

St. Paul's Anglican Church
4th Sun Epiphany; 1:1-11
Matthew 8:1 to 13; Feb 3, 2019

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Matthew devotes three entire chapters to Christ's Sermon on the Mount; it is Jesus' greatest teaching event. Our Lord had just completed this wonderful discourse and as He headed toward Capernaum, Matthew tells us **Great multitudes followed him.** This practice pretty much continued until the night of his arrest at Gethsemane, when almost all of even his closest disciples abandoned Him. After his Resurrection and Ascension, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the multitudes again followed Him, and it continues to this day; we are gathered here to follow Jesus.

Jesus drew crowds primarily because of his divine healing miracles, but people were also attracted to Him because He preached with Godly authority. His practical teaching concerning everyday life matters, as demonstrated in his Sermon on the Mount, enlightened and captivated his audience.

As He journeyed to Capernaum, **There came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if you desire, you can make me clean.** It was widely believed that lepers were simply being punished by God because of their past sins. They were considered ceremonially or spiritually "unclean". They were to be avoided; and do not even consider touching them.

But our Lord did not always adhere to the accepted practice of the day. **Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean.** He not only touched this untouchable Jewish outcast, He healed him. With faith the leper asked for healing; and he was healed through the mercy of God because of his faith.

When Jesus reached his destination, He was approached by a Gentile who was also seeking healing. This was a centurion, a man of authority within the same Roman hierarchy that oppressed the Jewish nation. He pleaded, **Lord, my servant lies at home**

sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. Many of our Lord's neighbors would have encouraged him to pay no attention to this foreigner's situation. "Why give aid to the enemy? Let the Romans deal with their own problems."

In keeping with his teaching on the Mount, Jesus offered to come and heal the servant. But the centurion exhibited great faith when he said, **Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.** His faith that Jesus had the power to heal without touching, without even being in the same area, led our Lord to acknowledge the centurion's faith was greater than that of any He had seen among his own countrymen.

Then our Savior again went against conventional teaching by acknowledging that it is faith, not nationality as the Jewish leaders taught, that will determine salvation. **Many shall come from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness.** Many Gentiles from around the world will share everlasting life with the revered Jewish Patriarchs, and, salvation is not guaranteed to all Jews.

So, Jesus went against traditional thinking and the Pharisees' teaching by healing an outcast leper, by ministering to a Roman Commander who was a Gentile, and by proclaiming that through their faith Gentiles can have everlasting life while Jews without faith may not.

Fearing retribution by their Gentile rulers, Jewish authorities encouraged obedience to Roman law as a means to protect their lofty status among their own people. In the epistle (Romans 13:1-7) Paul also goes against traditional thinking when he said, **Let every soul be subject to the higher powers, for there is no power but of God.** He maintains the governing authorities serve by the power of God; they are to maintain order by establishing and enforcing laws for the protection of the people. Paul believed their government was divinely led and would generally provide order and peace to the Jewish nation.

Was Paul's thinking based on the fact that he was a Roman citizen? Actually, his thoughts mirrored Jesus' teaching to **Render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's** (Matt 22:21). Neither Jesus or St. Paul advocated blind support for, or overthrow of the Roman government; They were more concerned with the heavenly government. To all political rulers, we are to give respect and honor, we are to pay taxes to support their efforts, and we are to obey their laws.

This is the basis for Paul's teaching but he also felt that Roman justice was the environment through which the gospel of Jesus Christ could be spread. He believed that the multitudes could more readily continue to follow Christ under Roman control. At that time, they were being persecuted by most Jewish leaders, but widespread persecution by Rome had not yet started.

Giving honor to our governmental officials and others in authority does not negate our obligation to our heavenly Father, our Divine Ruler. We are to give God our undying and unconditional love, our worship, and our devotion. We are to dedicate to Him ourselves, our souls, and bodies; our whole being.

This is the point Moses makes in our Old Testament reading as he prepares the Israelites to take possession of the Promised Land (Deut. 4:5-13, 32-40). He knows he will not be with them much longer, so he gives godly last-minute instructions. First, he gives this stern reminder: **I have taught you statutes and judgments as the Lord my God commanded me.** Moses was God's messenger.

Then he announces that God's law will impact other nations who **shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.** Why will Israel be noticed by other nations? Their laws came from God; their law is God's law.

Our reading ends with Moses proclaiming God's awesome nature, **the Lord is God in heaven and upon the earth; there is none else,** followed by the benefit of obeying Him, **keep his statutes and commandments that it may go well with you.** This

should not be considered as teaching the “prosperity gospel,” where all people of faith will enjoy a trouble-free life blessed with enormous material wealth. God may bless us with healing and material things, but faith leads to spiritual wellness in this life followed by being in the presence of God surrounded by his peace and love for all eternity in the next life.

In light of these Scripture texts, how should we react to those who are in authority in our all aspects of our lives? We are to live within the law and give honor and respect to our elected officials and to all those in authority. Unfortunately, today too many people fail to give respect to those with different ideas.

The wife paused in her conversation, and said, “You haven’t heard a word I said!” The husband thought to (wisely) to himself, “Wow, that’s a strange way to begin a conversation.”

Too many people fail to listen to the message in Scripture, to the teaching of Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Spirit within us.

Controversy only arises when the laws and policies of the government, or our employer, or even our church conflict with the laws and truth of God. Jesus lived within the Roman and Jewish laws as long as they did not disregard God’s laws. He ministered to lepers and Gentiles, not to tick off the Jewish rulers, but because all human beings are God’s children.

So, as Christians we have a responsibility to work to elect officials who believe they are called to serve the people who elect them while at the same time seek to honor God. They should believe his truth and honor the sacred trust between God and his created beings.

Like the multitudes that followed Jesus seeking to be healed, taught, and inspired, we are to follow Him; we are to be living examples of what life in Christ is all about.

We must remember, and act accordingly, that we are members of the multitude that continue to follow Jesus Christ, and this should be evident in all aspects of our lives; in our practice of religion, in our work, in all of our social settings and in our church and in our homes.

And how do we do this? By reading Christ's Sermon on the Mount (Matt:5,6,7) and listening as the Scripture speaks to us; and by listening when the Holy Spirit speaks from within us. Then we must follow this great teaching of Jesus Christ and encourage others to do the same.

Now unto God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all might, majesty, power, dominion, and glory, both now and evermore. Amen.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.