

*Dear Friends,*

*This morning's message is being delivered online at 10:30 AM, via live stream on Facebook. Like us at First Christian Church of Decatur. An Order of Worship is available.*

*You and yours are in our prayers as we go through this collective experience of a pandemic that is affecting our lives and shared space. Even though all large-group gatherings at First Christian Church of Decatur are cancelled, let's strive to stay calm and connected with each other and the holy. We are better together even when we must keep a physical distance.*

*Like many local churches in the Decatur area, we are offering online worship services. Citywide faith communities are exploring viable means to serve and support families in need in our midst. Stay in touch, stay linked in, stay safe.*

*Shalom, Pastor James*

***"You Have Heard That It Was Said"***

Online Message & Open Communion

Livestream on Facebook at First Christian Church of Decatur, GA

10:30 AM, Sunday, March 15, 2020

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Scriptures: Isaiah 58: 1-9a; Matthew 5:17-22

Isaiah 58:1-9a (NRSV)

Shout out, do not hold back!

Lift up your voice like a trumpet!  
Announce to my people their rebellion,  
to the house of Jacob their sins.

<sup>2</sup>Yet day after day they seek me  
and delight to know my ways,  
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness  
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;  
they ask of me righteous judgments,  
they delight to draw near to God.

<sup>3</sup>"Why do we fast, but you do not see?  
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?"  
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day,  
and oppress all your workers.

<sup>4</sup>Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight  
and to strike with a wicked fist.  
Such fasting as you do today  
will not make your voice heard on high.

<sup>5</sup>Is such the fast that I choose,  
a day to humble oneself?  
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,

and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?  
Will you call this a fast,  
a day acceptable to the Lord?  
6 Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?  
7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them,  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?  
8 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up quickly;  
your vindicator<sup>[a]</sup> shall go before you,  
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.  
9 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;  
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

Matthew 5: 17-22 (NRSV)

<sup>17</sup> “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup> For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>21</sup> “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.

### Opening Sentences

#### ***Welcome home!***

We are delighted to welcome you home to First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia.  
We’re an Open and Affirming Congregation located in downtown Decatur.  
As a spiritual hub and a community hub, we are open 8 days a week  
...except now, of course...hence today’s online service.

We just celebrated the marriage ceremony of Porter and Whitney.  
On the back of their wedding program they put their church’s Welcome Statement,

because, said Porter, it's what drew us here, and in, and keeps us close.

Our Welcome Statement proclaims:

*First Christian Church of Decatur (Disciples of Christ) is an open and affirming congregation. We welcome everyone into full participation in the life and membership of the church.*

*Inspired and informed by God's love, mercy, and justice, we are purposefully involved in healing and helping our community and our world. We covenant with God and the greater community to nurture a spirit of love and service to neighbors, honor one another's differences, and fellowship in the breaking of bread.*

*Actively striving to honor each other's race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, physical or mental ability, family configuration, political affiliation, economic circumstance, or theological perspective, we truly do welcome all.*

NPR's news show, *Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Me*, was here at the FOX on Saturday.

The radio show went on,

broadcast before a live audience of only 5 people in a theater that seats 5,000.

In terms of attendance, today we best Peter Sagal & *Wait, Wait*.

You will find an Order of Worship posted on our Facebook page.

For those of you worshipping the Living Christ with us, here is the flow.

First a Call to Worship and Prayer of Invocation.

Followed by readings from Isaiah 58 and Matthew 5.

Our message will revisit Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Hopefully, prayerfully, everything we do here, together, guides us to the Table.

If you like, go ahead and get some Bread (gluten or free!) and a Cup to share,

and in a little while we'll meet at Christ's Table

to partake of Holy Communion, together.

Here all of God's people are made welcome because all belong.

Let us worship God together.

### Sermon

As we journey through Lent toward Easter's resurrection power,

we are revisiting Jesus Christ's Sermon on the Mount.

Two Sundays ago, Jennifer Hasler, our seminary intern, preached on the Beatitudes.

*"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven."*

She reminded us that Jesus reminds us daily

that God's love is for one and all,

even and especially those whom the world treats like zeros.

Last Sunday our Associate Pastor Anna Strickland preached

on Jesus' affirmation that you are the salt of the earth,  
that you are the light of the world,  
that Jesus made the Gospel personal,  
that God's love and light shine through you.

Today as we revisit the Sermon on the Mount  
we stand on the hillside listening to Jesus of Nazareth,  
Jesus the Rabbi, the Teacher,  
the Pioneer and Perfecter of the Faith.

Here we encounter Jesus the Preacher who Interpreted the Law of Moses, the Torah.  
He drew deeply upon Love as the prerequisite for grasping  
the Law's nuance, the Law's purpose, the application of the Law.

