

## Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21 NIV

### Giving to the Needy

**6** “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

**2** “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

### Prayer

**5** “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **6** But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

## **Fasting**

<sup>16</sup> “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

## **Treasures in Heaven**

<sup>19</sup> “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

## Talking Points Ash Wednesday 2 22 23 Authenticity

On last Sunday we celebrated the wonder of Jesus, as his transfiguration revealed and confirmed his identity as the Son of God.

As His face shone bright, we recognized in amazement with Peter, James and John that Jesus was greater than we could ever imagine.

And now on Ash Wednesday, in the glow of the one who was sinless, we begin to take stock of ourselves in comparison to the one who was transfigured and allowed His Divinity to be glowingly seen by a handful of His disciples on the mountain top.

His light shines bright and in the ultimate act of Epiphany or revelation of who Christ is, we understand that His light shines and shows us who we really are in His presence.

In the light of His presence we understand how far away from sinless divinity we are. This brings us to Ash Wednesday, understanding and admitting in the light of Christ how much we are in need of a Savior.

Matthew 6 finds us in the middle of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount.

In our passage for Ash Wednesday, as we incline our ears to the scriptures we hear the voice of Jesus calling to us and asking us an important question.

Are you authentic in the practice of your faith?

Do you authentically "practice" your religion?

Do you have an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ as your Savior, Lord, and Friend.

Or are you all about the show?

Are you authentic as a child of God in your behavior with others as you are when no one is around?

Jesus tells us in Matthew 6, that practicing your faith is not about drawing attention to the act of piety. And it should never be about ‘showing off’ for the delight and perceived opinion of others.

Since long, long before the days of Jesus Christ and even to our own day, and according to the prophetic scriptures that speak of the last days before the return of Christ, phony religion and phony devotion to God are indeed present and persistent in the human order.

In this case, who we are really in God is far more important than what we do to be seen in the sight of others.

Jesus’ message is quite simply what we do for God is a privilege offered to those He loves and who love Him.

It is not a phony show, but a divine imperative so that others will look beyond us and see the cross of Christ as the only one who could pay our sin-debt to restore to bring us into right and good relationship with God and with others.

Jesus tells us in Matthew's gospel that authentic devotion and love of God is what makes the devoted true lovers of God stand out.

Matthew highlights in our scriptures for the hearers of his time and for the readers of the scripture of all time just four areas for us to glean heavenly wisdom from this evening.

The four areas Matthew highlights, and will be the topic of our discussion with Matthew this evening, as we remember that these are the words that were recorded of Christ.

Those words highlight the following areas:

**Giving to the Needy**

**Prayer**

**Fasting**

## Treasures in Heaven

Imagine yourselves this evening sitting in the presence of Jesus the Christ, as He is in the middle of giving his impassioned Sermon on the Mount.

To the Jews, the people of God, He is the long awaited Messiah, and to the Gentiles, He came to save them too.

In this moment, Jesus has to address the basic fact that then, as well as now, there are those who come in the name of God, who have not treated people well by showing them the real Living Water.

They have been out for themselves.

Their desire has been to offer themselves up in a vain attempt for short term glory for themselves.

Jesus put His relationship with the God of love over glory and recognition for Himself.

And HE warns us about a false relationship with vanity.

He warns us about using a phony relationship with God for any reason.

It damages us and those around us, putting in jeopardy the reconciliation needed with God and with one another.

Jesus takes the four most raw moments when people need to see the authentic Love of God for themselves and how dangerous phony actions can be.

In looking at the four areas of tonight's scripture, Jesus reminds us that we should always be about serving, and loving God as we introduce others to God by our actions and our words.



Lets look at an authentic faith verses phony sensationalism in Christ's four areas.

### **Giving to the Needy**

**6** “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

<sup>2</sup> “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Mt 6:1-4)

Christ asks here quite simply, how are things with you walk?

Many would say that if I help the needy, it's altogether a good thing.

Christ says not so. The state of your soul impacts how your gift is given.

If you give money to the needy and make it about you, when they need again and you cannot provide, what happens to the one in need.

Christ's emphasis here in this verse is very much on the giver wanting to receive their own reward and not on wanting to get the needy what they need.

Christ says God sees, and will judge the intent of the actions.

Even in our giving, or trying to do something good, if it does not point back to God it can only accomplish a fraction of what it could.

1 Chronicles 16:11 says that we should "Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always."

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled (matthew 5:6)

Sometimes it is in our actual hunger and thirsting and desiring for the things of this world that bring us to the throne of Christ. How much more should we point our fingers to God as we help others rather than point to ourselves.

Humanity can only satisfy but so much. God can satisfy the hungering of the soul.

When we keep the focus on authenticity in our service to God, we may well discover as the prophets did that it is not the immediate need of money but the presence of a wicked system that prevents one from earning a satisfying living wage. When righteousness, virtue, morality, and justice is to be found on this earth it will be because the people of God have heard His call to be His agents in an unjust world and demand that systems change.

We can only get to that revelation in authentic service to God in all that we do.

## Fasting

<sup>16</sup> “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

It is obvious that God seeks our full hearts, and He gives the fullness of Himself. He gave His Son Jesus Christ and offers us forgiveness and life anew in Him. Whatever we do we should do it for the glory of God and He will bless us.

The scripture here is not saying that we shouldn't feel hunger or desire, but that we shouldn't exaggerate it to be seen in front of others to illicit their sympathy thus drawing extreme attention to ourselves and not relying on God to give us what we need.

## Treasures in Heaven

<sup>19</sup> “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Our greatest treasure should always be Jesus Christ and the presence of God within our hearts.

