

A Narrative 22, 2019
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Poulsbo
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Matthew 6:7-21

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus began his ministry saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” The kingdom of heaven has come near. In Jesus, God is bringing in the kingdom, bringing righteousness, making the world right again, and he’s doing it by tearing down walls. In the past, I’ve described Matthew’s Jesus’ actions as flipping everything on its head, turning everything they knew upside down. But the biggest thing Jesus flips is that society’s definition of community, and that meant tearing down walls.

The ancient Mediterranean culture (and still many cultures around the world today) was deeply communal. They had no sense of the individual; everything you did reflected on your family, and everything someone in your family did reflected on you. Couple that with the culture’s patriarchal honor model, and you have a society that essentially pits families against each other. Any interaction between families put the delicate honor balance in jeopardy. Any family seeking to better their situation was, in effect, seeking to bring someone else down.

Enter Jesus, who, from the moment he starts to speak on that mountain, flips those communal norms, not seeking to upend the communal nature, but seeking to redefine the nature of community. Jesus sought to break down the walls around the family communities, around the Pharisaic communities, around religious communities, around cultural communities. And Jesus created new communities, incorporating everybody, even the honorless, even the Gentiles, even, well, everybody.

As radical as that redefinition was for that culture, it is equally as radical for us in our individualistic culture. Only for us, Jesus is breaking down the walls we put around ourselves, making us consider the other, the ones out there.

In today’s text, Jesus is redefining the family core. God is “our” father. Our head of the family. All who call God Abba is part of this family. All God created is part of this family. And Jesus tells us to ask for God’s way of family to be here now (and throughout Matthew’s account, Jesus will show us and teach us what God’s way of family is like and will invite us to understand our place in it!).

Jesus tells us to ask for communal daily bread; like manna, communal daily bread is shared and eaten, not stored. Jesus tells us to ask that God would forgive us as we forgive (now, keep in mind that for them, forgiveness entailed losing honor, so why would we expect God to do such a thing, and how hard is it for God to expect us to do such a thing?!). And Jesus tells us to ask God not to be like all the other spirits whose job it is to test us and tempt us to seek our own good instead of the good of others.

Every time we pray this prayer, we are praying that God would break us out of our selfish individual mindset (our normal mindset) and turn us to be in community with our neighbor, even (and maybe especially) the neighbor we don’t want to be in community with.

Which is why Jesus needs to point out that we need to have that communal mindset when it comes to our finances and our stuff as well. “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,

where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Jesus seeks to break down the walls we have put up around our selves and our money and our stuff. Jesus points out our need to be communal with our selves and our money and our stuff. Jesus points out that we need to give.

When we give, we are bringing in the kingdom, making sure all have daily bread, lifting up those without honor in our society. But beyond that, we need to give in order to break down the walls we have established around “our” things. We need to give in order to keep money from becoming or continuing to be our priority. Because when money is our priority, money actually isn’t our priority. The self is.

The motivation is key here. Saving so the self can retire easy. Hoarding because the self might need it someday. Filling the home with stuff to make life easier or more enjoyable for the self. When money is our priority, the self is our priority.

And that is not kingdom behavior.

Focusing on the self goes against all Jesus taught.

Focusing on the self goes against all Jesus DID.

We need to give. Because when we don’t, we turn to ourselves, we rely on ourselves, and we blatantly disregard our neighbor who needs us. When we don’t give, we are loving neither God nor neighbor. We are loving the self.

We need to give in order to maintain our kingdom priorities. Giving in any degree stores up treasures in heaven, because giving in any degree helps others and brings in the kingdom a little more fully. Giving is an act of faith, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Now, note here that Jesus doesn’t say that where your heart is, your treasure will follow. Jesus is not saying that where you put your money is evidence of where your heart is (although that is often true). Jesus is pointing out that our money has everything to do with these walls he’s breaking down. Our money has everything to do with the justice he is bringing. Our money has everything to do with making the world right.

When we give, when we put our money outside our selves, our hearts follow. And the kingdom comes. We need to give, we need to put our money outside our selves, because until we do, we are not fully participating in the justice-bringing, wall-busting, communal kingdom Jesus is calling us to. We need to give, we need to put our money outside ourselves, because until we do, we are actively stunting our faith.

We need to put our money outside our selves, and our hearts will follow.

This isn’t some random idealism. Jesus has called you blessed. Jesus has called you a child of God and invited you to call God “Abba, daddy, father.” Jesus has torn down the walls that separated you from God, and now Jesus is tearing down the walls that separate you from others and separate others from the kingdom. Jesus knows us, knows our tendencies toward our selves, knows our habit of equating money with worth, and Jesus loves us anyway. Jesus plops us in the kingdom and tells us how to make the kingdom real for others. Jesus has claimed your heart. Jesus has claimed you as family. And Jesus has told you how family acts: share bread, forgive debts, store up treasures in heaven by drawing your own heart outside yourself. All that God has done for you, we now do for each other. That’s kingdom work.

Amen