

February 3, 2019
Treasure Heart
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Matthew 6:1-18

6 *“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

² *“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

[Concerning Prayer]

⁵ *“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

⁷ *“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

⁹ *“Pray then in this way:
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.*

¹⁰ *Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

¹¹ *Give us this day our daily bread.*

¹² *And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

¹³ *And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.*

¹⁴ *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

¹⁶ *“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have*

*received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,
¹⁸ so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret;
and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

So, again, the Sermon on the Mount, from Matthew's gospel – Jesus poised like Moses on a hillside, teaching a crowd of Jews who have been following him around Judea for some time, listening to his teaching, watching him heal people. Chapter 5 says that here, Jesus is specifically teaching his disciples. Many more are listening, but the teaching is for the ones committed to the way of life he is offering.

Beware, Jesus says. Sounds serious – dangerous even. There is *danger* associated with following Jesus? There is the danger of death by state execution, of course; the danger of speaking truth to power, of turning the other cheek. Except Jesus isn't talking about any of **that** danger. He's talking about the danger of *practicing one's piety before others in order to be seen by them*. Do so, he says, *and you'll have no reward from your Father in heaven*. And he says it as though he thinks his disciples want it, like we want **it** most of all – that reward from our Father in heaven. Which, I've decided, is what makes this text so hard to preach.

Let's pray. *To want what you want to give us, O God, may we always pray. To stop craving this world's praise. For the faith to know you love us now, completely. And empty as we may feel sometimes, being empty of everything false makes us most ready to receive you. Amen.*

A relative of mine announces on Facebook every next book she reads. This might be news if she were in first grade. She has a master's degree. Because, no news is too small to post on social media. There was no social media in Jesus' time. But they did have trumpets. Can you imagine? Every time you wanted to announce your accomplishment? He might have been exaggerating, but I don't think he was wrong.

Humans do like to have their names on things. My husband used to work at the IU School of Business. Now he works at the Kelley School, Steak and Shake School of Business. Mike works at the Maurer School of Law. Luke Gillespie teaches at the Jacobs School of Music and plays the organ at the Andy Mohr baseball diamond. Men who are no longer mere humans – they are schools! Generous men who have done good in their community and received their earthly reward. We can't all buy a school though. Thus the beauty of our Facebook, whatever our Facebook forum is – the place we project our public self.

I post, therefore I am. I am published, therefore I am. I preach, therefore I am. Someone clicks on “like.” Therefore “I Am” even more than I was before. The more likes I get, the more “AM” I AM. It's become a psychotherapy gold-mine, did you know that? One person becomes two – the real-life version a person who never measures up to the one she is online. Her real-life children are less delightful than their Facebook selves. A

whole market, an entire clientele of people whose emotional and mental well-being ride on social media validation.

Which got me to thinking that maybe Jesus is suggesting something like the same thing here in chapter six of Matthew, in the Sermon on the Mount; that when the near entirety of our discipleship, our life in God, is lived on the outside in public view for public consumption, we are not in the relationship with God that God offers – a relation with the actual groceries to sustain us through the real-life experience of being human. We'll get what we asked for: public praise. But we will miss the reward, the treasure destined from God, to our hearts.

Our heart: not the blood-pumping organ, but the seat of the self and the will, where our personality is born and rooted; where our most fundamental decisions are made, such as who or what shall rule us, what shall be regarded as truth. The heart is our most closely guarded self. No one enters without permission. And anyone allowed in has great power over us. That is the “me” God is most interested in. Not the one I work so hard to make you think I am. The one God knows I am. God wants to sit there, rule there, live there. But God will neither come nor stay uninvited, and we cannot invite God to a place we will not go ourselves.

My new favorite Netflix binge is “Blue Planet.” Do you know more life lives under the deep sea than above? There are fish miles under the sea only just discovered in the last ten years when technology enabled cameras to go so deep.

However generous, prayerful, or sacrificial they appear on the outside, Jesus' disciples are those hearers willing to go to deep – deep below the surface, below the known tides of our public lives – into our hearts, our minds, our memories, and show God around in there. Talk to God about what is there. How it got there. Whether it ought to stay or be put out. To cry over it. Tell the truth about it. Deal with it. Allow those hearts to be re-formed, re-made. Such reformation cannot be confined, naturally. It will spill over into every part of life.

We can pretend – and we all do – that our locked-up, broken hearts don't affect us. But of course, they absolutely do. They stay in the way of grace. They keep us stalled in places God is fine to let us stay – and so glad to move us to healed and happy hearts too. Healed hearts make us brave. Healed hearts make us joyful. Healed hearts make us truly generous and free – generous and free in ways that pretending and trying to be generous and free never, ever, ever will.

In chapter 6, Jesus speaks of three religious habits he assumes his disciples already practice: almsgiving (money), praying, and fasting. Jesus does not say “if”; he says “when.” *When you give. When you pray. When you fast.* We may have to catch up to Jesus' starting place, if we aren't already *giving, praying, fasting*. But for those who are, Jesus says, *It's not enough just to go through the motions.*

He doesn't say, STOP! No way. Keep it all up! Raise your tithe, even. But the real discipleship work is the inside job. What do you think and feel? What are you trying hard NOT to think and feel? Whom are you most trying to impress? And why? What losses will you suffer if others never see?

And what is this reward we are after, by giving, praying, consuming, living, from healed and happy hearts? It surely must be something only God can give: True Peace. True peace because it looks and smells and tastes like peace we have never known. Peace that is the complete and total absence of anxiety and fear, or any hint of loneliness. Or maybe *freedom* is the better word. Being completely, entirely unbound by anything including, if you can imagine, doubt. I even wonder, if this reward for which I cannot find words is what Jesus means by *treasure* in verse 21.

Where your treasure is, so is your heart. Treasure heart. As if, by our faithfulness to Christ the two wind up as one, in the mystery of it all.

Would you pray with me?