

Sermon Text for July 7, 2024

By Guest Minister Rev. Michael Wilson

Title: Stay Silent!

Text: Proverbs 17: 27-28; Matthew 12: 15-22

Proverbs 17:27-28

New International Version

²⁷The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint,
and whoever has understanding is even-tempered.

²⁸Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent,
and discerning if they hold their tongues.

God's Chosen Servant

¹⁵Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. ¹⁶He warned them not to tell others about him. ¹⁷This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁸“Here is my servant whom I have chosen,
the one I love, in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

¹⁹He will not quarrel or cry out;
no one will hear his voice in the streets.

²⁰A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out,
till he has brought justice through to victory.

²¹ In his name the nations will put their hope.”^[b]

Title: Stay Silent!

Text: Proverbs 17: 27-28; Matthew 12: 15-22

Can I just say – there is something humbling about standing up to preach when these words have been read:

Even fools are thought wise if they hold their tongues, and discerning if they hold their tongues. Right? Here we go!

Many of us have a part of our lives that it not what we want it to be. A thing that we would long to change. Perhaps you would be taller. Or shorter. Weigh more. Weigh less. Perhaps you would work elsewhere. You would retire. Or not have retired. Perhaps there is a failure or regret in your past that you would long to go back and make different. But we cannot – because it is the past. Underneath that longing. Not the longing itself. But underneath that longing – that is where we meet God.

Will you pray with me?

What are you favorite things to talk about? – real question – let’s make a list! What do you love to talk about!

What about things people don’t really like to discuss?

Health, religion, politics, our failures.

Most popular topics of discussion?

AI answer to this question:

There are many popular topics of conversation, including small talk and deep conversation topics:

Small talk

Topics that can help start a conversation include:

Weather

Sports

Local events

Movies and television

Art

Music

Food

Hobbies

Career

Travel

Deep conversation

Topics that can help you get to know someone better include:

What do you consider your best quality?

What's one thing you can't live without?

Who are your role models?

Which is your favorite movie and why?

Which song best represents your life?

What is your healthiest habit?

What is your worst habit?

Not going to say - So – parts of your life you would most like to change?

Lots of talk in churches about whether or not people have or will come back after the pandemic. Lots of talk about younger generations and whether or not they will come and participate in church.

A while ago - in his book, *The Unchurched*, Russell Hale did a study of 4 different counties in America of who the unchurched really were. The first thing that Hale found was that most of the unchurched had once been church. Or we might say – they come from families that once were.

Here's what ran them off of church - their sense of failure. Something had gone wrong in their lives – and the church no longer seemed safe. Something that they longed to change about their lives, but they couldn't.

Certainly the congregations may have been welcoming, but these people didn't feel it. The people who became unchurched had faced issues like divorce, adultery, bankruptcy, public embarrassment, major issues with children, or deep depression.

In response they had run away from the church – maybe even from God.

It raises huge questions for us:

One is a question for each of us – we 've all got a place in our lives that we are not dragging out into public view. Are those things, for you – walled off from God? Does God have nothing to do with those for you?

The other is a question for all of us – or at least all of us who would claim this as our church - Is that what churches do - do we run broken people away from God?

I remember calling a couple who had visited Chestnut Level Church, when I pastored there. I asked them how it was, if they had any questions. Here is what they said, "You seem nice.

(I like that.) It was a good sermon. (I liked that.) We won't be back. It looks like everyone at your church has their life together, and we don't, so we won't be back."

I try to say something like, "Oh you must not have come to the right service, the other service...."

And then I trailed off – the other service – they look really bad?

I awkwardly tried to say – we would love to help. How can I support you?

But what about it – if the things we longed to have changed, the parts of our past we don't often think about – if all of that was out there – what would it mean?

We are marching through Matthew!

Have been in Chapter 12 for a while now. One of the beauties of that – get to follow the arc of what is going on.

Matthew 12 is a chapter about confusion about the ministry of Jesus.

