



“Christ Blessing the Children”, by Nicolaes Maes (1634-1693), National Gallery, London, © Web Gallery of Art. In Mt. 19:14, Jesus allows little children to approach him, “for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” That is *not* our Gospel reading for Sunday, but Mt. 9:35–10:8 is, and in Mt. 10:7, after Jesus had called his 12 disciples, he told them to preach that “the kingdom of heaven is near.” Similarly, in the O.T. lesson, God was near to the Israelites as they waited by Mt. Sinai, and He called them to be his “kingdom of priests”. In the Psalm, we’ll read that He’s so near that we may “enter his gates”, and in the Epistle we’re told that we’re “restored to friendship with God”. He is near, and we may approach him as his children.

Jesus Took Seriously the Wrong in People’s Lives, But He Gave Precedence to Relationships and Mercy Over Customary Conventions

“It’s easy to wag our finger at the Pharisees for their arrogant and self-righteous attitude,” the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said in his sermon Sunday, “but there is only one problem: the Pharisees are right.”

“The Old Testament, the teachings of the Rabbis, and conventional wisdom all point to the fact that we become like those we are around, and that bad company corrupts good morals. The Old Testament constantly exhorts the children of Israel to separate themselves from their pagan neighbors. Psalm 1 states, ‘O the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with scoffers.’ In Psalm 26, the Psalmist asks for vindication because he hates the company of evildoers and will not sit with the wicked.

“There is much wisdom here,” Pastor Thelander continued. “As parents, we are very interested in the friends our children choose, because we’re concerned about character formation. Read the book of Proverbs, and you will come to the inescapable conclusion that the company you keep makes a huge difference in your life.

“Now let’s apply this to Matthew, this one whom Jesus calls. Matthew is not a fisherman, as are many of the others. Matthew is a tax collector. Fishing was an honorable profession; tax collecting was not. The Romans contracted with local people to collect taxes, and the collectors extorted excess taxes for their own personal benefit. . . . It was

one of the meanest forms of exploitation possible. . . . We may not like the term, but the New Living Translation captures the thoughts of the Pharisees well when they refer to Matthew and those like him as ‘scum.’ And when Jesus not only calls Matthew out, but then goes and shares a meal with him and his friends in public, the Pharisees are upset because sharing a meal in public implies *acceptance*, yea, even *approval*. . .

“It’s easy to wag the finger and criticize the Pharisees, but they have a point—but Jesus . . . says, ‘I want you to . . . learn mercy.’ ”

The root of the term “mercy” is “womb”, Pastor Thelander said, suggesting a “nourishing, sustaining love, borne out of pain”. “It is this (p.2→)

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Sundays, 10:00 a.m.: Word & Table service

Sundays, 11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation

Sundays, 11:45 a.m.: Moderated post-service discussion

Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.: Evening Prayers

For the poor: Meat; fresh produce; canned fruits and vegetables; dairy products; peanut butter; cooking oil; pancake mix; syrup; spices; diapers; baby wipes; bathroom tissue; for personal care: soap, shampoo, conditioner, razors, shaving cream; new underwear (adults and children); cleaning supplies; bleach.

Readings, 6/15: Ex. 19:1-8; Ps. 100; Rom. 5:6-11; Mt. 9:35–10:8. **6/22:** Jer. 20:7-13; Ps. 69:1-18; Rom. 5:5-19; Mt. 10:24-33.

Prayer Emphases: Philippines; Primitive Baptist Churches; Cove United Methodist Church, Hampton Cove, AL, and the Rev. John Tanner; Christian Counselors and Psychologists, including Dr. John Dawson and Dr. Charles Rice; parishioners on Mountain View Drive.

(Sermon, cont’d.) kind of love and compassion which Jesus embodies as God in the flesh. . . . (It is just this kind of love and compassion which is needed, not just for Matthew and his ilk, but for all of us. . . . Jesus took seriously the wrong in people’s lives, but for Jesus, relationships took precedence over ritual or moral purity, and showing mercy took priority over following customary conventions of discipleship. . . . [T]o show mercy costs more than performing religious rituals. . . . [W]e should (become so aware) of our own need of mercy . . . that we cannot help but be merciful to others.”