

WEST CENTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

The Pastor's Portion *Spiritual Nourishment for the Soul*

February 4, 2020

"Life is short, and we have so little time to gladden the hearts of those who travel the dark and lonely road with us. Oh, be swift to love, make haste to be kind."

Growing up, a poster with these words hung in our house in Martha's Vineyard, and in New York. It was my father's favorite saying...well, that and: "Wear the glove of life loosely" (I am still working on that one).

I am grateful that my family emphasized the fleeting nature of this physical life, and the need to build our hope on things eternal...to hold on to God's unchanging hand. It strengthens me in these perilous and uncertain times. Still, while we are in these bodies, we must resist evil and strive for the best that life has to offer, for ourselves and for our world. Keep the faith! The trajectory is ALWAYS upward!

Blessings,

Rev. Kris



**RESUMING ON
FEBRUARY 2:**

**DEVOTION AND SILENT
MEDITATION 10:45-
11:00AM**

**1:00 pm COFFEE
& CONVERSATION WITH
PASTOR KRIS**

**An informal Study of the
Lord's prayer. A time to
share and ask questions.**



West Center Church seeks to worship the Living God, being Led by the Holy Spirit to carry on the work of Jesus in justice, peace simplicity and unity.

See our February Church Calendar attached.

Weekly Inspiration: There is a Buddhist precept that asks us to be mindful of how rare it is to find ourselves in human form on Earth. It is really a beautiful view of life that offers us the chance to feel enormous appreciation for the fact that we are here as individual spirits filled with consciousness, drinking water and chopping wood...

It asks us to understand that no other life form has the consciousness of being that we are privilege to. It asks us to recognize that of all the endless species of plants and animals and minerals that make up the Earth, a very small portion of life has the wakefulness of spirit that we call "being human." ...That I can express this to you and that you can receive from me in this instant a part of our precious human birth. You could have been an ant. I could have been an anteater. You could have been rain. I could have been a lick of salt. But we were blessed – in this time, in this place, to be human beings alive in rare ways we often take for granted. ...**this precious human birth is unrepeatable.** So, what will you do today, knowing that you are one of the rarest forms of life to ever walk the Earth? How will you carry yourself? What will you do with your hands? What will you ask and of whom? ... today, you are precious and rare and awake. It ushers us into grateful living. ...Grateful and awake, ask what you need to know now. Say what you feel now. Love what you love now." Mark Nepo

Pastor Kris' Sermon February 2, 2020
The Essential Teachings

The Message Bible: 5" 1-12 ¹⁻² When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, **the committed**, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

³ "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

⁴ "You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

⁵ "You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

⁶ "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

⁷ "You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

⁸ "You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

⁹ "You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

¹⁰ "You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

¹¹⁻¹² "Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don't like it, / do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. **My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.**

The Beatitudes are traditionally known as the essential teachings of Jesus.

One author put it this way: "No sermon ever preached has been more significant to the Christian church than the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon is widely recognized as the heart of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. Luke Timothy Johnson did not exaggerate when he wrote, "In the history of Christian thought—indeed in the history of those observing Christianity—the Sermon on the Mount has been considered an epitome of the teaching of Jesus and therefore, for many, the essence of Christianity."

For those who affirm the deity and authority of the Lord Jesus, no portion of Scripture could possibly be more important for defining the nature of Christian discipleship and the lofty ethic that should characterize God's people. Although more than two thousand years have passed since Jesus uttered these words, they remain as relevant today as when they were first breathed from the Savior's lips." A. M. Hunter"

As we approach the Lenten, I believe it is important to at least spend some time in the basic and essential teachings of Jesus. So today launches a sermon series on the Sermon on the Mount.

First let me tell you a bit about the gospel of Matthew. It is known as one of the synoptic gospels because its content is the same or very similar to the other two gospels: Mark and Luke. The gospel of John, which was written much later, is not at all similar and has a much higher Christology, or understanding of who the Christ is.

Matthew, Luke and Mark all derived their primary sources from something called the Q source. A source of the teachings of Jesus that has been lost down the ages. But the Q source is one of the primary sources for the actions and teachings of Jesus. Matthew's gospel is written in the context of a Jewish Christian community. It is written later than the other synoptic gospels, and it is aimed at convincing this Jewish Christian community that Jesus is indeed the fulfillment of the Jewish law and the expectation of a Messiah.

Matthew's message is that in the person of Jesus of Nazareth the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled. Or to put it in other words, God's redemptive plan was begun in the history of Israel, depicted in prophetic fashion in the events and activities of the people of God, and was climactically finished in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The background out of which the Gospel of Matthew comes is Judaism which had undergone a vast doctrinal development during the four hundred years of the Inter-biblical period. A significant change had occurred in the concept of the coming of the Messiah. Prophecy in the Old Testament prepared the setting for God's fulfillment of his redemptive work in Christ. In Christ the plan of redemption is completed.

But during the long period between the Testaments, (it was at least 400 years) Israel's messianic hope gradually, but surely, took on a different expectation. Against the background of bondage and affliction by foreign powers, the Jews looked for a political Messiah who would deliver them from the yoke of Rome.

