

First Congregational Church, Loveland  
Rev. Erin Gilmore  
February 12, 2017  
You Can't Be Human Alone

Matthew 5:21-27

Prayer: Prayer: God bless this scripture in our hearing and in our telling bless my words and the space between my words that there may be a word for all gathered here today needing your presence. Amen.

At first glance this seems an odd scripture for this morning – given my announcement and the current place we now find ourselves, focusing on these specific issues that Jesus raises in this part of the Sermon on the Mount seems a bit peripheral. Not that they aren't important, but they do not, at least directly, seem speak to our situation. I debated picking a different scripture for this very reason. But I decided to keep it because there is a spirit beneath these specific issues that Jesus raises that I think does have something to say to us on this particular morning.

For the last five weeks we have been reflecting on our identity as children of God. We have been given all kinds of ways to think about our identity: we are beloved, claimed, called, blessed, salt and light. They all point to an inward reality, a naming of who we have been created to be, a way to think about ourselves, not through the world's eyes, but through God's eyes.

In this next section of the Sermon on the Mount that Brian just read for us Jesus is now turning their perspective outward and inviting them to see that who they are is inexorably linked with those around them. That is, who you are is not just about you, about your gifts, about your salt, about your call, about your name – who you are is also about who you are in relationship with and what that relationship looks like. Discipleship is not an individual affair. You are not a disciple for your own sake but for the sake of those around you as well. In South Africa they have a word Ubuntu. Translated it roughly means, I am because we are. A person is a person through other persons.

In this scripture I think Jesus is helping the disciples to see something similar. God's will and hope for our lives is not just about refraining from certain behaviors, or living by particular rules – it is about living in right relationship with one another. In this scripture Jesus is trying to help the disciples see that

following God is not as simple as “as long as I don’t do any of these things I am good” – it requires special attention to our relationships. It asks us to recognize that our actions affect others and that they not only reveal who we are but also the communities of which we are a part. Whenever we took youth a service trip we would drive this point home. Whatever you do on this trip – is not just a reflection of you but a reflection of the church that sent you. Our discipleship is not just our own.

And so Jesus goes through six different examples to make this point. We just read one of them this morning but they all start with you have heard it said by I say to you – you have heard it said do not murder – but I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment.”

Jesus knows that even if we keep the commandment not to kill, we can still hate and despise others. One can too easily discriminate, injure, neglect, or speak poorly of a neighbor all the while saying, “I have kept the commandment because I have not murdered.” And so Jesus intensifies the law to make us more responsible for our neighbor’s well-being. God didn’t give us this law just to avoid physically killing. We must also avoid destroying the dignity and reputation of another. If we seek life and wholeness, we will refuse to degrade another with our angry words – be they insults, gossip or manipulative “back-stabbing”. Rather, we will do everything we can to recognize the humanity of the other.

The commandment is given not just so that we won’t kill each other, but so that we will be the type of people who will seek out someone who has wronged us and work to be reconciled with them. We will find ways to reconcile our anger and not speak ill about our brother or sister. So this is the first of six examples and all of them follow this line of thinking – (I have a sermon from a few years ago that gets into the specifics of each of these if you want more details) for today - what I want us to see here is the underlying spirit of this text that speaks to importance of relationship in a life of discipleship.

The law wasn’t given for just to individuals it was given to community. It was given to strengthen community and orient a community to the ways of God rather than the ways of the world, and at the heart of the law was honoring the life and health of our neighbor. If we want to follow the way of God it means that we ask ourselves, are we living in such a way that enhances the life of our neighbor, and helps our neighbor flourish, or are we living in a way that diminishes the life of our neighbor and causes our neighbor harm? To follow the law of God, the way of

God, its true form, in its complete form, is to care about the welfare of our neighbors, and to make our living such that all who are around us flourish.

So how does this speak to the present moment we now found ourselves?

Two things. First – in the three years that I have been here I seen this teaching in action. Relationship is at the heart of who you are. It was a huge part of what drew me here.

When I first learned that First Congregational Church in Loveland was going to be searching for a new pastor I had no idea of course if we would be a good fit. After being in conversation with the search committee and visiting in person – it became clear that the Spirit was leading me here, and so with a bit of trepidation, I said yes. I say trepidation because I knew that in choosing me you were taking a risk – first female pastor, decidedly UCC, and theologically progressive. For the first few months I wasn't sure how I would be received, or how we would find our way together. But those concerns faded more and more into the background as we began to build relationships with one another and you welcomed me into the joys and sorrows of your lives. You extended to me the same authentic relationship that you extend to one another.

And since being here I have heard story after story of about how important your relationships are. For some of you it is the relationships with the people that keep you here. You may not always agree, you may be angry at times with other members of the congregation, you may not understand where another person comes from, but you nonetheless show up for one another and support one another in times of need.

