

PRAISE INTERNATIONAL
THE WAY OF CHRIST.. HEAVEN ON EARTH...
MATTHEW 18:1, ROMANS 13:8-10

Good Morning
Prayer Needs

Read – text Selections – TPT Matthew 18:1, Romans 13:8-10

I want to talk to you this morning about what I am calling 'The Way of Christ'

- *I beg you, Lord, let the fiery, gentle power of your love take possession of my soul, and snatch it away from everything under heaven, that I may die for love of your love as you saw fit to die for love of mine. Amen. St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)*

In the 1984 classic Karate Kid Movie. The original movie tells the story of a young boy who after being bullied and beat up by classmates who are trained in karate - he reaches out to a man he thought was just an old eccentric building maintenance man - Mr Miyagi. What he discovered was that Mr Miyagi was a skilled master in Karate. So naturally he pursued Mr Miyagi to get what he was sure he needed enough karate training to help him deal with his new found bullies.

- **Simply put Daniel La Russo's best imagination for this old man was not to get to know him but get him to help fix his problem.**
- So the story unfolds in such a way that for anyone who has seen the movie they will seldom forget. He paints a fence, sands a deck, wax's a car....for days just work for Mr Miyagi until finally he has had enough.
- Then in a dramatic display Mr Miyagi shows Daniel how these 'chores' were teaching him to use his muscles to respond to karate attacks.
- **Then of course Daniel not only discovers he has much to learn but he actually wants to come to know this man Mr Miyagi a journey that changes how he lives and inhabits his world.**

Soon Daniel is no longer preoccupied with learning a technique to fix his problem but he is getting to know a man who is doing much more than teaching him 'the motions of Karate' - he is helping Daniel learn about the 'motivations' that should inhabit his body.

So much about that original movie speaks to how many of us first come to God – which is not unlike how His disciples were looking for 'Messiah' who could fix life...is the image in their mind...

- One who can fix our problems – by means of 'sacred violence'. The one who can help us learn how to defeat our enemies...and we often couch it in those terms.
- I wonder how many prayer meetings or calls to prayer found their motivation in goals not too much different than young Daniel La Russo. **I have a problem that needs to be fixed.**
- And lest anyone hear anything I am NOT saying - the truth is most of us come to God because of the bullies who have left us wounded and alone!

Then we find ourselves being invited by Jesus to sand the floor...wax the car...take up our Cross...

- And it doesn't feel like it is the thing we need....almost feels disconnected...
- We need to defeat the problem...

So we turn to God...we want to Get God on our side....when God is actually intent on inviting us to a new way of inhabiting our life and our living not just our motions but our motivations – in and from the way of the Cross – self giving self emptying love and forgiveness.

And the secret is simply this Christ in you!
Yes, Christ in you bringing with Him the hope of all the glorious things to come.
Col 1:27b JB Phillips

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Beloved here is Good News - the primary practice of the Christian life is not just a duty or obligation but the very essence of the Kingdom of God where we can experience what it means to be fully alive - to live in, from love and because of love.

Our scripture today is from the book of Romans following chapter 12:1

- *I urge you therefore to offer your bodies as living sacrifices....*
- How often I have heard this taught and spoken of as a call to **try a little harder** and **do a little more....**
- Yet Paul says in vs 9 *let love be without hypocrisy - beloved The Way of Christ can only be lived in and from Love!*

One of the biggest challenges of the western evangelical church has included a history of attempting to resist and stand against obvious evil and wrong....'the way of the world' defines greatness by 'removing our enemy' by means of power and force in what we call 'sacred violence' – meaning 'God is on our side' – at the cost of Love.

