

Living Inside Out: Standing Up. Standing Out.

Matthew 11:25-30

Intro

Alright, so let's get the question that many of you have out of the way, right up front: yes, there are four scripture readings this morning. How do I know that some of you were thinking this question? Because within 30 seconds of Kate seeing me on Tuesday afternoon, she asked if that was what I really wanted.

Now that that's out of the way, let's start to grapple with the next question: why?

Living Inside Out (letting go so as to surrender to God by leaning into His Spirit through the skills, talents, and blessings that we have been blessed with) necessarily means that we start to change internally. We started tackling that the last couple of weeks in regard to forgiveness.

Well, those aren't the only areas that letting go to lean into God should shift how we think, and how we live in the world (and if it isn't shifting our thought, then it should be, at the very least, deepening our leaning into the Lord). As people of faith, we aren't called to coexist, we are called to stand up, which means that we will, in some way, stand out.

That's a reality that, when we are honest with ourselves, we are not all that sure we want to deal with, not on a daily basis. But it is the yoke that we are called to carry. The scripture reads this way.

Matthew 11:25-30

25 At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

Matthew 23:1-12

Intro

Now that we have picked up the yoke, what are some areas of our life that should cause us to stand up; to stand out?

How about this: speak what is true, and live that truth out. We need to lean into the Lord to have that happen in our own lives which therefore models to others that we expect it from them as well. The scripture reads this way.

Matthew 23:1-12

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ²“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; ³therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. ⁴They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have people call them rabbi. ⁸But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. ⁹And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹²All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

Luke 9:23-26

Intro

This standing up and standing out also manifests itself in this way: what we value will be seen by the world. When people look at your life (or at the very least the façade that we put out there for public consumption...wait, doesn't that connect into the last passage? Yes. Yes it does!), what do they think you think is important? Said another way, if you're your focused on yourself (to the exclusion of others), people are going to see that. The scripture reads this way.

Luke 9:23-26

23 Then he said to them all, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. ²⁵What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? ²⁶Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

John 8:2-11

Intro

This last area of standing up and standing out focuses directly on sin, and how people judge others because of their sin. Jesus was against sin.

I know, big shock there.

But as much as Jesus hated sin, he also showed us a disdain for those who judge the sinner. As was mentioned a moment ago, the world will see what we (really) believe by the way that we live. How do you live? The scripture reads this way.

John 8:2-11

²Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. ³The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴they said to him, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?’ ⁶They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ ⁸And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰Jesus straightened up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ¹¹She said, ‘No one, sir.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.’]]

‘Living Inside Out: Standing Up. Standing Out.’

By and large, bumper stickers do not bother me. I look at them and think (at most), ‘well isn’t that an interesting thing that they want to promote.’ That’s it.

But there is one sticker that always causes me to twinge, even just a little bit. It’s the COEXIST sticker that is made up of a variety of religious and social symbols. The reason that I have that reaction is because the people whom I have known who have stuck that message on the back of their vehicles tend to view coexisting in this way: everything is equal, and no one’s opinion carries more value or worth than another.

As a person of faith who believes that Jesus came, lived, died, and was raised so that creation might have the opportunity to dwell eternally with the Creator, I don’t believe that.

Dialogue? Respect? Peace? All of these can be faithful expressions. But not to the point of silencing the truths that Jesus came to declare, lived out, and then called for his disciples to emulate moving forward.

Jesus stood up and in doing so stood out.

Yes, Jesus was extremely tolerant from a multitude of contemporary perspectives. He hung out with foreigners. He was willing to break the letter of the law as long as the spirit of the law was adhered to. He cared deeply for all; he loved the sinners (while not tolerating the sin), even to the point of extending forgiveness in situations where forgiveness was anything but expected. So yes, he was extremely tolerant.

And yet, as we listen to his words (and yes, we’ve got a view of them to work from this week), Jesus wasn’t willing to put up with those things that were contrary to his Father’s call to love God and neighbor. Forgiveness was absolutely there. But love and forgiveness, as we have talked about, is not a synonym of silent apathy masquerading itself as peace.

So as disciples of this risen Christ, as followers who are feeling led to live inside out, what should we be willing to put up with or even coalesce to? In what ways do we need to stand up and therefore stand out?

As we look to our scripture passages, there are a few things that we need to learn to accept. The first is that we are not God, that we are not the center of our own (let alone anyone else's) universe. When we place ourselves in that position, the various forms of sin that Jesus rejects so heartily begin to manifest in our lives (more on that in a moment).

No, we are children of the Living God and as His children, we need to surrender (even just a little bit more) and lean into the flow of His Spirit through the interests, skills, and talents we have been blessed with (there's the connective tissue of the last few weeks). This morning, we are reminded that as we lean into the Spirit, we will also need to take up the yoke of the Lord. Said another way, we need to stand up declaring our allegiance to him.