**Job 23:12** *proclaims* “I have not gone back from the commandment of His lips; I have esteemed and treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.*(Amp)*.

Essy Esters<sup>1</sup> ([More Than My Necessary Food!! – Essy Esters \(wordpress.com\)](#)) puts it this way. “Job held God’s Word in higher regard than food for his body. He longed to be with God more than anything, and this needs to be our

goal. Job is confident of God's Spirit dwelling within him, for God has tried him over and over, refining him as pure gold that he says God knows what direction every choice in his life will be. Job was a happy man. He regarded the Word of God as being greater in his daily life than the food necessary to keep him alive.

As the world strives for the monetary gain of world treasures of wealth, that's how we have to treasure the Word, the presence of Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit within our lives.

We have to see Sunday School and Bible Studies not as inconveniences in an already long Sunday morning, but as investments that are more sure than the investment we can make in our 401K or in our earthly savings accounts.

## **Prayer**

<sup>5</sup>“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup>But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your

Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

God looks not for the person who can speak with eloquence but with a sincere heart. The scripture says God can even understand the groanings of our hearts and He hears and understands the prayers uttered within our very beings.

He listens for the lips that are pressed in honesty and not in big words.

Years ago attending a small church service at a church in the inner city of Baltimore, the children were all called up to the front for the pastor to give the children’s sermon and the Pastor normally so eloquent, suddenly forgot what he was going to say in his prayer for the children.

The child seated next to him suffered from a variety of physical issues after being deprived of oxygen at birth 8 years earlier and was unable to speak words, and had only just began to walk maybe the year prior.

That child reached over and grabbed the microphone from the pastor and uttered guttural sounds that were unintelligible to the adults in the sanctuary, but everyone of the children in the circle with their little heads bowed in prayer began to say 'amen' at points in his utterances.

God knew what that boy was praying and his little friends in support of the work of the Holy Spirit in that moment were moved beyond themselves. I felt a warmth come over my spirit that was indescribable. To this day that is the most beautiful, heartfelt, and sincere prayer I have ever heard.

When he had finished, he smiled and handed the mic back to the Pastor, at which point the Pastor said "In Jesus' name" Amen.

I spoke with the mom of that precious child. She was a single mom, like me at the time. She shared with me a heartbreaking story of the churches she had visited that would not include her son or her in any youth activities. The other churches labeled him 'disruptive' that his



presence would not play well in the planned where that house of worship often invited the press to give them news and air play.

She had determined to just give up on church entirely. Someone invited her to our inner-city church that day. She said for the first time she felt welcomed and was not made to feel her son was a burden. Almost 30 years later that mom serves as a dedicated Elder at the old inner city church where the Pastor let her son pray and the children welcomed her son and saw the God in him. Her experience has informed their witness and ministry of welcome to all with disabilities.

That's what happens when we put aside our desire to be seen by man, in favor of allowing prayer warriors for God to rise up as He calls them.

That's what the Lenten Journey is all about.

If you spend more time watching social media, than you do praying God is calling you today.

If you spend more time thinking, shopping, planning and cooking your meals than you do spending time in the Word, God is calling you today.

If you spend more time watching television than you do working for the Kingdom of God, God is calling you today.

The time is coming and is already here when humanity will be called to account by God. He will ask each of us “Child of mine, what did you do with the time I gave you on this earth?”

Did you come authentically seeking me?

Did you authentically share me with others?

Were you authentic in your faith walk? No matter how hard it would be?

This year the Lord led me to follow the Lectionary readings for the year whenever I would preach.

I asked Him as I do each year, Lord how would you have me structure the time with your people as we gather around your word and worship?

I was clear that God was asking me to preach and speak with the Church Universal in one voice, as most Protestant Churches around the globe this year have chosen to do.

In doing so, our worship services have followed closely with the natural times and scriptural themes of the Spiritual Calendar. I have found new appreciation this year in the order of the preached work of the Lectionary.

The calendar recognizes ordered time in how the church may move with the Lord and the presence of His word. Since January 1<sup>st</sup> we have discovered a newness as a congregation in the Epiphany season.

We have leaned our ear to hear the master preacher and teacher Jesus Christ preach on the Mountain Top.

Our Sunday Services have taken us to the Mountaintop with Peter James and John and seen the living glow of Christ and the mist of the Spirit of God.

Now we come to the moment when the light of Christ exposes those areas where we are in darkness and God calls us into His lightness of being.

Christ's light shines and exposes the truth of the words of Isaiah "All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. This evening we come in repentance accepting the gift of the cross of Christ.

Let us prepare for the Imposition of Ashes.

## CHALLENGE

### CHALLENGE:

This evening the sermon is not done.

You will finish the sermon with how you walk out that door tonight.

This sermon isn't done when the preacher stops talking, or even when the church says "amen".

It is done when you take up God's call to journey with Him through Lent and ask Him to show you something new as we walk with Him to Resurrection Sunday.

God only started the sermon with me. He will bring it's conclusion through you.

Like the little boy in my sermon example, God loves you. He hears you and He's talking to you to and calling you to a new level of discovery in Him.

Like the little boy, the world may have written you off, saying you didn't 'look like', 'talk like' 'act like' what they want to see. You may have even counted yourself out, but this day God says follow the example of the little boy who prayed the best prayer because it was authentic to who he was.

God will never ask you to be the best 'somebody else'. BUT He will and does ask you to be the best He wants you to be. He has equipped you and empowered you.

Take the challenge tonight to be seek God on each day of this Lenten day journey.

Make a commitment to pray more, love more deeply, and seek Him more fully.

In Jesus' Name. AMEN