This is exactly the wrestle of Jesus friends revealed so clearly in Matthew 18...*who is the greatest?*

- I was thinking about the disciples, why are they asking these questions that seem disconnected?
- **Thomas** who is known as doubting Thomas – *Lord we don't know where you are going...*
- Thomas unless I see His hands...have you ever considered that his doubt was NOT that Jesus was raised from the dead?
- The gospels record repeated individuals who had been raised from death - including Lazarus who had been dead for 3 days - Thomas 'saw' that - **so what was he doubting?**
 - How could a 'Messiah' carry wounds of crucifixion and establish a Kingdom?
 - How does Good beat Evil like that? You have to 'take a stand' in force.
 - I watched this in living color yesterday in a tv interview for a political candidate...
 - His best imagination of Israel's Kingdom was the Maccabean revolt 150 years prior - when by 'sacred' violent force they had 'removed' their oppressors.
- Thomas was not alone - believing the common conclusion of many in the Jewish faith that **Grace was proven by works** - not just their personal purity to the law but their works of zeal, separatism and resistance to their oppressors. Messiah would set them free – like that.
- Tells us plainly Jesus are you that 'Messiah' John 10, John 14 - **show us the way....**even before His resurrection they ask are you at this time going to establish 'that Kingdom?'
- Their best imagination was not unlike Daniel La Russo...**sure their motivation** – Jesus show us the **motions- we need** a 'savior' to remove obstacles and fix my challenges.
- Jesus is confronting their heart motivations.

The faith later birthed in Thomas in His encounter with Jesus

- Is not just His physical resurrection from the dead but unto a whole different way of living - for love, in love and because of love.
- Faith to believe that love can drive out hate...I don't need 'sacred violence' – which by the way became the heartbeat of Dr MLK's leadership in the Civil Rights movement – it was based in the nonviolent 'Way of Christ'.
- This Kingdom is about a different way of living...the way of Christ – **in, from and because of**

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Love!

- Until John finally says we know we have been born of God if we love one another - ahh this is what Jesus meant when He said *'all men will know you are my disciples if you love one another'*.

Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of God - Matthew 18:1

- This question is dripping in Maccabean thinking...or **Western thinking...**
- After all Kingdoms are 'removed' by dominance, power and strength.
- **Removal of enemies by Sacred Violence** becomes a believable storyline- the power to overthrow the present oppression must be not just an equal but a more dominant strength – so then violence begins to sound ok...
- **Yet beloved it was NEVER the Way of Christ – anyone or anything that tells us anything else is not representing the True Lord Jesus.**

Jesus can you give us a clue about *whose who* - how is this going to roll...

- **Jesus is NOT concerned about how great we appear but our way of living and being!**
- I believe this is the only way to really properly understand the remainder of Matthew 18
 - Jesus is speaking directly to this thinking that is looking to fill in their blanks about who is gonna be the most impressive.

This is why it is so remarkable - **Jesus answers the question about 'Kingdom' by pointing directly to their imagination of 'Sacred Violence' to the Liminal, the Lost, and the Last...**

- **The Liminal..** a child...cool Jesus is speaking about the importance of children's ministry...NOPE.
 - Little Ones - children in Jewish thinking were thought to be 'Liminal' beings - meaning that they were **not quite fully human**.
 - They lived in the gap between of not being fully formed....**they don't really 'count'**.
 - Jesus is speaking to their imagination that was convinced of a need for 'sacred violence' and unless you become like them...you are not going to enter the Kingdom.
- **The Lost** - Jesus talks about the seeking out the 'Lost' sheep and the word used for 'lost' refers to a person who has far more than lost directions - they are those who are considered **'gone'**.
 - Read Rev. 18:14 and we see this word used of Babylon - this is no just someone or something needing direction but rather **'gone'**.
 - Beyond the ability to reach....*it is the will of your Father that not one of these little ones perish*. This is not about being great or impressive – its about trusting the power of love and forgiveness as more powerful than mans power systems.
- **The Last** - He speaks of those who have lost an imagination for living connected with those who have sinned against them - the last person they could see myself connected with.
- **The Liminal, the lost the last** is the place where His friends saw others on the basis of their earthly relationships based in fear, failure and un-forgiveness.