In today's world of 'likes', 'friends', and 'follows', people are able to show in a variety of ways what they stand up for. They'll stand up for this political cause. They'll stand up for that sports team or musician. They'll stand up for social media figures that seem to be living 'the life', make them laugh, or make them think about something other than the life that is immediately around them. They'll stand up for a brand that produces apparel that they like or food that they enjoy.

People stand up for all sorts of stuff.

Do we stand up for God? Do we declare our alliance to Jesus?

Our opening passage says that we need to. As we start to surrender and lean into the Spirit, we need to take on the yoke of the Lord; we need to stand up for the Almighty. And that is regardless of how the world may react to that stand. Those reactions will run the spectrum from agreeance ('Go God!'), to 'well that's nice for you', to 'the way other people see the world is just as valid as the way you hear your God calling you to live', to 'the God stuff is a waste of time'.

But this life that we have been blessed with, this faith that we are called to live inside out, is not meant to be swayed by how (or if) others support us. No, it needs to be about bringing glory to God's name through those who believe showing and sharing His love, care, and forgiveness.

So yes, we need to stand up and declare our allegiance for the Almighty (pick up the yoke), and then step out through our words, our actions, our very being. Aka: we need to allow the leaning into the Spirit to guide us to abate and ultimately end the sins of selfishness, hypocrisy, and judgement of others that manifest themselves in multitudes of ways. And not only live that out in our own lives but model it so that those who are around us recognize how we are stepping out for the one we are standing up for.

So let's touch on these areas for a moment.

What do we hear Jesus say? In regard to the scribes and Pharisees he said, ‘do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.’ One of the greatest inhibitors to people believing that Jesus’ call to discipleship is anything more than another positive voice to listen to in a sea of co-equal messages, is that the Church and its members have become focused on the religion instead of the faith. We’re taking care of the church buildings and learning the ‘right’ prayers...and too often it has been to the exclusion of serving God through the community that we have been led to be a part of. We have expected people to come to the church, instead of being the body of Christ in and amongst the people. We have to be authentic. Say what you believe...and live it out. And a side question for you: if you aren’t living it out, do you really believe it, or are you just going through the religious motions?

Stand up and step out. Live Inside Out.

What do we hear Jesus say? ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?’ Alright, a moment of extreme candidness: we live in a little corner of the world that struggles ridiculously with this one. We are surrounded by wealth (or at least the trappings of it). We see it, we have a fair amount of it, and we want more of it. It might not be in an actively evil way (I’m taking what you have), but it is in a sinful way where we strive for the things that will benefit the person we see in the mirror. And it doesn’t have to be in regard to money. Maybe it’s in regard to time, or influence, or entitlement. When we become the center of gravitational center of our universe, life will ultimately start to go sideways. We are able to identify it in others: we need to acknowledge it, confess it, and (through the leading of God’s Spirit) reject it in our own lives.

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What do we hear Jesus say? ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ Too often, we hear that line in such a way that we feel that it is wrong to name sin in another’s life.

But that isn’t what Jesus is decrying. Jesus hates the sin. He tells the woman to ‘go and sin no more’, so he’s agreeing with the Pharisees that this person has done wrong.

But he is not willing to condemn her. His love, care, and grace show that even the most messed up are able, and should be welcomed back into the fold. And at the very least, as we have chatted about for the last couple of weeks, even if there is not contrition, faithful forgiveness can and should still be extended. The yoke that we are called to carry does not invite us to go around pointing out all the wrongs; instead it implores us to love as God first loved us.

Stand up and step out. Live Inside Out.

Our God, our Savior, is not just one of many co-equal voices that says its okay for us to simply coexist.

No, our God calls for us live inside out by declaring our allegiance and showing that commitment through lives that are becoming ever more faithful to the yoke that He has called for us to take up.

I know, I was talking about quite a few things this morning.

But remember, while there may be several what's, the why and the how remain the same. God has called for us to carry His yoke of service regardless of how the world may respond. We do that by surrendering, beginning with just a little bit, leaning into the Spirit through our interests, gifts, and talents.

Who will you pledge allegiance too? How will your world know that is the case?

Stand up and step out. Live Inside Out.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy and gracious God, Your voice has no equal...and we need to not only listen to it, but we need to stand up declaring our allegiance to it and show through our very being that we are not willing to tolerate those things that are contrary to You, instead stepping out living Your Call to life. Lord, help us to acknowledge the areas of our life where we are out of phase with You so that who we are becoming declares to the world that we know that in You, there is no equal. Lord, let it be so. Amen.