The Messiah-King was expected to re-establish the Davidic monarchy after conquering all the enemies of God. (That is why it was important for Matthew to delineate the lineage of Jesus in the opening chapter of his writing) He would reign in glory on the throne of God in Jerusalem. He would make his appearance at the Temple and conqueringly declare his Messiahship with great signs and wonders. Israel would rule the world under his sovereign power, and his disciples would reign with him in splendor and glory.

Against this traditional expectation of the Jews, Matthew shows that Jesus indeed came to reign as King, but not the King in the traditional sense, but a King upon the throne **of**

the hearts of those who accept him by faith; he came to establish his Kingdom, but a Kingdom which would be the rule of God in the hearts of his children by faith.

Matthew is careful to reveal the kind of King Jesus came to be and **kind of Kingdom** he came to establish.

So that is the backdrop. Matthew has established his audience: the Jewish Christians, and he has established Jesus' lineage going back to David and even earlier, to Abraham, and he tells the traditional birth stories, the magi, etc, and then he recounts the brief story of John the Baptist, who has declared that he is NOT the Messiah.

Jesus, as we saw last week is gathering his disciples. The men that he called left all that they knew, and they IMMEDIATELY followed this man. And Jesus starts immediately to heal the people, to minister to the poor, the broken, those under Roman occupation. And the crowds are starting to follow him and expect to see miracles and healing and expecting to be fed and learn from him. And it is in this context, right in the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus delivers the greatest sermon ever preached.

But pay careful attention to the text: notice who gets close enough to really experience it, because it was not the crowds...

Once Jesus sat down, the crowds stayed right where they were...seeing that he sat down, knowing they would have to climb, and realizing that he wasn't feeding, healing, he wasn't touching, so why bother CLIMB TO HEAR WHAT HE HAS TO SAY?...WELL, with that attitude, the unwillingness to put ANY EFFORT INTO LEARNING FROM JESUS... THEY MISSED the fundamental teachings delivered in the greatest sermon ever preached because they didn't want to walk up a hill.

In this sermon, Jesus lays out his fundamental teachings. And his teachings shock the people because they are so countercultural.

Right away Jesus is telling you that his ministry, his message and his mission is COUNTER CULTURAL. Right away he is disturbing the status quo because he is planting in the minds of the people the notion that they are NOT LESS THAN, they are not SUBJECT OF AN EMPIRE, BUT OBJECTS OF GODS LOVE, he is telling them to reject the world view that places value the use of people, and the love of things, but rather Jesus is saying Love God and each other, and don't worry about material wealth or things. Jesus is telling us that they no longer had to wait for the coming of the Christ, because the KINGDOM OF GOD WAS IN THEM. He is telling them that external things are not nearly as important as the pursuit of God, that our lives are supposed to be all about the pursuit of God. Period. Full stop. And however that looks for each of us, whatever that means, it has to mean that our first thought should be about how we pursue a relationship with God. Not the church, not people, not things, but God.

Church, this is revolutionary and countercultural, and it stuns the people. It was a culture shock. Can you imagine the shock and the dismay? But the thing is, what he was saying resonated in their inner being. It resonated because it is Divine truth. But change is hard. And you and I know this from experience.

Let me say this: If you read nothing else for this month from the Bible, Read the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7 of the gospel of Matthew. To know what Jesus taught, you should read this because they are the essential teachings. Let these teachings resonate in your spirit on this day. Let the words of this greatest sermon ever preached resonate with you when you start to lose your focus on God. Let these teachings assure you that Jesus calls us to the imperative to draw closer to God, who resides in the depths of your inner being.

Let it remind us of the one great standard for successful living: A strong and healthy relationship with the God who provides for our needs and who loves us even more than we love ourselves. Let the words of this sermon remind us of what is really important-- and it is not the things of this world, or temporal things that can be--- and are-- lost in the twinkling of an eye...things that go poof!

If the events of last Sunday, the tragic death of Kobe Bryant, if the events of the past week in our government, if your own life events have taught you anything-- these things should have told you that life is fragile, political systems are fragile, our health is fragile, our moods are fragile, our world is fragile. Life is short, and we have so little time to gladden the hearts of those who travel the dark and lonely road with us. So, be swift to love, make haste to be kind.

This is the way in which we can draw closer to Jesus. It will mean we will have to climb some hills, press our way, sacrifice our time...but to me, it's all worth it. So together let's climb up—UP to be replenished, UP to be restored, Up to be renewed; Up to be revitalized. Let's climb UP when the sun shines, up when the rains pour; Up even when cold winds blow and the storms rage.

And remember, as we will see in this communion meal, we are all blessed, broken and distributed because we are the gifts of GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD. THANKS BE TO GOD. (C2020)

West Center Congregational Monthly Church Calendar

- February African-American History Month
AA Heritage Moments during Service **Commemorating 400 + Years of Africans in America: 1619-2019**
- 2 **COMMUNION SUNDAY Devotion: 10:45-11am; Study of the Lord's prayer 1pm**
 - 5 Rev. Kris to meet with Community Leaders in the Lounge for lunch
 - 6. Rev. Kris to meet with Hon. Shelly Mayer off site
 - 9 Preparing for the Lenten Journey: The Almighty Journey of Faith
 - 26 Ash Wednesday Service 11::05 am in Sanctuary Lenten Almighty Journey of faith begins.
 - 28 Rev. Kris Training a group of Climate Activists in the Lounge 9am-5p through (not open to the public)
 - 29