

EPHESIANS 2:11-22 (p. 947)

JULY 18, 2021

MARK 6:30-34, 53-56 (p. 817)

BLAINE

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

We are here to proclaim your Presence Lord—both to ourselves, and to the world around us. You have opened our eyes to the Truth of your Son, and our hearts to your Glory. So, we gather to thank you Lord, to praise you, and Worship you. As we do, please Blanket us with your Love, and Cover us in your Peace. Encourage us Father, and Empower us, so that we will live lives that Witness to the Gospel we believe. We ask this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

“FAMILY VALUES”

Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest. Jesus had compassion, it says, on the Believers, the wanna-be Believers, and on the simply curious, for they were like Sheep without a Shepherd. So, He began to teach. And all who touched Him were healed. It sounds nice, doesn't it? Rather peaceful. It makes you want to Journey with Jesus, doesn't it!

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus and His Disciples are surrounded by the multitudes. The crowds are besieging Him. In fact, so much so that's it's virtually impossible for them to do anything, including take time to eat! So, they seek out a quiet place, a place without distractions, a place away from the demands of ministry for a while. Sometimes Scripture just hits you right where you're at, doesn't it! Jesus, and His Disciples jump into a boat and paddle away, off to the other side of the lake.

They are looking for a little rest, some solitude, a place of peace and contemplation. They want a temporary break from all the demands. But that desire is foiled by the crowds! People are so eager to be with Jesus that they race around the lake on foot, ahead of Him! And when He lands, Jesus is met by multitudes again, a swarm of people, hungry people—people who are hungry for healing, people hungry for attention, people hungry for the Word of God! And as we'll discover in just a bit, people who are hungry for food as well! And here, we are given a glimpse into Jesus' heart! Instead of being irritated by all the demands, something you and I might easily be, Jesus is "filled with compassion", it says, and "begins to teach"!

Now that seems a little strange, doesn't it? These people are hurting, right, lonely and tired and scared! Some are possibly sick. And some, really curious! Others are ready to be amazed! They've seen miracles already, and want more! And Jesus knows all this! But instead of addressing any of these "felt needs", Jesus begins to "teach"! That got my attention! In fact, it jumped right out!

Oh, later, He'll offer bread to the masses, in just a little while in fact, at what the Church calls the "Feeding of the Five Thousand". That miracle actually happens between the verses of today's readings. And then He'll do another amazing thing. Jesus will Walk on the Water! That takes place right after the feast, by-the-way, but before they cross over to Gennesaret. Prior to all that, Jesus teaches! The Lord's response, His "compassionate response", to those who are "like Sheep without a Shepherd," to those who are "hungry", to those "wandering in the wilderness", is to Teach! What does that say?

Did you notice that in the first verse of today's lesson, when Jesus' Disciples came to Him with a report of their Mission Trip, they tell Him about "all they have done, and taught"? Do you remember back at the very beginning of His earthly ministry, when Jesus was teaching in a Synagogue? Mark actually uses the term "Rabbi", "Teacher", to describe Jesus a lot, more than any other title in fact! And when Jesus was in the Upper Room with His Disciples, on the night before He was betrayed, He promises the gift of the Holy Spirit, remember, who will "teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you". I see a theme, don't you!

Then later, when Jesus gives the Church our marching orders after the Resurrection, what we call the Great Commission, He tells us to; "Go and make Disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you!" Again, I see a theme! Which makes me wonder if we in the Contemporary Church might sit up and pay attention? "Go and make Disciples!" In other words, reach out and create Followers of Jesus! And here is how you need to do it, "Teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you!"

Discipleship then, Christian Education, are absolutely crucial to our Mission in the World, not to mention a critical part of our own Faith, right! These are not just "add-ons", something "extra"! Teaching is what we do, the very foundation of what we do! If we are going to do what Jesus did, do what Jesus told us to do, then we need to Teach! Only, are we? When you look at the Church today, is that what you see? Because in all honesty, I think we've dropped the ball! And look at the results!

Oh, don't get me wrong, we do a lot of good things as the Church! And we do these things all over the world! We feed people, and help people, and dabble more than a little in Politics and Social Issues! But how much teaching are we actually doing? Are we teaching what Jesus taught, or something else? There is undoubtedly a whole lot of teaching taking place today, in lots of different places, and lots of different ways! But are we, as the Church, the Family of God, passing on Biblical Truths?