He said, *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets.  
I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."*

His sermon teaches us that the Law of Moses is fulfilled in and through love.  
Jesus took seriously the prerequisite of Love as a foundation for the Law.  
Because He did so,

He applied a principle that is deeper than rules,  
a spirituality that undergirds both religion and regulations.  
It matters what you do, and it matters what you choose not to do.

Reminds me of the patient who said, *"Doc, when I move my arm like this, it hurts."*  
The doctor responded, *"So don't do it!"*

For example, says Jesus, the Torah tells you 'Thou shall not commit murder,'  
but I say unto you  
that to be so angry at someone  
that you harm them emotionally or physically,  
spiritually or psychologically  
is like killing a soul.

If your anger is eating you up inside  
and your angry behavior is hurting someone else,  
don't do it!

Help is here for all who seek it, who knock, who ask.

For example, says Jesus, the Torah tells you 'Thou shall not commit adultery,'  
but I say unto you that the way you treat women  
matters just as much if not more. So don't do it!

When we see people as objects, we objectify them.  
People become an It, a Them, an Other,  
rather than as an extension of ourselves, worthy to be loved.

The way you behave around the whole people of God matters,  
be they children or men or women, Christians, Muslims, or Jews,  
regardless of sexual orientation or ethnicity or social status,  
everyone should be treated with respect.

Jesus took the complexity and emotional distance of the Torah  
and made it real to us on a deeply personal level.

There is real security in this.

Being loved is like having a security blanket.

When you are secure in your love, you trust.

You have confidence.

You can conquer mountains, oceans, problems, challenges, anything.

You are omnipotent.

You can fly.

A couple years ago I had the blessed opportunity  
to represent this significant congregation  
at the funeral of Bob Kidd in Acworth, Georgia.

The sanctuary in Acworth hosted relatives, media colleagues, and neighbors.

A bagpiper started the service  
and away we went, transported by the holy.

Stories were shared;  
familiar scriptures read;  
the pastor offered a fine eulogy;  
emotions and gratitude for a life well-lived were expressed.

Somewhere in the middle of it all  
Bob's widow Melanie stepped forward  
to read a poem about angels.

Then, just as she was about to walk away,  
she said she did not speak in public like this,  
however she wanted us to know  
that she and Bob had shared a very special relationship,  
and that he loved her like no one had ever loved her before.

After all was said and done the bagpiper struck up "Amazing Grace"  
as he walked down the aisle and out into the world.

I turned to the stranger next to me and said, "*When I die, no bagpipes.*"

Long after the last musical notes grew faint in the Piedmont Hills of north Georgia,  
Melanie's testimonial is still resonating in hearts and minds:

*"He loved me like no one had ever loved me before."*

At the funeral reception I started to tell someone I just met named Shelly

how touched I was by Melanie's affirmation of love reciprocated.  
Shelly got animated.

She said that Melanie's statement of reciprocated love  
reminded her of a conversation in the TV show "This Is Us"  
Her face lit up as she quoted the character Kevin:

*"The best thing that ever happened to me  
was you telling me that you'd marry me.  
I'm still in love with you,  
and I will be at our restaurant bright and early tomorrow waiting for you."*

We all want to be respected.  
We all want to be recognized.  
And we all want to love and to be loved in return.  
That is not too much to ask.

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To live this life we need food, water, shelter, rest, and, of course,  
a cell phone within each reach or wrapped around our wrists.

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To have a life we need meaning, purpose, fulfillment  
(Thank you, Atlanta United, for a championship).

We need one another.  
Even though by necessity we are isolating communities and nations,  
re-member we are members of a common species and share a common cause,  
re-member our common bonds, our commonalities, our common connections.

No one is an island.  
No church is an island.  
No community, no city, no state, no nation is an island.

In this shared experience of coping with the threat and reality of the coronavirus,  
we will keep our social distance, as best as humanly possible.

We will be diligent when it comes to health and healing.  
We will look after one another, as best we can, without fear, with love.

As we move through these days, together, re-member that we need one another, and at the  
center of that need is love.

At the core of our meaning and relationships,  
hopes and desires is love.

We all want to love and to be loved in return.

Sounds good to me.

Sounds good to you.

Sounds good to those around us,

to those whose names we know,

and to those with whom we have yet to meet and become friends.

As Paul said, *"Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

God loves you like no one has ever loved you before.  
Allow God's love to emanate in you.

All this is to say the love is primary.  
Love is first through the door.  
Love makes a way.  
Love always wins.

Bono and U2 sing to our hearts through their unifying song, "One"

*One love / One blood / One life  
You got to do what you should  
One life / With each other  
Sisters and my / Brothers  
One life / But we're not the same  
We get to / Carry each other / Carry each other  
Can You hear us coming Lord / Can You hear us call  
Feel us knocking / We're knocking at Your door*

***All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!***

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