

Matthew 5 (Cultured)

Last week we celebrated Easter and the understanding that Jesus died on the cross, was buried and three days later rose from his burial place. For many people of faith that is where the story ends, personal salvation offered to you and I, but Jesus had something far larger in mind. Easter was about the redemption of God's Kingdom, here on earth. Not only about that redemption but as we spoke last week the truth that you and I are supposed to be a part of that redemption. With that said the question remains; "where and how are we to bring this redemption?"

It doesn't take a long look or study of the life of Jesus to realize that he brought hope to places that seemed hopeless, he brought community to people that had been shunned, he ate meals with those that the religious deemed unnecessary and unwanted. He wants the message of redemption to not only be for those who have and are in the center of life but also to the margins, pushing to the very edges of who this redemption is for.

What does that mean for us? It means that Abraham Kuypers quote is very much true, Kuypers stated this about the kingdom of God: "In the total expanse of human life there is not a single square inch of which the Christ, who alone is sovereign, does not declare, 'That is mine!'" Does that strike you the way it strikes me? All of human life, religion, the arts, nature, music, wherever there are people Christ declares it as his. Now some people may say that this is reason enough for us to continue to run a parallel universe of Christendom to the rest of society, secular and sacred running side by side. I would suggest that it is much more than that; this idea of Kuypers in fact means that we are to rub shoulders with the total expanse of human life both inside and outside the church.

Let's take a look at one of Jesus teachings from Matthew 5:13-16:

"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage."

"Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven."

God colours and God flavours what a great way of helping us to understand that God has some underlying beauty that if you aren't taking notice or using our spiritual alertness, then we just won't see or taste all that God is up to. I love the imagery that Jesus uses here of salt, in the past I've done messages on the various uses of salt and how we can be flavour enhancers, healers, valuable assets and a myriad of other applications. But this evening I want to focus on the flavour enhancement.

A few years ago I was with a group of pastors in Southern California, we were scheduled for a day with Neil Plantinga the president of Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand

Rapids, Michigan and Dr. Richard Mouw, the president of Fuller Theological Seminary. The purpose of our scheduled day was to look at Kuypers question in essence and wrestle with how deep the truth lies in it. Does Jesus really look at all of our existence and claim it as his? Is God's truth and spirit really everywhere?

In my spiritual development I would have to say that there are some places in this world that seem to be devoid of God, that in some way God has potentially left the building. Let's take a few moments with each other and talk about places that seem to be devoid of God and his truth... What places have you come up with?

Having asked this question and wrestled with it for a solid 8-10 hours with these brilliant men, I would suggest that there is in fact nowhere that God's truth isn't. Even in place that seem to be completely bankrupt of goodness, peace, kindness, love, joy, patience, God's truth is still there, it just seems to be bottled up.

Much like a saltshaker you and I are the ways in which God has chosen to bring redemption to enhance flavours and this means that we are of no use if we stick within the shaker. Sadly this is what much of Christendom has been about, bottling up our faith, packaging it nicely and telling the world if they can somehow squeeze themselves through those little holes on top then they can be a part of Christ's body. We have this parallel universe of things that are Christian and what is not, we go so far that if something is not named Christian we avoid it, we will only drink milk from a Christian farmers cow, is this what Jesus wanted? Emphatically no!! He wants us to be like salt, rubbing up against the world changing its flavour, making it more like God intended it to be.

Basically what I am trying to get at is that those of us that call ourselves Christ followers need to be fully engaged with our world, watching movies, listening to music, going to art shows, attending theatrical productions, being great business people, committed employees, hard working students, good neighbours, walking our streets with people that others may wonder why you would walk with them, being like Jesus.

Earlier I spoke of who Jesus spent his time with, if we look at his teaching he spoke about the things that people in the community he was in would readily have known about and then showed them some truth of God and His kingdom, are we able to do the same? Only if we are understanding with our culture and not just running a parallel culture, we have this fear that the world is going to change us when in fact we should be agents of change that are going change the culture.

I learned recently that Bill Gates has actually started paying certain TV shows to add some sort of moral message to their shows, now if someone like Bill Gates who can produce a TV show of highest quality and rival anything currently on TV but instead chooses to use what's already there, shouldn't we realize the same and do something similar?

Half of our music tonight is what would have been deemed secular but here this evening it has been reclaimed to be sacred, much like many of the old hymns were once bar tunes but were redeemed, reclaimed, re flavoured, recoloured to reflect God's Kingdom. Are we willing to do the hard work of redemption and be accused of giving approval to things that may not have been originally pinned for sacredness? That Jesus claims all of creation as his removes the line between secular and sacred, it is now all sacred; we just need to have the boldness and wisdom to help the renaming occur.

For some of us this is a very scary place to find ourselves in, we fear that those places that are darkened by sin will somehow envelop us, but we are carrying the light of Jesus with us, we are shining in the darkness a light that it cannot overcome. Now if we go in with a cloak trying to hide what we are about we leave ourselves susceptible to being overcome, but if we go in aware of the battle and looking to reclaim we will start to push the shadow of darkness away. We must be keenly aware of what we are called into, who we are serving.

When I was younger and heading out of the house my mom would always say to me to remember who was with me. I took this as a guilt-ridden statement when in fact it is true and we can go anywhere prepared to overcome and reclaim Kingdom territory. On that day that we spent in Southern California, I remember asking the question of these bright minds in regards to some pretty difficult areas and they said of course they can be redeemed, you just have to be careful in the methods that you use to bring about change, which reminded me of another of Jesus teachings that we are to be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. (Matthew 10 parallel to Luke 10)

This is truly the way in which we need to engage our culture completely engaged with a purpose not to somehow direct a conversation but being directors of change so that Christ's Kingdom becomes more and more the way it was intended. Not fluttering away in fear but creatively and shrewdly maneuvering our way to the fulfillment of what God would have with His world and at the same time with integrity and out of a true passion for the people and organizations we are a part of, fully immersed in this culture so that this culture could in some way be fully immersed in God's love, peace, goodness, kindness and joy.