Greatness in this Kingdom then is not about our systems of valuing ourselves and one another but in

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Love - Jesus the real Messiah of this Kingdom reveals that hope filled reality of a Gospel that brings restoration and redemption - NOT BY MEANS of Sacred Violence...

The Way of Christ – Heaven on Earth?

the Power of Self giving self emptying Love and Forgiveness - this is the Kingdom!

- *So I tell you love your enemies and pray for those who wrongly abuse you.*
- *When they force you to go one mile - go two.*
- *Bless those who wrongfully accuse you - bless and do not curse.*
- *Forgive as you have been forgiven.*

But Jesus I thought in this Kingdom we where going to pull out swords and slay the bad guys...!

- *Owe nothing to anyone except to long one another.*
- *Love and Value others the same way you love and value yourself.*
- *Love makes it impossible to harm another, so love fulfills all that the law requires.*

Beloved the Way of Christ – the Kingdom of Heaven on earth - where we are most fully alive is to live in and from the Love of God revealed in Christ!

- **It really is the operating system of what the scripture describes as True Religion!**

So what does that look like?

- Paul makes it very simple Romans 13:10 – Isn't that Matthew 7:12
- *Love does no wrong to a neighbor....woo a child can get this...*

I submit that part of the repentance of our religious thinking is again how we have lived in the 'name of love'.

- All kinds of un-loving things....injury - harm – manipulation.
- To lay aside our own 'Maccabean' motivations of removing enemies by 'sacred violence'.
- What does love look like...well God said I will come and show you...and Jesus put on human flesh - layed down His rights His privilege and His life - embraced a Cross.
- Beloved we need to be very clear about this – any militant ideation of our christian life that allows us to embrace a world veiw of anything less that the Way of Christ in self giving love and forgiveness needs to be laid to the side! The scriptures are abundantly clear on this.

So then Paul's says in verse 13 *let us behave properly...*I knew it so we do have a set of rules!

- Allow me to give this paraphrase...**we don't use Love as a weapon...**
- **Meaning** I do not say - I love Jesus but still live from my old frameworks to find life...
 1. Using things to checkout - to numb out.
 2. Use people to get what I want
 3. Demand my needs to be met by power over others

Love does no wrong to a neighbor...

- No wonder Paul comes to the end of his first letter to the Corinthians 16:4
Let all things be done in Love.

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So how do I awaken to The Way of Christ?

I want to suggest that this is a place where the witness of the historical Church can help us.

What the Church has described as a Sacramental Response;

- The sacraments were always to be a visible symbol of the reality of God - communion - baptism - common confession.

2 words I want to submit – I have found so life giving on a daily basis

- **Remember and Reflect** – daily admission that my mind needs help ...daily.

Romans 12:2 - **Renewing the mind** is the realization that my mind needs to be reminded!

- So I rehearse the scripture, of the promises of Christ – almost daily.
- For me this is a regular practice of praying the scripture, of confession of sin, of common confessions like the Apostles Creed and the Lords Prayer.

Remember -

- Jesus, you choose Love and you invite me to live from the same place.

Reflect...

- As I choose to embrace and believe what I am remembering I can begin to reflect what I am remembering! This is about the way of Jesus in me.

Romans 13:10 TPT

Love makes it impossible to harm another, so love fulfills all that the law requires.

Beloved - the primary practice of the Christian life is not just a duty or obligation but the very essence of the Kingdom of God where we can experience what it means to be fully alive - to live in and from love.

I beg you, Lord, let the fiery, gentle power of your love take possession of my soul, and snatch it away from everything under heaven, that I may die for love of your love as you saw fit to die for love of mine. Amen. St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)

Closing Prayer

Holy God,
you call us to righteousness and light.
Teach us the undivided law of love,
that we may love your children even as you do,
love you with all our will and strength,
and find our freedom in this blessed service,
taught to us in word and deed
by Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Communion

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