

Matthew 5:38-48
February 19, 2017

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

God's into a lot of things right? It's easy to name a host of them – creation, salvation, forgiveness, wholeness, healing, restoration, life, love, freedom, transformation. This list could go on and on and on just like the unending and exponentially awesome scope of God's grace. In all reality I think there are aspects of each one of those things God is up to in the world embedded in today's passage Jesus delivers. Some more visible than others but nonetheless they are there. What's that? You didn't hear creation in the text? Well, it's there as it so often throughout the biblical account because creation is at the very core of who God is. Jesus said, "God makes his sun rise on the evil and the good." That same great light God set in the sky millions of years ago God continues to make rise day after day on the evil and the good alike. Or how about that last sentence, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Argh! That's a tricky one because we are taught from an early age we aren't perfect. Right, we are sinners in need of God's redeeming grace to bridge the gap between us and God. Yet, God created us to be like God in so many ways. Harken back to Genesis 1 in which it states, "So God created humankind in his

image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

(Genesis 1:27 NRSV) Or the words of the Psalm 8 in which the psalmist is reflecting on the glorious handiwork of God and marvels at God’s love for human life despite how vastly small it is when contrasted to the magnitude of all God created. In the midst of his ponderings the psalmist rights these utterly graceful and powerful words, “Yet you have made them (humans) a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.” (Psalm 8:5)

The point is that “perfect” in the sense Jesus uses it is about completeness. It’s about wholeness. It’s about living into the fullness with which God created us. It’s about being kingdom people. A kingdom Jesus says is happening right here and now. A kingdom he says will be made known not only through him but also through the hands, words, and actions of the people he has called to share in his mission. People like fishermen and tax collectors. People like lepers and demoniacs. Even people like the Samaritan woman at the well. (John 4)

One of Israel’s greatest enemies were the Samaritans yet Jesus bridges the gap and ultimately through that Samaritan woman’s testimony of her encounter with him we are told that many Samaritans came to believe in Jesus. Perhaps, that is one more thing about this passage we could lift up that I left off my initial list. One more thing God is into and up to in the world and that is God is in the

business of using us. Giving us an identity, purpose, and mission. Making us disciples. Using us to testify of what God has done through Jesus Christ.

Welcoming us to the table of Christ, filling us with words of comfort and salvation, feeding us through bread and wine, giving life through his body and blood, helping us taste, see, smell, and touch the grace of God that permeates our entire being so deeply and fully that we simply can't help but go forth with shouts of thanksgiving and alleluia and glorify God in proclaiming the extravagance of this most sacred and precious gift.

Jesus is all about creating a different kind of world – God's world – in which he calls this world the kingdom of God. According to the Reverend David Lose, it is a kingdom "where violence doesn't always breed more violence and hate doesn't always kindle more hate. Martin Luther King Jr. captured the logic of Jesus' kingdom well when he stated, 'Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.'"ⁱ Lose makes the contention that perhaps what Jesus is getting out in these difficult passages which we often hear as strictly command is more about promise. The promise that God created us to do some pretty spectacular stuff. The promise that God has saved us so that God can use us. The promise that Jesus continues to call out to us and minister to a world that so often remains in the darkness and

desperately longs to hear the good news about a God relentlessly at work trying to overcome hatred and violence. The good news about a God of love. The good news about a God who forgives even in the face of His enemies who crucify him on a cross. The promise that even when we are our own worst enemies and think we may not be good enough, strong enough, smart enough, courageous enough, or oratorically gifted enough the light of Christ continues to burn bright within each of us and he is able to use that light to make the world a different kind of world – a kingdom of God type of world.

And that kingdom of God type of world looks so drastically different than the world we often live in. The portrait Jesus has been painting in his sermon on the mount is the world we all long for yet it is a challenging world to live into. Loving our neighbor is an easy task when that neighbor is just like us. But Jesus calls us to something more. Something that truly can transform the world and in doing so can truly transform us as well. Because God is into transformation. He is into changing lives. Jesus was into crossing boundaries. Overcoming obstacles. Moving beyond stereotypes and long standing rivalries. Encountering the other and extending God's love to those we so often are engrained to fear because they are different than us. God is in the business of freeing us from our bondage and when we simply live in the safe confines of our own little world, of those whom

look like us, act like us, and believe as we do we continue to remain captive the bondage of fear. We continue to limit the breadth of God's work that can be done through us. That is where grace enters the picture because grace is transformation. Grace moves us to bear forth that transformation. Grace empowers us to love our enemy. To pray for our enemy. Releasing us from our bondage as we encounter Christ in the other, opened up to new relationships and God's love in ways we never imagined possible.

¹ David Lose, www.davidlose.net