

23 February 2014
Matthew 5:38-48
I Cor 3:10-11, 16-23

SGL
CCNS

New Foundations

There was a little old lady, who every morning stepped onto her front porch, raised her arms to the sky, and shouted: 'PRAISE THE LORD!'

One day an atheist moved into the house next door. He became irritated at the little old lady.

Every morning he'd step onto his front porch after her and yell: 'THERE IS NO LORD!'

Time passed with the two of them carrying on this way every day. One morning, in the middle of winter, the little old lady stepped onto her front porch and shouted: 'PRAISE THE LORD! Please Lord, I have no food and I am starving, provide for me, oh Lord!'

The next morning she stepped out onto her porch and there were two huge bags of groceries sitting there.

'PRAISE THE LORD!' she cried out. 'HE HAS PROVIDED GROCERIES FOR ME!'

The atheist neighbor jumped out of the hedges and shouted:
'THERE IS NO LORD; I BOUGHT THOSE GROCERIES!!'

The little old lady threw her arms into the air and shouted: 'PRAISE THE LORD!
HE HAS PROVIDED ME WITH GROCERIES AND MADE THE DEVIL PAY FOR THEM!'

It has taken us three weeks to get here and finally we are at the peak of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. "Turn the other cheek," he says. "Love your enemies." Is it realistic to think we can do this on our own, never mind trying to get our culture to embrace these ideals? Geez. Can it get any tougher than that?

Well, actually, it can. "Be perfect as God in heaven is perfect." That one is enough to make us close the Bible and not look back. We shake our heads knowing that no one can be perfect. But let's not give up yet. We can dig a little deeper to find out what Jesus really meant by looking at that word translated as "perfect."

"Perfect," in this case, stems from *telos*, the Greek word for "goal," "end," or "purpose." The sense of the word is more about becoming what was intended, accomplishing one's God-given purpose in the same way that God constantly reflects God's own nature and purpose." (Lose)

Eugene Peterson's The Message gets closer to the mark when he translates it, "You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity."

How many of you have ever worked on building a house? Who has ever cooked a meal for your family or friends? Or made a dress or knitted a scarf? When you build a house you need good stone for the foundation, don't you? Otherwise time and weather will wreak havoc on it and you'll find yourself having to rebuild. You wouldn't use rotten eggs to cook breakfast for your family. And if you've ever sewed or knitted you know how

much better what you have made looks and lasts when you used the best materials. In everything we do, the quality of the outcome is all about what we use for our foundation.

God didn't use cheap materials on building us. Here on this mountain, Jesus is reminding us that we are quality stuff, capable of the best – with God's help. When we can embrace the fact that God's creative power of love and grace is at our core, we can do anything. Think of who is speaking here...Jesus. He of all people knew what he was talking about. And he not only talked about it but lived it. He kept on his path toward Jerusalem, turning his other cheek and loving his enemies, in the midst of humiliation and violence, even embracing death.

He understands "... just how hard it is for us to love rather than hate, to forgive rather than begrudge, to embrace rather than protect, to share rather than hoard, to heal rather than wound, especially when we ourselves walk so much of our lives wounded and hurt." (Lose) Jesus also understands how blessed and beloved of God we are. So maybe we shouldn't think of these words as commandments – but as commendments. Jesus commends us to live into our God-given potential. As St. Augustine once said as he served communion to his congregation, each day we are to "Receive who you are. Become what you've received."

Receive who you are – child of God. Become what you have received. Receive the love of God – and share the love of God.

We are not always good at receiving, though, are we?

What holds you back? What gets in your way? What blocks you from being able to believe that you are truly loved, and blessed, and a child of God? I don't ask this question idly – as I hold that challenge up to myself as well.

We have a moment right now to think about what we are not able to love about ourselves or what prevents us from sharing God's love. In your bulletins there is a square of paper with the words: This is what keeps me from embracing and becoming the person God wishes me to be:

Take a moment. It may be a fear, or a resentment, or memory or hurt that keeps you from embracing and becoming the person God wishes you to be. If you feel so inclined, I invite you to write something down. You can fold it – then put it later in the offering plate. Our offerings will be brought forward and left here beneath the cross. We do this – placing it in God's hands to work on with us.

God didn't use cheap materials in building us. We have good foundations – and in Christ a new foundation. So in our turning our broken building blocks over to God, may we begin to believe and know this:

"You are kingdom people, blessed and beloved by God and called to be salt and light in the world. Go, be who you are!"

David Lose, The Marbury E. Anderson Biblical Preaching Chair; Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN. February 13, 2011; *Perfect*, at workingpreacher.org.