You know, it wasn't that long ago that the Church was the dominant force in American Culture! The values and norms of this Great Nation of ours came to us through Scripture! Our morals and principles were handed down to us by Sunday School Teachers and Preachers, not to mention by parents and grandparents intimately involved in the life of the Church! Truth, Biblical Truth, Ultimate Truth was transmitted from one generation to the next, in all kinds of settings, at the dinner table even!

But now there is such fierce competition for our hearts and minds! And it comes at us from all kinds of venues! Hollywood, for example, has a very big say in our perception of what's right and wrong! Look at all the actors that are telling you what to believe! The Media tells us what is good and fair, in a very loud way! Our government even, or at least those who control it, are telling us what is Truth! Just this week, the White House triumphantly announced that they are "Flagging" whatever they think is "Misinformation" on Facebook! Isn't that called "Censorship"? Doesn't that, whether you agree with it or not, negate the "First Amendment"? What's next, Amazon trying to ban books? It's kind of scary, when you think about it!

Things have changed drastically in just my lifetime! When I was young, my parents didn't have to wonder if I would learn Christian values. That happened almost by osmosis! The Ten Commandments were posted in Government Buildings. Scripture was common at National Monuments, including those in Washington D. C.! We prayed, and pledged our Allegiance to "one Nation under God" every day in schools! Stores were never open on the Sabbath! People hardly ever worked that day! And there was never, ever, a school function planned on Sunday! School Boards just wouldn't have it!

There used to be traffic jams on Sunday mornings between 9:30 and 10:30 as everyone scurried to Church. And then, again at noon, as everyone scurried to the restaurant or back home! Sunday School and Worship used to be things people did each and every week, without fail, like clockwork! Ballgames and garden clubs, guests and golfing, would never be allowed to interfere!

But the world is radically different today! It's busy indoctrinating us into all kinds of lifestyles and worldviews that are anything but Christian! Most of us don't even notice, let alone try to counter it in any way when we do! We are told, repeatedly, that we just need to be more "tolerant", "tolerant" of whatever other people want to believe! But what they are actually saying in arguing that stance so tenaciously, is that I need to agree with them, even if it goes against what I, as a Christian know to be Truth! I'm wrong, they say, or "phobic", or prejudice in some way, and need to acquiesce to their position! But isn't that the opposite of tolerance, not letting me live as God intends! Won't that, eventually, lead to persecution?

I am not trying to get on a soapbox here! I am not even trying to rattle cages, although maybe I should! But I see a clear Biblical Theme of Teaching in Scripture, don't you, of passing on values and practices and beliefs to those who come behind us? Today's lesson makes that point explicitly! But are we? Or have we let fear get in the way!

Believe me, I wish our reading today would have included the Feeding of the Five Thousand, or Jesus Walking on Water. Those are far easier to preach! But it didn't! It begins with Jesus, teaching! It then moves to spending quiet time alone with Him. Only then does it finish with Jesus, healing folks! There is a clear sequence of events, isn't there? Teaching! Time with the Lord! Then Healing! I think our world needs healing!

George Barna, the Christian Research Giant, in one of his books, lists seven "Passions" experienced by the Early Church, things maybe we should focus on; "Intimate Worship", "Faith-based Conversations", "Intentional Spiritual Growth", "Servanthood", "Resource Investment", "Spiritual Friendships", and "Family Faith". Barna then goes on to compare these First Century values to the 77 million American adults today, who profess to be "Churched, Born-Again Christians".

And for his survey, that category, "Churched, Born-Again Christians", is defined as; "people who have confessed their sins, asked God for forgiveness, accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, are confident of their Salvation based solely on the Grace extended to them by God, and regularly participate in the life of a Christian congregation". I have to tell you, what he found is scary!

Eight out of ten “Churched, Born-Again Believers” today, not just people who say they are Christian, “do not feel as if they have entered the Presence of God, or experienced a connection with Him during Worship in the last year”. Eight out of ten! A majority of the 77 million say they have “no specific person in mind whom they are praying for, in the hope that that person will be saved”. Fewer than one out of ten Churched Families “pray together, other than at meals, or study the Bible together outside of Church”. And only nine percent of “Churched, Born-Again Believers” have a “Biblical Worldview”.