In the time that I have been here I have seen your commitment to your relationships grow. The called to care team is about relationship. The one community one family is about relationship. Being a Sunday school leader is about relationship. The Wednesday groups are about relationship. It was in one of those Wednesday groups where one of the participants said it plainly – “You can't be human alone.” I could not agree more. Relationship is at the heart of what it means to be human, and what it means to be a disciple. It is not a coincidence that we have at the center of our faith a Trinitarian God – a relationship of being –

And so to my second point: just as I have seen relationship at the heart of who you are these past three years, so too do I see relationship as the heart of your future.

It is my hope that what has begun to flourish here will continue to deepen. You are an incredibly kind and generous group of people each with your own gifts and perspectives. And there is a beginning here of being able to trust one another more fully with all of who you are. Your church council has acknowledged that it is not easy for this congregation to talk about hard issues – those things that you don't all agree on – and yet they are necessary conversations for your future. And so your relationships with one another are essential. Not only for you, but for all those out there who are wondering if there is a place where they can bring all of who they are and be part of a living, loving, community of faith.

Up until a couple of months ago I imagined I would continue to be part of that future, and part of helping you continue to strengthen your relationships, and identifying how God is seeking to use you in this particular time in this particular city, but a door has opened that I can't not walk through. And as I said in my letter it has nothing to do with who you are and everything to do with where I feel called to go. There will be more words in the days and weeks to come, but for today I want simply to say, don't let this change give you reason to step away from one another. Step in. Lean in. Invest in this community, and in one another, and know that it doing so you will be guided by the Spirit, and upheld by God, and the goodness that is within this community will continue to shine forth.

## Children's Time

good morning - welcome - good to see everyone this morning.

Robbie wanted me to be sure say ehlllo to you this morning – he is preaching at the UCC church in Greeley today

So this morning I want to talk about the word change.

That word can mean a lot of different things.

What comes to mind when you hear the word “change”.

I have change in my pocket.

It’s time to change into your pajamas. Change clothes.

We decided to change the time of our party.

Those are some simple, straightforward examples of change.

There are also some more complicated kinds of change.

Some of you have had the experience of welcoming a new sibling into the family – Its super fun and super exciting – but things change a lot when that sibling comes home. You have to share time with Mom and Dad – you have new responsibilities

I want to talk about change because I sent a letter to the congregation this week letting them know that I have been called to a new position – I will be here as your pastor through Easter, and then you will have an interim pastor who will be here as long as is needed, until the search committee finds a new settled pastor.

I want you to know that this was not an easy decision for me because I really love this church and all of you, my decision to make this change has nothing to do with this church, it’s not anybody’s fault, there’s nothing that acould have been done differently – I am just clear that the Spirit is calling me in this new direction at this particular time.

I also want you to know that in the midst of this change in pastors, that there are a lot of things that will not change. Robbie will still be here. Sunday school will continue on. Youth Group will continue on. Your church family will still be here and love you and support you and care for you. And most importantly, God will be with you, with your church family, and that will never change. We can always count on and rely on God’s love for each and every one of us. So I just want you to know that you are well cared for, and well loved, and in these next couple of months together, we can celebrate being the church together. \

Welcome

Good morning and welcome to our time of worship together. Every Sunday as we gather here in this sanctuary we are reminded that whoever we are and wherever we are life's journey God's welcomes us here. together

Prayer of invocation

Most Loving and Gracious God,  
we praise you and we thank you for the guidance that you give us  
from day to day in your Word and by your Spirit.  
We thank you for choosing to dwell among us  
and praise you for calling us to be your faithful people.  
Bless this time of worship and of prayer,  
that those who need comfort may be comforted,  
those who need challenge may be challenged,  
and that all of us may grow closer together as your children—  
as members of the body of Christ Jesus our Risen Lord,  
in whose name we pray. **Amen.**

## Prayers of the People

God of Love, We give you thanks for your constant presence. You are with us in every season calling us ever into deeper waters and calling us out of ourselves into the world to serve others.

God our Father, in whose eyes all life is precious, help us to value the worth of every individual, whom you have created in your image.

God our Redeemer, We pray for victims of violence or hatred, especially people who have suffered innocently. May they find the healing in body, mind and spirit.

God our Peace, we ask that the causes of division and hatred at work in our world may be transformed into seeds of compassion and grace. Where there is prejudice because of color, language, religion or culture, help us to see things through the eyes of others, and act towards them as we would like to be treated ourselves.

God our Rock, we also pray for people who have been the cause of hurts to others. Enable them not only to admit their mistakes, but also to use their time and energy for the benefit of others and the welfare of society.

God our Creator, we pray for all who have been lifted up in prayer this day  
And ask your healing touch to bless them.

We thank you for the gifts, talents and skills  
with which you have blessed us.

We thank you for the experiences  
that have brought us into deeper relationship with you and with one another.

We thank you for the vision that you have planted in our hearts.

As we enter into this time of transition, we recall your deep compassion, presence,  
and abounding love.

And we ask that you be with us as we move forward,  
Where there is anxiety bring us peace. Where there is resignation, bring us  
resilience.

Where there is fear bring courage. Where there is sadness bring us comfort. Where  
there is doubt bring us hope.

Reveal to us once again your eternal truth of grace upon grace upon grace. Hear us  
as we pray...