? No! Jesus’ prayer reminds us that our unity, our “oneness” is to be a sign to the world of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ. If you have been a part of a family, a member of a church, or a community, you know that within that love there can be disagreements and squabbling. We are human. But the mystery of the incarnation is that God desired unity with us so much God became one of us. It is with God’s help that we can live into that oneness. In what ways have you experienced the unity that Jesus prayed for? How do you, with God’s help, live into that oneness?

Prayer: May we be completely one with you, God, and with one another. Amen.



FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH BIRMINGHAM
(Disciples of Christ)