Let me explain the definition of a “Biblical Worldview”, because I think we are even in danger of losing that! A Biblical Worldview is one that believes; 1. “Absolute Moral Truth exists and is contained in the Bible. 2. The Bible is accurate in its teachings. 3. Jesus lived a sinless life on earth. 4. Satan is real, not symbolic. 5. All Believers are responsible for sharing their faith in Christ with others. 6. The only means to Salvation is through God’s Grace. 7. God is the all-knowing and all-powerful Creator of the Universe who still rules it today!”

Only nine percent of “Churched, Born-Again Believers” have a “Biblical Worldview”! The other ninety-one percent, according to Barna’s research, “possess a patchwork of theological views”, and “rarely rely on these to inform their daily decisions!” So, given this, if you were going to give the Church a Report Card, you know, as any good Teacher would, how would you say we’re doing?

Maybe I'm just being reflective! Maybe I'm old, and keep thinking about "back in the day"! I did just turn sixty-four, which seems a whole lot older than sixty! Deb and I are coming up on forty years of marriage! We just had a Family Reunion, with loved ones we don't often see, and our grandkids for a week of Cousin's Camp! And we are headed to Family Camp this afternoon, where much of my early Spiritual Formation took place! So, maybe I'm just being reflective! But there are lots of people around me currently dealing with some serious issues! And Deb and I are leaving all of you for a few months, going on Sabbatical with Jesus, to get some rest! I have reason to take stock! But so do you!

I feel a sense of urgency right now Whenever I watch the news, my heart breaks! COVID got my attention, but so did all the things associated with it! Maybe you've noticed what's happening at the Border? Maybe you've heard our so-called "Leaders" who seem to be "Unencumbered by the Truth"? Look at the Crime Rates, Divorce Rates, and Suicide Rates! Consider all the drugs pouring into this country, the Gangs and Cartels that are growing like weeds, how people actually "hate cops", and resist anyone in authority! Divisions are everywhere, and growing! Hopelessness, and Anxiety, and Fear abound! So, are we, as Christians, missing the boat? Are we failing to teach?

Ethics are now "situational"! I know that trend started years ago, but now "facts" are determined by the loudest voice! Foundational Principles of right and wrong are completely ignored! People just do whatever they want, and then justify it in creative ways! We keep lowering the bar on ethical norms, in order to make people happy, or to match what Society is already doing! But if that's the case, then where does it stop?

Seriously! If the standards of Right and Wrong begin and end with you and me, with our own wants and desires, as opposed to something greater than we are, then won't we always lower our values? Won't the "Rules of Acceptable Behavior" constantly move downward, in order to make ourselves feel good? Won't we simply rationalize whatever it is that we want to do, disobey God "just this once", tell ourselves that eating the apple is really, okay? I hear the wisdom in something Wayne Margetson told me years ago! "What one generation tolerates the next generation embraces!" Without strong, Biblical Teaching, isn't that the trajectory that we are on?

C. S. Lewis wrote in his book *That Hideous Strength*, "Good is always getting better, and bad is always getting worse. The possibilities of even apparent neutrality are always diminishing. The whole thing is sorting itself out all the time, coming to a point, getting sharper and harder."

Do you remember the "I Dream of Jeanie" show, from the late sixties? Some of you are probably too young, but you can look it up on U-Tube. It raised quite the controversy! In an interview with Barbara Eden, one of the stars, she shared the behind-the-scenes drama between Producers and Lawyers and the General Public! They simply could not, ever, allow her belly button to show on National TV! That would be scandalous! They worked diligently to make sure it never did! Have times changed, or what? And at the very same time, in the late sixties, the biggest complaints from Public School Teachers, their largest challenges in the classroom, were "kids talking out loud and chewing gum"! What direction would you say we're headed?

So back to my question; “How are we, as the Church doing, with teaching the things of God”?

