

You Belong to Christ
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
February 23, 2014

First Lesson: 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

¹⁸ Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. ¹⁹For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness',

²⁰ and again,

'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.'

²¹ So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, ²²whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, ²³and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Second Lesson: Matthew 5:38-48

³⁸ 'You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. ⁴²Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³ 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Last week I talked about some of Jesus' "You have heard it said...but I say to you" teachings. Above all, these admonitions to go above and beyond the commandments as they are written serve the single purpose of mending relationships where they can be mended and avoiding breaking relationships where possible. Today's reading from Matthew continues literally and thematically from where last week's reading left off. "You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor

and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven...” Each of these is about relationship – do not return violence for violence, do not return pettiness with pettiness, do not return cruelty for cruelty.

If you seek to make relationships better not worse, what is the outcome? If you follow what Jesus commands, you will be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. God, who is always seeking to be in relationship with us, does not turn away from us even when we turn away from God. At times, we do not respect God. At times, we behave poorly toward God and toward God’s children. And what does God do? Ever seeks to be close to us, ever seeks to build relationship with us. To seek relationship when others will not or cannot seek it with you is to be like God. I’m not talking about seeking relationship with those who would do you physical or emotional harm. The language and the culture of Jesus did not involve the language of the psychology of relationships, did not delve into misogyny or racism or abuse but instead focused on the warfare of men and business transactions of men and oppression by Roman rule. Should we be uncertain Christ’s stance on abuse, we need only look to Jesus and his interaction with the woman whom others sought to stone for adultery. He prevented her abuse and even death with these words: “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

I’m not talking about seeking relationship with those who would do you physical or emotional harm. Instead I speak of Democrats who refuse to respect Republicans sand Republicans who won’t see eye-to-eye with Democrats. I’m talking about people who understand church one way and insist your way is the wrong way. I’m talking about any situation that could be simplified into one noun **versus** another noun. It is so easy to angrily stand your ground, righteously stand your ground, instead of humbly and lovingly and respectfully standing your ground. For me, that challenge comes especially with atheists who take pleasure in defining why believers are stupid. I will always be respectful of others beliefs and non-beliefs. I respect the doubt atheists have and I would never begin a discussion with the intention of trying to win someone over to my way of thinking – I **will** be myself, unashamed of my beliefs and trust in the work of the Holy Spirit, maybe through me, maybe through someone else, maybe in the life to come. When we are described as simpletons for our belief in God, my first impulse though is **not** to turn the other cheek or to give my cloak. But I believe that in the face of doubt and even challenge, from others and from myself alike, the God in whom I believe does not get angry or defensive but just loves and keeps seeking relationship. I am called to try to do the same.

It is this effort to love like God that shapes what it is that I build on the foundation Christ has laid. Paul’s words that “each builder must choose with care how to build upon” Christ’s foundation are not only for me and you as individuals but for us as this church here in Waukesha, for the Presbyterian

Church (U.S.A.), for the church universal. As a church, we are called to love and seek relationship with all, both those like us and those whom we consider different. This is what unifies the church universal – this aim to love like Christ loved and loves, to serve like Christ served and serves, to honor like Christ honored and honors.

Paul was writing to a church still figuring itself out. There were different leaders teaching in different ways, but all on the foundation which Christ laid. Some were beginning to associate their faith with the one who was leading. This happens even to this day when pastors leave a church and congregants follow. But Paul says to us and to them, “No, no, no! The church is yours. What you do as church is yours, not your leaders, not even if that leader is me.” The church does not belong to the state. The church does not belong to the powerful. The church belongs to all who are church. In this same way, this church is not and never will be my church – it is yours for you are the body of Christ. You make decisions how to love and serve and honor like Christ, through those you elect and through your own actions. I simply have the privilege of being along for the ride and, hopefully, offering some sort of wisdom on occasion, or, at least, prompting some mistakes from which we can learn. This church is not Heydinger’s or Humphreys’ or Farley’s. **You** have been given the gift of the church, which belongs to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

If not you, who? When Paul writes, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” he writes in the plural “you.” Should we have a Southern translation of the Bible, we would better capture his meaning: “Do you all not know that you all are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you all?” The future of the body of Christ resides even here in this downtown church in Waukesha. Your session and your board of deacons continue to work on how we love and serve and honor but theirs are not the only ideas within this body of Christ. It would be easy if electing persons meant we could leave them to do the work – oftentimes, it seems that’s the easiest way to be part of our nation’s government – but the church is not the nation and the Presbyterian Church in particular values and **expects** the voices of all to be heard. Now I know that we each have experience that says “she-who-suggests also volunteers to plan, organize, recruit volunteers, and carry out.” Sure, sometimes that is the case. But I ask you to set that aside today.

How do you want to love, serve, honor? Are you able to do so through this church? If not, tell someone. Tell me. Tell Lora, Barb, Katie, Sara, Steve, or Earl. Tell a deacon. We can’t try to fill a need we don’t know is there. This church belongs to Christ just as you belong to Christ. How you seek to follow Christ’s call on your life is part of how this church carries out Christ’s call upon it. Professor Melanie Johnson-Debaufre puts it this way: “The challenge of this passage is . . . to heed [Paul’s] call to

be a community that *all together* takes a good look at what kind of place it is making.”¹ The question for today, tomorrow, and every day is “How do we build on Christ’s foundation?”

Let us pray: Holy God, show us the way. Help us to love and serve and honor that we might give you glory. Amen.

¹ *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 1*, p. 379.