

Good Morning! Let us pray... *Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created And you shall renew the face of the earth. O God who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations, through Christ our Lord. May the words of my mouth & the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight...rock & redeemer of us all. Amen*

“Lighting the Way, part 1” Micah 6:1-8; Matthew 5:1-12 (Ps 15)

Remember last week I shared that I had reconnected with a long-time friend who asked the question: ‘what was it that caused the shift in your career’?

And the short answer is...I was drawn to Methodism because of the Open Table...where all were welcome to receive the bread & cup as signs of God love and grace.

However, I also shared how I participated in a 3 day retreat-like experience where I couldn’t run or hide or distract myself. It was a short course about living as a Christian. In essence, I was immersed in a time of teaching and learning about just how much God loves me and desires a relationship with me through Jesus Christ. When I returned from that weekend, I was different. I viewed the world around me with new eyes...and with a renewed heart. There was a new path to walk, and Jesus lighting the way.

Over the years since that weekend, there has been just one thing that has convicted me to the point of dropping to my knees, time and again... and that is pride. I share this with you because, I haven’t met a pastor or a preacher or any other person who gives witness to the gospel who doesn’t shudder when these two scriptures roll around.

Both of these scriptures, when we HEAR them, serve to point us to something bigger than ourselves. These passages call us to change our ways, and reminds us that God’s way is not the way most of us live our lives.

Last week I offered this definition...To repent is to change... to shift from self-orientation to an orientation to something larger.

In the trial between God and God’s people, Micah reports how God suffers with the people’s unfaithfulness. And the people want to know...well what must we do...what sacrifice would please you... a burnt offering, a first born child dedicated to serve you, God?

No, God desires relationship... a connectedness that reflects who God is. God desires justice, compassion, & faithfulness. Each one of these requires

relationship built on recognizing not my interest, but the interest (common good) of the person in front of me and the interest of the larger community. It is relationship that values that you and I are created in God's image, made of the same dust, and truly connected by the God of all creation.

Pride has no place because it too often looks like I accomplished this...and I accomplished that...and way too often at the expense of another.

As Jesus sits on the mountainside, and as he shares his vision for the Alternative Community of God's reign, he re-presents what God desires from God's people and how God blesses God's people.

These nine blessings call all of us to check ourselves...and shift our hearts toward the path Jesus illuminates and calls us to follow.

My life was dramatically altered as I listened and heard of God's love for me. I could not ignore nor forget that the depth of God's love was more than I could comprehend.

What I want you to know is that this path is not impossible... to do justice, to embrace faithfulness, and to walk humbly with God.

When we walk this path there is simplicity, there is hopefulness, and there is compassion.

When we approach life in this way, as a pattern of focus or spiritual practice, we are not shaped by the world while in the world.

Jesus speaks (in Matthew's gospel) to a people who are living in a sociopolitical context that includes oppression and a privileged establishment. Yet Jesus speaks to people that God deems worthy, not because of their status or what they've achieved, but because God chooses those who are undervalued.

Every day, I remind myself to leave pride at the cross because I am called to simplicity, hopefulness and compassion. It is not about me, it is all about how God loves, even me. And God loves you, too, and there's nothing you can do about it.

Join me in the prayer of response to the Word **Radiant Light, word that became flesh and moved into the neighborhood, shine into our hearts. Illuminate the path that we might dwell in darkness no longer. Summoning Word, guide our footsteps in the ways of life, that our lives might reflect your Light. Draw us from the shadows into the dawning of your glory, through the light we find in Christ Jesus. Amen**

May it be so. So be it. Amen.