

“Living Inside Out: Hearing Voices (Which One We Will Follow?)”

Matthew 6:1-15

Intro

Our opening passage talks about a lot. Boiling it down into a contextual theme though, let's go with the following: Fake Faith Fails (yup, I used an alliteration...I know, you're excited!). To put a positive spin on that, we could say 'A Faith Flowing Forward Flourishes' (don't worry: that was me finally finishing...with fanfare!).

In any case, what we are about to hear is Jesus speaking in very clear ways as to how his followers should live out their faith (you know, that whole Living Inside Out thing that we have been chatting about). Included in those declarations in Matthew's articulation of what we know as the Lord's Prayer. But Jesus does not stop with the prayer itself for he offers an additional line that causes many of us to cringe, even if it's just a little bit, because we don't know how, in certain cases, we could fully follow through.

And yet, the declaration remains: if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive you. The passage reads this way.

Matthew 6:1-15

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

2² '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.

5⁵ '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.

7⁷ '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.

9⁹ 'Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

¹⁴For 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.

Colossians 3:12-17

Intro

Our second passage carries this declaration into the early church which reminds us that it did not go away as the faith began to take on the trappings of religion. What this should say to us is that following

the Lord faithfully is worth fighting for, even when it's frighteningly challenging to face. This is where we need to remember that faithfulness starts with surrender and that the Spirit of God is able to lead us in that journey. The scripture reads this way.

Colossians 3:12-17

12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

'Living Inside Out: Hearing Voices (Which One We Will Follow?)'

We are going to do something a little different this morning.

Well, actually, it's a lot different. And here's why. We have chatted about forgiveness a couple of times over the last two months. I recognize that when we start to hear the same voice talk about similar issues, what is heard sounds remarkably similar to all the adults in the Charlie Brown cartoons.

I didn't want that because the idea of living inside out is too important to us individually, in addition to the world that we create around ourselves. So we are going to take our time over the next couple of weeks and through the listening to of a new voice as well as some unpacking as to what forgiveness is and how to live it out, my prayer is that we will begin to embrace this part of living out in a new way. What we are about to hear provides the context for the story of forgiveness that will be told. You may find it extreme, but the world that we live in seems to exist on those extremes in ever more abundant ways.

Selection 1: 1st 2:05 of the complete program

Now mind you, I sat down this past Tuesday to start to put these thoughts in some sort of an order...that would be less than 36 hours after the country was faced with the reality of bullets ripping through those who had assembled in Las Vegas to have a good time watching a concert. 58 dead. 527 wounded. Countless numbers of people whose lives are forever changed.

Yeah, let's talk about forgiveness: that sounds like a really easy topic to unpack right about now.

Exactly, not so much.

And maybe that's why we need to talk about it. Not that we are able to unwrap any ridiculously profound truths (certainly not in the couple of minutes that we worship here this morning), but instead because the God whom we worship is a God who calls for us to follow Him in the world of which we are a part. We don't want the world to be the messed up place that it is. But it is. Which means that following Him, Living Inside Out has to happen even through the muck and the mire.

Immaculée didn't want her reality to be connected with the context that we just heard...and yet she was forced to face things that she wanted no part of. Listen to her story...in her own words.

Selection 2: Excerpt 2: 3:59

Let her story try and sink in for a second. Try.

Senseless slaughter is happening all around Immaculée. The house that she is hiding in is surrounded. She is in a locked bathroom. She knows what is happening. Kill them all. The child of a snake is a snake.

And she hears two voices.

One says to give up, just letting the hatred of the world to wash over her. We know that voice. We hear that voice, even to the point of hearing it on a perpetual loop.

In her case that would have meant that she would have died. In our case the voice calls for us to care for ourselves, maybe even exclusively, which means that everyone out there becomes some variation of a stepping stone to whatever is next. Maybe that voice says that we are worthless and since no one cares for us, then why should we care about them. Maybe that voice says that God, let alone how the Bible says God wants us to live, is a waste of time. Whatever, we may hear, it causes us to place ourselves at the center of the universe which means that following God, let alone exhibiting forgiveness, seems pointless. We hear that voice.

Then Immaculée hears another voice, one that says that she is loved, that God is real, and that even in the face of tragedy, she should believe, not in herself, but in God.

As we have talked about, we have moments when we recognize that voice as well, but will we trust it, especially in regard to those people who have wronged and hurt us. We know what scripture says, but...

Well, that is the reality that Immaculée is about to be thrown into. And again, she is in an emotional space, even in the midst of tragedy, or truly believing that God is real. Now she has to deal with how she hears God calling through scripture. How she responds initially makes total sense. How she ultimately responds allows her to become a modern day example of Living Inside Out. Let's listen to another portion of her story.

Selection 3: Excerpt 3: 5:30

Jesus taught us to pray by saying, 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.'

We hear that and we want to ignore it because the people who have hurt us, others, they are bad people; they're horrible maybe even to the point of being evil.

Immaculée felt that, so what did she do? She skipped it. Do we blame her? Nope.

But the thing which I would like us to recognize and remember is that in following that second voice that we mentioned earlier, she immersed her life in activities that allowed the voice of the Spirit of God to become all that much stronger, all the more clearer, to the point that she was able to hear the voice say, 'the savior gave you this prayer. You don't need to edit it. You do need live it out.'

That's why forgiveness is part of Living Inside Out: because it was so much a part of how God wants us to live that it is included in the prayer that our Lord and Savior taught us to pray together.

Again, how does that process begin? By surrendering. And how do we surrender? By leaning on the Spirit of God through the activities, interests, skills and talents that God blessed you with. God didn't make a mistake in you and that is why we need to realize that it is through these activities when we are able to come alive, that the voice of the Spirit with all of Her power, peace, love, and grace, becomes all the more apparent to lean upon.

And we need that support, because there are way too many days when it feels like those who are out to 'get us' do know what they are doing...just like in Immaculée's story. And yet the call to forgive abides. Next week we'll talk about what forgiveness really is, and also what it isn't.

That's right folks, a teaser to come back next week!

We are called by the savior of the world to live inside out by forgiving others. It begins through surrender and leaning upon the Spirit of the Lord. You are not a mistake. You are created in such a way as to begin to live these promises out. Abide in the Spirit, dwell in those activities that allow you to feel alive and really start to listen for that voice. No, not that first one. The one that's in the background; the one that whispers the truth that we are loved, that we are forgiven, that we are empowered to serve the Living God.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy God, Living Inside Out sounds good...but there are some realities to it that, well, we struggle. So lead us Lord, lead us so that especially in our weakness and doubt we are able to hear Your voice and start to respond to it, even if it is just one degree more. Help us to surrender so that Your grace might flow in ever greater ways. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.