

“You Cannot Produce What You’re Not”

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19

Ephesians 1:3-14

Mark 6:14-29

We belong to each other and that is God’s intention. There are no ifs, ands or buts about it. Humanity is one race and one blood. Ephesians 1:3-14 describes how God has brought each one of us into a new definition of community. God saves, rescues, liberates and prepares us to bear witness to the good news of redemption and transformation of individuals and societies. How is that accomplished? Through one another. Jesus knows us. Jesus lives his life in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. We receive grace upon grace from God. Jesus is seen, heard and known through our interactions with others.

To be clear, the God who creates us is the same God who saves us and the same God who lives in us. Jesus showed us the way to give our lives away for the sake of others, as Jesus gave each human his life for their benefit. Love God and love others. Every Christian should be united around the Greatest Commandment.. Jimmy Carter in his book *Our Endangered Values* writes,

The many differences among Christians create confusion, fragmentation, and even acrimony, and it is difficult for individual believers to comprehend and adhere to the fundamental elements of the faith. The broader consequence of all these divisions is that global evangelical work suffers and our reputations are tarnished as we contend with one another. Instead, religion should provide the way to heal the differences that separate people, based on the paramount law that Jesus taught, to love our neighbors as ourselves.¹

And to former President Carter’s point, John Bryson in *Letters To A Birmingham Jail: A Response To The Words And Dreams Of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* writes, “It is inconsistent with the gospel for believers to lift up the name of Jesus with one hand and hold on to

¹Jimmy Carter, *Our Endangered Values* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 45.

racial attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, or actions in the other hand.”² As followers of Jesus, we cannot believe one thing and live with words and behaviors that contradict the gospel.

Yes, we need to shed words and deeds that are inconsistent with the gospel. From the Old testament Reading, The Epistle Reading and the Gospel Reading, we learn that the presence of God is no longer contained in the Ark of the Covenant. In Christ we have God living within each one of us. Whether we experience scarcity or abundance at any given time, the earth belongs to God and all that is in it. In Jesus Christ we have been given every blessing, chosen by God and adopted into God’s family. And we are to be known as people who tell the story of Jesus in word and deed.

This is how we are known as people who tell the story of Jesus in word and deed: our lives bear fruit consistent with the gospel. The statement by Jesus that he is the way, the truth and the life, the teachings of the Greatest Commandment, the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25 are imperative to being people who are the fruit we produce. 2 Samuel 6:1-3, 12b reads, “David again gathered the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand.... to bring.... the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim.... out of the house of Abinadab.... to the city of David.” Ephesians 1:3-5 reads, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.... just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.... destined.... for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ.” And Mark 6:14 reads, King Herod heard of it [the things Jesus’ disciples and John the Baptist were doing], for Jesus’ name had become known.” Ah, it is true that the gospel is

²Bryan Loritts, ed., *Letters To A Birmingham Jail: A Response To The Words And Dreams Of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2014), 107.

told throughout the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. It is one Covenant promise my friends.

In Mark 6:14-29 we encounter the power of Jesus' name. Although Jesus was rejected in his hometown and by religious leaders and the elite, his popularity everywhere else grew. Jesus' disciples were spreading good news. John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, spread the name of Jesus and the power available from Jesus for changes in character and attitude. Trusting Jesus and repenting of sin are most significant to experience the power of Jesus Christ. And this continued to irritate the elite, the religious leaders as well as government officials. John the Baptist's preaching about Jesus challenged the twisted rules of Judaism and the Roman empire. Herod's beheading of John the Baptist solved nothing. John the Baptist's message was carried on by his disciples and all who experienced transformation in Jesus and embraced their adoption into God's family. Mark 6:29 reads, "When his [John the Baptist's] disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb." Neither John the Baptist or his disciples renounced their responsibilities to live in word and deed the truth of the gospel. And they did so loving God and others. And yes, the gospel is political.³

The gospel disrupts personal and collective understandings of power. Individuals and communities cannot avoid the call of the gospel for change in character and attitudes. We are one race and one blood. All of us are in this together. Again, John Bryson in

³In the three paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Mark McEntire, Wyndy Corbin Reuschling, Anna George Traynham, Zaida Maldonado Perez, William Yoo, Matthew L. Skinner and Richard W. Voelz in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 144-146, 146-148, 149-151, 152-154, 154-156, 157-159 and 159-161.

Letters To A Birmingham Jail: A Response To The Words And Dreams Of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. writes, “A diverse life precedes a diverse organization of church. You cannot reproduce what you are not.”⁴ Be a person committed to diverse relationships and friendships. Be intentional about learning. You cannot produce a life in words and deeds like Jesus, if you haven’t begun the journey to discover the person and purpose of Jesus Christ.⁵

God is the God and Father of all people. How you live your life in word and deed is a gospel issue. Trust God to transform your character and attitudes to become more like Jesus. Demonstrate the unity in which Christians stand: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all. May your words and actions reflect this unity. Now that’s a life bearing good fruit. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (In-Person with COVID-19 protocols and Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 11 July 2021
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⁴Bryan Loritts, ed., *Letters To A Birmingham Jail: A Response To The Words And Dreams Of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 110.

⁵Some ideas in this paragraph adapted from Bryan Loritts, ed., *Letters To A Birmingham Jail: A Response To The Words And Dreams Of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 95-110.