

Prayer of the Holy Spirit

Good Morning Friends!

We continue our series focused on a Wonder-full life here within the Saint James faith community... where we are loving and serving God and God's people.

As was mentioned last week, resources of time, talent, and treasure are needed to initiate, build and sustain a community... Saint James has been blessed with many servants who have shared their love of God through their service to God's people through this church. **IN FACT, PLEASE BRING PHOTOS OF LOVED ONES OF THE CHURCH OR YOUR FAMILY WHO NURTURED AND SHARED THEIR LOVE OF GOD IN YOU. WE WILL USE THEM IN WORSHIP IN THE COMING WEEKS.**

We live an "incarnational" faith – the belief that, like Jesus, our faith is not just an idea, but it gets lived out in our actions in the world. So our focus today is to look in to our heart and our vision for our presence and our impact in the world. Truly, looking in to how we 'spend' our assets of time, energy, and money so that we approach life with attentiveness and intentionality.

Today's scripture reading from Matthew comes in the midst of Jesus' first teaching discourse... often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. This 'sermon' extends from chapter 5 thru chapter 7. Let us understand WHY this gospel is written.

Remember that the writer of this gospel, Matthew, is writing to a mostly Jewish community that has had a parting of ways with the home group. This came about after the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed (70ce), and their foundation as God's people was destroyed. Some believed Jesus was an agent of God who revealed and re-presented God's character, will, and interpreted scripture. Others did not.

Further, the community to whom Matthew writes is seeking to find its way in a 'homeland' occupied by the Roman empire. They put Jesus to death; they destroyed the temple.

The Romans controlled political, economic, and military structures to benefit themselves at the expense of others. The ruler of the empire was as if a god. So, from Matthew's writing, we hear Jesus' countercultural alternative vision for God's kin-dom and God's people.

So the message of the Gospel of Matthew is: To be a Christian... a follower of Jesus... was to be a participant in an active community of loving, merciful, inclusive, praying, and mission-minded servants. The heart is to pour out love and mercy serving others, not serving themselves.

The specific passage we've read encourages us to TRUST in God not in the accumulation of material possessions & wealth. In other words, your status/value in life should not be based on material things. Rather, the aspects of loving and serving...the outpouring from the heart is what matters.

The words of Clarence, the Angel, reflect this lifestyle of pouring out from the heart, with love and mercy, inclusiveness and service for others.

Last week I invited you to reflect on your personal experience (an autobiography) of money. I shared a brief reflection on my history of shaping forces and discomfort with the topic of money.

There is often fear and anxiety that is rooted in the role money has in our life. Our own self-worth often gets linked to money.

Friends, Jesus teaches that each of us is of sacred worth to God. And so the root of our worth is remaining connected to the source of our creation and valuing our loving and serving as the SALT and LIGHT that is the heart of Jesus message.

Let us look in to our hearts this week with deepening self-awareness. How do you spend your time? Your money? How do these practices reflect an awareness and connection to the Creator that is loving and serving? And when fear and anxiety arise... let us be intentional in re-framing the circumstance... to be creative and curious rather than fearful and anxious. For example... when thinking about paying bills for the month...starting sentences with 'I wonder how I will creatively solve my cash flow demands this month ...' It shifts from dreading to imagination, turning scarcity thinking into abundance thinking.

That is one reason I use deep breathing for centering. Why I walk or sit in the middle of creation... on the back deck... in the chapel in the woods...while driving to catch the sunset or gaze at the stars. Look in to the heart center, know you are loved and be the love that matters. May it be so. Amen.