The average adult today knows exactly what to do in at a fancy restaurant, what fork to use, and how much to tip and such. Most of us know how to buy things on Amazon or E-Bay, and even trade stocks on-line. Some of us know how to check our Credit Score, and do on-line banking. But how many people are baffled when they step through the doors of a Church?

Staying up late watching movies feels comfortable and right! But getting up for Church seems foreign and burdensome! Sending money to save the Spotted Owls, or the Blue-Bellied Whales doesn't even cause a second thought! But how about helping a Christian Organization, like BACN, or a Missionary Team, or even the Church? Everyone knows how to “Tweet”, right, and visit with friends on Facebook! And willingly share intimate details of their lives when they do! But how many take that same amount of time for Bible Study and Prayer? Or share what's happening in the lives with someone after Church? How many people panic, or get real shy, when it comes to visiting someone who is homebound, or in the hospital?

Almost any child over three knows who Elsa is, and Nemo, Spiderman, and Big Bird! They understand how important it is to get into their car seat! They know to wear bike helmets, and not talk to strangers! Any six-year-old can use an I-phone or I-Pad, a computer, or TV remote!

But how many kids these days can tell you about Samuel, or Peter, or Moses? How many understand the importance of Keeping the Sabbath, or the Ten Commandments? How many adolescents know what Communion means, or Baptism? Or how many Young Adults are prepared for Christian Marriage?

Religious Scholar are brilliant! Any Seminary Professor, or Pastor, or Priests, can explain in great detail how Jesus is “the eschatological manifestation of the kerygma, in which we recognize the ultimate significance of our interpersonal relationships”! But how many Church Leaders comprehend that “Jesus is God”, and needs to be their “Lord”? Tell me, are we teaching the next generation what really matters, or not?

Today we find Jesus offering rest, and healing, and miracles even! But prior to that, He takes the time to teach! It’s a prerequisite for the other things! But again, is that what you see happening in the world today, or even in the Church? How about over the last ten years? Twenty? Forty? Maybe more? What direction do you think we’re headed?

I guess we can’t complain about not having young people in the Church, can we! That’s our fault! We can’t complain, we need to do something about it! If we don’t honor the life-lessons that have been handed down to us, we shouldn’t dream of seeing them in our children and grandchildren! If we don’t stand up for Truth, right now, we shouldn’t be surprised when it no longer exists! If we don’t embody, and boldly live-out our Christian Values, then really, what kind of Legacy should we expect? And all of God’s people said, Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Teach us Lord! Teach us to seek your face! And reveal yourself to us when we do. Instruct us Lord, so that we may walk faithfully down your paths, in your time, and in your ways. And enlighten us Lord, so that our lives will shine with knowledge, and wisdom, and understanding. Teach us Lord. Educate your Disciples. So that together we may be built into a Holy Temple worthy of your Presence.

Father, we know that we are a diverse people, yet we are a people called together by your Spirit, and into the Name of your Son. We acknowledge our differences, but claim the promise that we are One through the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We realize that the only way to peace is through this bond. We know that your power is what brings us together, and what keeps us here. So today we ask you to do just that. Make us into your household. Weave us together in Christ. Build us up into a Spiritual Dwelling Place, a place where others may find comfort and peace, under your roof, and before your Altar of Grace.

Lord, as one people, as those who stand in the Shadow of the Cross, as a Christian Family that humbly kneels before you now, as your Church Lord, we bow together asking for your Mercy and your Grace. As sisters and brothers of Jesus Christ, one Body, His Body here on earth, we place our pleas and petitions before you now. Please be with..... Please calm their hearts. Please free their minds. And please heal their bodies, Lord, as well as their lives. Father, I ask a special prayer today for this Church, for our Elders and Leaders, for our Staff, for all of our members, and all of our guests. I pray especially for Pastor David and his wife Sue, and for their family. I pray for all of our Guest Pastors and Speakers during Sabbatical, and for Deb and I as well.

May this be a powerful time of Rest and Renewal, of Healing Lord, and especially Teaching. And may we all be Blessed by the Presence of your Holy Spirit—your Strength, your Power, your Peace—as we are apart. And then, filled with your Joy when we come together once again! We ask these things as Adopted Children Father, as Co-Heirs with Jesus our Lord, and pray together now the very prayer that He taught us saying, Our Father...