

June 25/23 Leader's Guide
Matthew 7:1-12 "Kingdom Living Requires Community"

Read Matthew 7:1-12

Kingdom living requires community. A community where we come alongside one another in love to encourage those things which are consistent with the kingdom and step away from those that are not. Last week we looked at the tendency in all of us toward a judgemental, critical spirit which is absolutely destructive to kingdom community. As the heart is transformed by the gospel we can find our hearts freed from judgement that we might support others in removing the specks in their eye (vs. 5) This week we turn to the second part of this work – that of hearing truth in love.

(vs. 6) There is some debate as to what this verse means. In the early church it was used as justification to keep the communion table to the baptized. Currently the most accepted interpretation links the pearls here with the pearl of great price in Jesus' parable from Matthew 13:45-46 (may be helpful to read) – making this verse mean – be very discerning with whom you share the good news of Jesus with because you might not get a good response.

1. What do you make of those interpretations? Do they seem consistent with what Jesus is teaching in the sermon?

As I didn't reflect on the validity of the other interpretations in the sermon I thought it would be helpful to begin with this question for your group to reflect on a little.

It was in the early document of church practice called the Didache where the interpretation of keeping communion just for the baptized was linked to this verse. Many interpreters say – well yes – we would want to ensure that we are keeping the communion table to those who have been initiated using this verse to support that is likely stretching it a little.

The major thread of interpretation links the common word – pearls – between Matthew 7:6 and Matthew 13:45-46. If in Matthew 13 the pearl is the good news of the kingdom, then reading that back into this verse has some validity for scripture interpreters. There is difference however in that Jesus refers to a pearl of great value, whereas here it is possessive "your pearls" and plural. It has become a valid interpretation however in that Jesus is appearing to give a balance to the teaching don't judge, but saying here that there are some things you must judge (discern) and respond accordingly.

Both interpretations however, to varying degrees, assume that Jesus is radically shifting topics, from relationships to church practice. The line I (Tim) took in the sermon was to see it as a very natural continuation of the teaching to speak truth in love.

2. (vs. 6) One of the other threads of interpretation sees this as a continuation of Jesus' teaching of speaking truth in love. Not everyone will be appreciative of drawing attention to the realities in our lives that keep us from living in step with the kingdom – making this verse a proverb communicating the same truth as Proverbs 9:8 (read). Has this borne out in your experience of speaking truth in love?

I would suspect we've all had interactions with people where we offered what we thought was loving correction and they couldn't hear it, instead they lashed out and the relationship has never been the same since. In another relationship, we shared loving correction and the person was so appreciative of it. As a result it deepened the relationship and we're now closer than ever. These polarized experiences however leave us often doing a cost benefit analysis. Is this worth the risk? How are they going to respond? Is this going to go well for me or not?

As this is a personal reflection question and if there is no debate as to the truth of this proverb, get enough engagement to get people thinking of how to live out this teaching in light of the responses we get and then move on...

3. (vs. 6) Why do pigs respond in the way that they do? What is the comparable when you relate it to human interaction?

Here is an unedited part of the sermon that reflect on this question that may help with your shared reflection...

Now why are wild dogs and pigs unhappy with pearls – well - because they have more basic needs to meet – they're hungry – one bite into a pearl and they know - not what I want – and if they don't get what they want – they're angry - turn on the one who didn't give them what they wanted - you – what do most people want when they're struggling in life and relationships – a listening ear and affirmation – yes of course this is all on them – they're terrible – you've done everything you could – anything other than that is often not all that well received – and so more often than not - we'll give

them what they want to hear – rather than what we think they need to hear – and at times that might be quite wise – they’ll never ever hear it – don’t throw your pearls down – but at other times it may be cowardice born of self-love – I don’t want to take the risk to lovingly speak truth for fear of how you might respond – and what that’ll mean for me – cowardice born of self-love.

4. (vs 6) We could turn the verse around and ask – do I create a conducive environment for another to share truth in love or am I piggy in my response? How does the gospel shape our hearts to hear truth in love?

Again here is the an unedited section of the sermon to help with this piece of your small group discussion...

The gospel must also transform the heart of the one who hears truth in love – if you’ve come to see yourself in light of the holiness and glory of God and are rightly undone – being met there by the lavish love grace and forgiveness of Jesus – you can hear any truth spoken in love – for you know you are far worse than anyone could ever see – and having another point out one aspect of that can’t define you or ultimately harm you – for you have been met in your sin by the unconditional love and acceptance of God – sure – it’s absolutely true that on the one hand no one can know fully what’s in your heart – what you’ve been through - what truly motivates you – so no one but the living God can judge you – and he has in Jesus and you’ve been forgiven – declared right in him – but it is also true that we all have tons of blind spots – often completely unaware of the impact of what we do and say upon others – and in order to live into the kingdom we need a community around us to lovingly speak truth in love – to expose the blind spots - and because we need it – even if we don’t feel it – and we likely won’t – when another takes the risk to speak truth in love – perhaps our first response needs to be - even though that was hard to hear thank you for loving me enough to share it with me – turn the verse around – do I create an environment conducive to others speaking truth in love – or am I piggy in my response – if so ask the Spirit to bring the good news of Jesus home to your heart in a fresh way.

5. (vs. 7) How is this verse both a fitting conclusion to the teaching on speaking truth in love, and the sermon as a whole?

We don’t have because we don’t ask.

The most important ingredient to speaking truth in love is not our insight – our tone – the timing – but prayer.

We should never attempt to come before another to assist them in taking the specks out of their eye without bathing all of it in prayer – persistent prayer – prayer that brings discernment - are our pearls born of the spirit or a judgmental heart – prayer that brings direction – speak or stay silent – prayer that brings attentiveness to the spirit – as we're led to the right time – the right tone – the right words – ask and you'll receive – seek and you'll find – knock and the door will be opened

But this is not just a promise associated with Jesus' teaching on speaking truth in love – it is a promise associated with the entire sermon - Jesus is saying – if you want the glorious life of the kingdom to take shape in you – ask – seek – knock.

For example - If you want a radical love for your enemy, that cuts away bitterness, overflowing in prayer for them – ask for it – you will receive it.

If you desire freedom from the worry and anxiety that has you imprisoned – paralyzed – seek it - and you'll find it.

If you so yearn for God to break the hold money has on your heart - in it's place overflowing generosity – knock – and the door will be opened to you.

You see the sermon on the mount is the glorious promise of what God is desiring to shape in us by his Spirit – and here he tells us how to grab ahold of that promise – prayer – persistent prayer – prayer that is shaped by the character of the Father

6. (vs. 9-11) The sermon is the glorious promise of the life that God is shaping in us by the power of the Spirit. What aspects of the character of God are meant to shape our prayers that such a life will take shape within us?

Now we could easily be taken down the rabbit hole of Jesus referring to his listeners as evil – but to put our focus there would be to miss the point – he's driving home the glory and grandeur of the father - how much more

If you – marred with sin - know how to give good gifts to your kids – how much more will your heavenly father – who is infinitely more holy – infinitely more wise – infinitely more generous – infinitely more loving - how much more will he give good gifts to you – his beloved child?

Jesus is saying that persistent prayer for kingdom life is shaped by a vision of your heavenly father – so it begs the question – what does my prayer life tell me about who I believe God to be?

Ask one another what aspect of the teaching of the sermon they would like shaped in them by the Spirit and then pray for one another as a group.