It is centered upon whether the compassion of Jesus fits the expectations of a Messiah.

1st Confusion – Picking Grain on the Sabbath (vs. 1-8)

I preached on this – June 16 – anyone remember what the disciples did?

On a Sabbath the disciples of Jesus are hungry and they pick some grain along the edge of a field. It was not really a meal, but more of a snack. But the picking of the grain was work in a certain definitions of it by the Pharisees. Work on the Sabbath and thus, the Pharisees accuse Jesus of Sabbath breaking.

The 10 commandments clearly call for us to treat the Sabbath in a special way. But the Pharisees layered that commandment with enormous prohibitions. It was well-intentioned to give specificity to the general command.

I once stayed in a hotel in Jerusalem which had a "Sabbath elevator." I had never heard of such a thing and so I got on it.

I discovered that on the Sabbath it stopped at every floor. Orthodox Jews were not allowed to push the button – that was work. So we stopped at every floor. Looked at one another, and then off we went again.

This is the kind of legalism Jesus is facing from the Pharisees. They are very interested in the outward observance of their understanding of the law. In their defense, this is very much the expectation of a certain and very sincere view of what they believed God really intended for them.

But Jesus then says two nearly outrageous things in the minds of these Jews.

He says that he is greater than the temple and he is Lord of Sabbath.

Think about it – they try to publicly shame Jesus. Expose the past – put it in full view. And he will not have it!

Jesus inviting us to center upon His person and not just the law – the rules.

Confusion often centers upon the person of Christ. Instead of the past!

2nd Confusion – Jesus heals on the Sabbath (vs. 9-14)

Pastor Bob preached on this two weeks ago – anyone remember what Jesus did?

The Pharisees saw a man with a withered hand and hoped to trap Jesus by asking him whether it was lawful or not to heal on the Sabbath. They had seen enough of Jesus' compassion to guess that he would try to heal. The rules surrounding the Sabbath commandment would prevent this. But Jesus showed them that it was lawful to get an ox out of the ditch, so it should be even more acceptable to heal on the Sabbath.

To avoid controversy Jesus could have told the man to meet him the next day.

But Jesus helps people and ignites controversy. There is a problem in full view – and Jesus fixes it – doesn't push it away.

In light of that action the Pharisees make a decision to destroy Jesus. They need to destroy someone for doing something very loving and humane.

An ugliness can creep right into religion in awful ways – by people thinking they are doing God a favor. Think what Jesus could have done here – he could have ramped things up – confronted the Pharisees, gotten the people on his side. Taken them down. That's our mode of operation these days – escalate, then escalate. And that is not what Jesus does!

Notice that Jesus goes out from there and heals all who need healing (v.15).

Those things where people long to change – there they meet God!

Matthew reminds his readers of the picture of the Messiah (vs. 15-21)

David Bosch on Matthew:

Our first gospel is essentially a missionary text. It was primarily because of his missionary vision that Matthew set out to write his gospel, not to compose a "life of Jesus" but to provide guidance to a community in crisis on how it should understand its calling and mission.

I accept, together with the majority of contemporary scholars, that the author of the first gospel was a member of a Jewish Christian community which had left Judea before the Jewish war and settled in a predominantly Gentile environment, probably Syria. In Judea the community had most likely shared some of the insularity of other Jewish Christians and had participated, at least to some extent, in the general cultural and cultic life of Judaism inasmuch as that was possible before the war.

Jesus meets the undistinguished at life's margins

Matthew reminds them of Isaiah 42, where the Servant of the Lord is mentioned. How is Jesus dealing with these parts of our lives that we long to have changed?

There are four job descriptions mentioned in that text:

- a) The Messiah will bring justice to the earth (vs. 18)
- b) The Messiah will not cry out like someone needing notice but instead will go about his work quietly and humbly (vs. 19)
- c) The Messiah will not bruise broken reeds or quench dimly burning wicks (vs. 20)
- d) The Messiah will bring salvation to the Gentiles (vs. 21)

There are lots of phrases we could examine in this prophecy and we will eventually see how each of them are played out in Matthew.

