

In our scripture passage from Mark last week Jesus asked the disciples a couple of important questions: *Who do people say that I am?* And *Who do you say that I am?* With the first question he addressed the crowds of people who were coming to see Jesus and be healed by him. The disciples replied that some said Elijah, some said John the Baptist, and some said one of the prophets. People had a variety of ideas and thoughts about who Jesus was, but the point is that most people seemed to think he was a long dead ancestor of the faith come back to life.

The other question is addressed to the disciples themselves. Jesus wants to know what the disciples think, these men and women who had been travelling around with Jesus and had been present for all of the teachings and miracles. Peter, as we know, blurted out *You are the Messiah!* Surprisingly Jesus's response is to warn them not to tell anyone about him, to not go around saying that they believed Jesus to be the Messiah. I imagine that Jesus, already making waves in the Jewish community, doesn't yet want to upset things completely until the time is right.

Then Peter rebukes Jesus and Jesus rebukes Peter and Jesus gives a further warning, that following Jesus isn't fun and games, it isn't for show and it isn't for power, in fact it is quite possibly dangerous; and that following Jesus means setting aside one's own wants and needs and taking up the cause of Jesus for better or worse, til death do they part.

Then we skip a bunch of verses and pick up today with an argument. They're on the way to Capernaum and when they get there and stop for rest Jesus asks them what the argument was about. I can imagine them kind of looking at the ground and shuffling their feet nervously; they didn't know Jesus had heard them and were embarrassed to admit what was going on. They'd been arguing about who was the greatest and the implication is that they were arguing about which one of them was the greatest disciple. Never mind that Jesus had told them again on the way that the Son of Man, Jesus, would be killed. They just didn't get it.

Jesus doesn't reprimand them, exactly; but he does remind them that being one of his disciples, one of his students, is not about power or greatness. It is about gentleness, compassion, and welcoming and caring for the weakest among them.

But Jesus and the disciples just don't seem to be on the same page.

The problem is, I think, that the disciples are working from a worldly point of view. They think of the Messiah as a literal King, a warrior king in the mold of David. A King who would lead a rebellion against the Romans and bring independence and greatness to Israel once again.

Jesus, on the other hand, is working from a different set of expectations, a set of expectations that come from God, and that will lead Israel on a spiritual, not a physical, renewal.

This is an important distinction, and we see it echoed in our text from James today when he makes a distinction between wisdom from above and wisdom that is earthly (and evil and unspiritual.) The difference, according to James, is that earthly wisdom involves bitter envy of others and selfish ambition—like what might have led to the argument among the disciples. Ambition and jealousy of what others have brings disorder and wickedness. Wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle and willing to yield (and seemingly brings order and righteousness.)

And it is true what James says. Wanting what we don't have or being jealous of what someone else has leads to arguments, conflicts, even war. On social media it leads to people being terrible to each other sometimes—calling each other ugly names, threatening their safety, bullying them. We might even be afraid of our own brokenness or ugliness inside and are afraid that someone else will have love, will deserve love when we don't. Of course, in God's economy there is enough love for everyone and no one is greater than anyone else. But that is *so hard* for us to truly know, isn't it? We don't have to compare ourselves to others, we don't have to compete for God's love because God is love. Period.

So it isn't a question of whether we are good enough, or whether we measure up (you know how it goes, *I'm not the best person but at least I don't...* fill in the blank) It is a question of believing that God loves other people *and* there is enough love left for us, it is a question of believing that God doesn't have to measure out portions of love like pieces of bread at dinner, slicing it *just so* so there is enough for everyone, but that the love of God in Christ is a never-ending loaf of bread, enough for everyone and 12 baskets left over.

Our job, then, is to accept that we are loved but that all others are loved too. And that's hard for us to do. The world pulls at us, whispers in our ear *look at that! God must really love them for them to have such a perfect life* or *look at them! They must have been really bad to be addicted like that—how could God love a person like that?* This is the kind of thinking we have to let go of as individuals and as church if we are going to be people Christians, or little Christs.

I want to especially talk about us a church for a minute. We might look at ourselves where we are right now and feel hopeless and unloved by God. Our membership has been declining for years, we struggle to keep things going, there's deferred maintenance that needs to be done and our finances are just keeping us afloat. The staff positions are all part time. We're even talking about selling the building and property, or selling part of the property, and perhaps moving our ministry to a new context. It can be hard to feel that God thinks highly of Community of Faith Presbyterian Church, it can be easy to feel that God has forgotten us, that God doesn't love us, that we've done something to make God mad at us.

But here's the thing: when we allow ourselves to have those thoughts we are looking at ourselves through the lens of the world. The world says, bigger is better. The world

says, if you're a true church, if your theology were correct, wouldn't you have lots of members? The world says, wow, what a beautiful view. Too bad no one ever sees it. The world says, you might have to sell the building? Sad! Fail! Losers.

But I think God looks at us and says, look at all the lives you touch! The hospital volunteers, the meals for Cornerstone, the children that are cared for by CLASP and SPARK. The clean water you've helped provide for communities in Nicaragua and the lives you've touched there—and who you've been touched by. The people you help by giving to Be Concerned and Covington Partners. The relationships you have with each other. That is what being church is about—it is about being disciples of Christ in the world, not just on church day but every day. So what if you might have to move—do you think that means that I don't love you? (says God.) There is nothing that can separate us (says God) not even change! In fact, sometimes I nudge you to change (says God.) Sometimes I want you to change. But whether you do or you don't, I love you. (says God.)

This is such good news, isn't it? That we are loved, that God loves us *and* all other people who have ever been and will ever be? That we are loved even if we don't do church at 1400 Highland Pike? That we can love each other, are called to love each other, no matter our location?

There are a lot of things tied up in a building. Memories, stories, good times and bad times. Joys and sorrows. Money, time and talents invested. It's hard to think of doing something different. It might even feel like failure. If we listen to the wisdom of the world.

But if we listen to God's wisdom, we remember that the memories are ours, even if we don't stay in this physical building. We realize that our money, time and energy might be better spent in other ways. We don't worry about being the greatest, we just enjoy being followers of Christ, bringing the love of God and the wisdom of God to a broken and bitter world; and we enjoy watching our God's love and wisdom heal that brokenness and soothe that bitterness. Watching the world become, not *great* in the world's way of accounting but *whole* in God's way of accounting. Amen.