

Fireworks

This previous week our country celebrated the 247th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. We went with some friends to watch the fireworks in Sidney. Did anyone else go watch their fireworks? At the very end there was a huge wall of flame which shot up into the night sky from the field by Sidney Middle School. It reminded me of something off the Wizard of Oz. The whole display was impressive, but they don't hold a candle to the display our God puts out on cloudless nights with all the stars above!

The last couple weeks we've looked at what Jesus says about following Him. Being a disciple is hard work. He puts a high expectation on us to reach out and let other people know what He's done for us. Sometimes we do very well with that, and sometimes we fail terribly. Certain individuals are more inclined to do the Lord's will – to be His hands and feet, present in the world today – than others. The God we serve is a loving and patient god.

Each week we pray, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Sometimes we mean it, sometimes we just say it as part of a ritualistic expectation – and – there are even times when we refuse to say it in our hearts, to which God says, "thy will be done," often to our detriment! With this in mind, let's see what He would have us glean from His word today. Turn with me to Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30. **Read Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30.**

Taps

The first part of this passage is pretty hard to hear. Jesus says, "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 'We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn,'" (Matt. 11:16-17). Just a side note here, a dirge is a sad song. I can't think of any off the top of my head, but sometimes at funeral services for veterans they'll have a trumpet player play "Taps." It's a sad song. The point Jesus is making here is that sometimes people seem to thrive on drama. They like playing head games with other people's feelings. It boils down to manipulation. Trying to get other people to do what you want them to do, using any means at your disposal. That's what He's trying to get across.

Look what He says next. "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds," (verses 18-19). What will Jesus call our generation? Do we run the same risk of refusing to join Jesus? Do we reject the ways of God and God's

agents – like John the Baptist? Does Almighty God look upon us and sigh, frustrated that we keep refusing to truly see and welcome wisdom, kindness, grace, and compassion for ourselves and for others?

Earlier this morning the kids talked about Disney princesses. Do you know the fairy tale of Goldilocks and the Three Bears? She goes into their house, tries their food, then their chairs, and finally their beds, all the while complaining one is too hard, one is too soft, before she finds the one just right. The audience Jesus originally spoke to were sitting there like Goldilocks, judging spiritual lifestyles. Evidently they felt that John's way was "too hard," and Jesus' way was "too soft." They hadn't found their "just right," so they refused to join in with whatever it was that either of God's messengers at the time were offering.

Wisdom

Did you catch what Jesus says at the end of verse 19? "Wisdom is proved right by her deeds." Some translations have "children" instead of deeds. That's an interesting take, because it roots wisdom in people – rather than some thought, or some wise sage in an ivory tower, far removed from everyday life. The point He's making here is that true wisdom is proven by what the person does with their life – it's not about their ideas, their opinions, their Facebook posts, TikTok videos, or anything like that. The measure is this: do they join in with whatever it is that God is doing, or do they sit out like grumps on a log – I said grumps, not lumps – because they don't like what God's wanting them to do? We have Biblical examples of that – Jonah comes to immediately to mind!

So how does Jesus react to the frustration? Look what He does next. "At that time Jesus said, 'I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what You were pleased to do. All things have been committed to Me by My Father. No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him,'" (verses 25-27). What's Jesus do when He's frustrated? Does He lash out at the people around Him? No! He prays! I suspect if we paused to pray when we're angry, things would go much smoother for us!

In His prayer, Jesus tells us what God's up to. God is giving out wisdom. When we think of wise people, we think successful, wealthy, elite, impressive, powerful folks. When we think of this type of person, usually we don't think about the other traits that tend to go along with them – greed, lust, envy, and selfishness. These aren't who God's giving wisdom to, though. It turns out that we usually measure "wisdom" by the wrong set of standards – human standards – instead of by God's standards.

God's Standards ≠ Human Standards

In God's standards, the wise are the infants – the “children” – the trusters, ones who are excitedly fed by, and lovingly attached to their Father. These are who God gives wisdom to, who God chooses to reveal the Son to. We know Jesus isn't literally describing babies here. He's making His point by contrasting the identity and characteristics of a baby with people's preference to blindly – and without regard for the common good – give power to the “wise and learned,” and follow their lead. But the babies – the infants – are usually the ones who are often beat down, kicked out, and made to suffer under the oppression of the “wise and learned.” People who choose to trust in Jesus in ways that others have rejected as false, unholy, and unacceptable, have the additional burden of not being accepted and supported in the space God created specifically for that purpose – the Church. We have powerful, “wise and learned” brothers and sisters this morning who don't like the way God's working in the world today – it's “too soft!”

We're surrounded by stories and real-life experiences of brothers and sisters who have been beat down by fellow Christians who don't agree with what their Christianity looks and acts like. Like Jesus and John the Baptist, they can't win. The goal posts of acceptability keep getting moved on them. There are so many followers of Jesus Christ, out there working for good, following the wisdom of God and God's will for His people, who then get spat on, stabbed in the back, or slapped across the face, because it doesn't adhere to our preferred mode of how things ought to be done.

It is to these discounted, yet still faithful followers, that Jesus invites to join Him in His prayerful pause. “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest,” (verse 28). After each of one of our girls were born, as soon as they were wiped off, suctioned, and breathing, they were placed against Kendra's chest. They were calm. Safe. Resting in a way that fosters growth, health, well-being, and an innate knowing they're loved and cared for. This is what Jesus invites us to do with Him. “Come to Me,... and I will give you rest.”

Taking the Yoke

Then He follows that up with this statement. “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light,” (verses 29-30). In other words, He's telling us, “Hey kid, you can exchange your heavy burdens of various expectations, anger, prejudice, rejection of others and by others, and take My yoke instead.” He invites us to grow further in God's wisdom by learning from Him how to live in a world that rejects us, rejects truth, rejects beauty, rejects goodness and compassion. Jesus invites us – and them – to learn from Him. He is God Incarnate. God in human skin. Jesus is the Wisdom of God. He's wise, He's emotionally and spiritually mature – and He stays gentle and humble in heart.

And He speaks a word of promise – true rest for weary souls. It's not a relaxing type of rest – it's active – the burden is light and easy in comparison to the troubled existence we have when we try to live up to the pressures and demands of this world, and other people. Jesus is describing true freedom here – which comes from being different, or set apart. We become that by growing into, and doing what matters most to the God we follow. The Bible's full of instructions on how to do this. "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God," (Micah 6:8).

See friends, when we truly trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, He changes us. He puts His Spirit inside us to be an invisible seal that we are His. In allowing the Holy Spirit to have dominion over our lives, we transform us into sacred vessels – temples – moving and doing the work which only Jesus Christ alone can do in the world. Are you letting Him move you and put you to work? If so, keep up the good work – you're bringing great joy to our Father! But if not – what's holding you back from taking the yoke of Jesus Christ and letting Him make you a new creation?

Prayer: We give You thanks, O God of compassion, for the salvation You have revealed to the little children through Jesus Christ, our wisdom and strength. Teach us to take up His gentle yoke and find rest from our burdens and cares. Amen.