

Songs of Love and Justice

Psalm 101:1-2; Matthew 5:2-10 || Pastor Shawn Gendall || 14 June 2020

*To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW together as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
– CG Mission Statement*

Icebreaker: *“Stories create empathy; relationship creates empathy.”* How have you experienced this to be true?

Sermon Summary for Psalm 101:1-2, Mathew 5:2-10

There is something very unique and very deep about the pain our culture is experiencing right now. And for very good reason. That pain has worked its way into our church family, causing us to ask some big questions and seek how to thoughtfully, purposefully respond to these cries for justice. It's good to remember a few things, which can help deepen our resolve and courage, enliven our creativity, and unify us as we engage with these questions:

First, as disciples of Jesus, we are a community of worshipers. Our ultimate orientation and the affections of our collective heart are unto God. We worship a God whose heart is for justice and inclined toward the oppressed. He is a redeemer. And so we must ask ourselves: What is God calling us to do here? And how might we live into that calling for His glory and to the accomplishment of His redemptive purposes? We consider these questions in light of the fact that all gifts are given from God to be used for the flourishing of all His image bearers.

Second, we have been called, gathered and gifted by the Holy Spirit. Our interactions with each other and the world are therefore intended to be an expression of the wisdom, peace, and truth of the Spirit. Meaning we have the responsibility – especially in these times – to think and pray deeply about this reality: that Christ lives within us. For if this is true, the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control) must enter into our conversations both with one another and with the world.

These two things aren't meant to divert our attention from the issues at hand. Quite the opposite! They are meant to bring them into our most pressing reality of proclaiming and living the Gospel and our fundamental mission of making disciples. In this context, that means a disciple of God is someone who will not tolerate and will not abide racism. And Psalm 101 offers a path to engage with these questions as caring neighbors:

Ponder. WEB DuBois once wrote, “the tragedy of the age is that we know so little of each other.” With both responsibility and love for our neighbors, we as a church are called to ask about and listen to their stories. Stories and relationship create empathy: When we know someone's story and we love them, we are reflexively concerned with their well-being. This means reading the books, watching the films, learning the stories, building the friendships. That is how we prepare ourselves for the question: Do you hear me? Do you believe my story?

Walk With Integrity of Heart (v2). This requires examination and repentance. As Gene Joo recently wrote, racism wages “a perpetual guerrilla war against justice and equality. Its venom is as toxic and insidious as ever before... It's painful to pinpoint it in one's own heart. But racism will never be rooted out and dealt with on a systemic level until it is first confessed and lamented on a personal level. It has to begin with me.” To walk with integrity also calls us to embody the Gospel for the sake of the Gospel – to live it out in Christian community. We pursue justice because we love Jesus, and at the same time, we come to understand Jesus because we pursue justice.

Sing of Steadfast Love and Justice (v1). Music requires harmony; in order for a chord to sound right, all the notes must be played. Similarly, though things may be right personally in our world, there isn't harmony unless things are also right in their world. This calls for the embodiment of the Gospel, where our words are our deeds and our deeds are our words. May we take this to heart as we meditate on the words of our Savior:

Worship: Matthew 5:2-10

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Discussion Questions *(It's better to wrestle deeply with a few good questions than to gloss over many.)*

- How did the sermon impact your thinking about love and justice?
 - Share a struggle and a blessing you have experienced recently.
- Which of the Beatitudes is the most comforting to you today?
 - Which do you most need to hear? Are any of them challenging to you right now?
- How should our reactions to injustice be guided by our faith in Jesus?
 - How are the experiences of both the last few weeks as well as the last several months changing you to be more like Christ? In what ways has the Holy Spirit been working on you?
- What does it look like to have the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control) enter into these conversations?
 - Does the fruit of the Spirit manifest differently when these conversations are with fellow Christians versus when they are with the world?
 - In the midst of these difficult conversations, how can we align our expectations of one another (how we may expect fellow Christians to feel, act, etc.) with grace, humility and patience?
 - What does it look like for you to be an active listener?

Prayer: For racism to be rooted out and dealt with on a systemic level, it must first be confessed and lamented on a personal level. Pray prayers of confession and repentance. (The weekly prayer guide can be a resource.)

Engage & Experience: When you know someone's story and you love them, you are receptively and reflectively concerned with their well-being. Read the books, watch the films, listen to the stories, build the friendships and be able to say, "I hear you. I believe you. I am with you."