Notice two things:

Jesus brings justice.

Jesus acts in the imagery of not breaking bruised reeds and not quenching dimly burning wicks.

A bruised reed is a symbol of a kind of brokenness or weariness.

And a dimly burning wick suggests someone whose vigor is nearly gone –barely going.

Most revolutionary leaders have little time for the weak. Flickering flames are not the best for world changing movements.

But Jesus is different.

He is not after the most disciplined – the most prone to legalism. Jesus offers special attention to outcasts – lepers, Gentiles, women, possessed. Jesus is the savior of failures and little people.

Let's not break Bruised Reeds.

I think of bruised reeds as those who have been hurt in life in some way. They are trying to find their way, but they are seriously limping along. When those people get to church sometimes we break them.

We push them toward too much.

We hit them with “Avis” theology – we try harder.

Have you been around Christians who **bark** you into order?

So many in churches get the impression that Jesus is disappointed in them.

I think it sometimes just breaks them and they retreat.

What would be an example of breaking a bruised reed?

Well – say the Dallas Cowboys are really bad – you shouldn't give your pastor a hard time about that, right?

But really – think about how Jesus lived in this respect.

In His story of the Prodigal Son, have you noticed that the father did not chide the son – didn't even ask him where he had been – just loved and restored him.

Rich young ruler walks away and Jesus is sad, but Jesus doesn't shame him.

The woman caught in adultery is urged to go and sin no more.

None of those bruised reeds were broken by Christ.

The only people Jesus is really tough on are the ultra religious types.

Let's not quench dimly burning wicks.

You know what it is like when the candle is pitiful – barely flickering.

It just is not putting forth light – but Jesus doesn't snuff out such a light.

I am a preacher – and the son of two teachers. Which means that I am given to talking. Raising kids – I talked to them a lot. This does not work all that well.

Great reminder from the Proverbs text – sometimes, just be quiet. They know.

I marched in the Memorial Day parade – amazing.

You don't quench a dimly burning wick.

What happens when you come here? Do we crush you – do we quench you?

Jesus is in controversy all around him – but he keeps pointing to God and valuing people.

God's grace heals – grace changes us – the love of God unlocks us.

If I had to choose my elevator definition of church it would be a "place of grace." A safe place for the bruised and the used – an encouraging place for the dim and the dark. This, in a sense, is what Matthew means in this gospel of righteousness. It is not self-righteousness. It is grace for those around us. And for you – and all that you brought with you today. Whether we know about, talk about it, or even can see it.

Amen.

Walked in the Memorial Day Parade for the first time this year

How do we get to know something?

From being told – it can be described.

From seeing

From experiencing –

Faith as verbal assent. Faith as experiential.

Right after healing on the Sabbath – Pharisees want to destroy him

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The Christians had not yet understood themselves as being members of a separate religion over against Judaism but primarily as a renewal movement within it. They had, of course, known about the vigorous missionary expansion among Gentiles but this happened outside of their experience and range of vision.

However, by the late seventies or early eighties of the first century AD, the situation was fundamentally different. At Jamnia (as has been mentioned in the [previous chapter](#)) the Pharisees, with Johanan ben Zakkai their leader, were assuming exclusive control. The synagogue worship was regulated and partly structured on that of the now defunct temple. The rabbinate was introduced as authoritative interpreter of the law. Even more important, a bitter polemic had developed between Jamnia Pharisaism and Jewish Christianity and was inexorably moving, around AD 85, toward the formulation of the Twelfth Benediction: “Let the Nazarenes and the heretics be destroyed in a moment...Let their names be expurgated from the Book of Life and not be entered with those of the just.”

Sequence –

Jesus could escalate this conflict – he could get into a war of words – or perhaps

Jesus goes underneath – to where the bruising is. To where the candle is about to go out.