

Listen to what the LORD says:

“Stand up, plead my case before the mountains;
let the hills hear what you have to say.

²“Hear, you mountains, the LORD’s accusation;
listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth.
For the LORD has a case against his people;
he is lodging a charge against Israel.

³“My people, what have I done to you?
How have I burdened you? Answer me.

⁴I brought you up out of Egypt
and redeemed you from the land of slavery.
I sent Moses to lead you,
also Aaron and Miriam.

⁵My people, remember
what Balak king of Moab plotted
and what Balaam son of Beor answered.
Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.”

⁶With what shall I come before the LORD
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

⁸He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly^[a] with your God.

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them.

The Beatitudes

He said:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Yesterday a group of 15 of us finished the lay Servant class which prepares lay folks to serve as supply preachers in churches in the conference. It was my first time teaching the class and yesterday I got to hear the short sermons of the class members. It was an honor to hear the Lord at work in their lives and through their words. In the 3 weeks of our time together, I answered many questions, some they didn't ask, but

one question they didn't ask and I didn't answer I thought about yesterday after we were all done. The question is, "what is your greatest preaching concern?" Now, I am not sure how I would have answered that question if put on the spot by the class. I might have quoted my pastor when I was a teenager, who said. "Don't preach because you have to say something, preach because you have something to say" – In saying that I could express the real anxiety over preaching when the well is dry; working to have something to say. However, in preparation for today I know that this is not my greatest concern... my greatest concern is one that was manifest by preachers like Moses, Prophets like Micah and the in fact all the others, a concern that distressed even our Lord Jesus himself. The concern is not that you will have nothing to say, but that you do in fact have something to say, something from God, something that is necessary -- and that people, will not get it, and "people" includes me also. To have a word from God, in the midst of hard hearts, stiff necks, poor vision or whatever, keeps it from sinking in and growing good fruit... That is the worst.

Have you ever been up in an airplane, I have many, many times. Big planes like a 747 jumbo jet all the way down to a little 2 seater. I am not a pilot and I am certainly no expert on aerodynamics, but I do know a little about the mystery of how planes are flown and keep their course.

The mystery of an airplane keeping its course day and night through all sorts of weather lies in the reality that it moves in two worlds. In one world is the plane itself, the air around it. It moves through the air and with adjustment of speed and the wing flaps air pressure varies providing lift to move higher or lower in the atmosphere. Differences in air pressure between the wings and tail allow it turn. On a clear day, over familiar land, and perhaps especially in a little plane one can almost function completely in the one world of plane in the air. But during storms, fog and even clouds it is the second world that becomes more important.

On clear days and over familiar land the two worlds are less obvious, because you can see where you're going with great confidence, and the danger is small because it is a big sky, but over water at night, or overcast conditions, it is the second world's intangible, invisible fingers which first moved a magnetic compass, then later radars inaudible sounds bounce off earth giving a picture of the altitude and location, and today the projection and reception of satellite imagery and sophisticated GPS revealing, direction, speed and location down to inches. Even on the darkest night over the most barren of land or sea, a pilot can rely on the second world to guide her way. She flies not trusting her eyes, but her instruments.

Human life is like this. We live in two worlds. We might call it body and spirit – the one material, physical, visible. The other immaterial, invisible, intangible. Harry Emerson Fosdick in his sermon "Living under tension" noted that in one sense we humans are just like mammals in the sea, whales, and seals who, though their habitat is the water, have another need, and must from time to time come up to breathe the air. Humans are immersed in the material world, and yet we cannot live by flesh alone. We are drawn, pulled, we must rise into this other realm of spirit, with its varied beliefs, its ideals, its vision of beauty and right. Here is the mystery of human nature, as that of a plane; it lives in two worlds.

Even in unremarkable times the most profound problems of our lives center in this fact. Love, courage, friendship, morality can pull us in directions that our eyes question even resist. But as Fosdick noted when he preached in the midst of WWII, **"But in days like these how tragic are the tensions between these two realms! Here in this immediate, factual world we see such catastrophe and brutality as will make our generation rememberable for its horror many a century from now. And yet we inhabit as well a spiritual world, with intellectual insights, with ideals of beauty and loveliness, with faiths and**

friendships, and with aspirations that lay hold on God's goodness."

Fosdick contends that It is often painful to live in the tension of these two worlds. It is for this very reason that Robert Louis Stevenson's story "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" is so compelling. The good doctor tried to escape the tug of war between his lower and higher self. He dreamed a resolution if only he could separate the two.

On the one side, his grounded and self-focused identity free from considerations of another's good, unencumbered by remorse or compassion. This Mr. Hyde self released to revel in carnal desires and unfettered by anything that limits what it wants. To be authentic and whole living in only that one world, or the other. Lifted beyond self consideration to a universal, transcendent view, a harmony of intersection in which community, and celebrations beyond this moment in time claim clean dominance without the fear that Dr. Jykel is diminished because another is elevated.

Fosdick asks, **"who does not know the subtle temptation in these days to relieve the tension between these two by sinking to the lower level, saying, the immediate obsessing facts of this present world are real, nothing matters now, except these; and all the higher world of faith, and hope and love that once seemed real can wait?"** This kind of a life ledger bottom line, one world thinking sees loss, or the risk of loss, in only tangible things and proclaims we must not be in the red. We will consider higher things, invisible worlds in better times, right now we need to do whatever it takes to right the ship.

Ironically, my bible is full of red. Every time Jesus speaks I am physically, literally in the red. Today, you can truly say that your heard at least a part of the greatest sermon every preached. (It is not this sermon preached by me, but Jesus') We are in the red for 3 chapters in Matthew, where the intersection of worlds is not surrendered to cheap escapes from tension. And expediency is not a sufficient reason to fly by the seat of your pants.

Again Fosdick wrote of the 2nd world war: **It makes little difference who wins the war unless Christ wins the peace... The function of the church of Christ is to keep alive and alight this realm of spiritual judgement and guidance so that even amid the storms we may not lose those faiths and values on which human hope at last depends.**

The bottom line is in the red when the poor in spirit are blessed, when morning, and hungering for righteousness, and purity of heart and peacemaking are called right.

If Jesus is Lord, then he is Lord. Not in seasons of clear skies alone, but in the storms of life too. What happens when a plane or a ship or a life loses its bearings, no longer has a true north? What happens when Jesus and his preaching are put on the shelf for friendlier and more reflective times? We must live in the material world, Jesus did and preached to those who were, but we must not only live in the material world, we must not only cultivate the expedient reaction to what scares us the most at this moment, and risk the surrender our greatest treasure, our soul. Surrendering the red letters just to be securely in the black in this moment?

Finally Fosdick said, **“The major business of the Christian is to keep clear the vision of Christ upon that judgement seat, above our strife, standing for a kind of life that all have denied but to which we must return if people are to have any hope.**

As for me, I must accept the tension - a church, a nation, a world polarized on one side, and Christ on the judgement seat upon the other, and I must keep him there, the condemner of our joint guilt, the chastener of our unrepentant pride, the guide to our only hope.

The bottom line in this... In the world of physical dominance, the leger of power makes Jesus' words in the red. Power is imposing, dominating, directing and controlling. Morning and hungering for righteousness, purity of heart are for the losers. Maybe that is why

Jesus said, What does it profit a person to gain the whole world, but lose their soul. I am not sure who heard Jesus' sermon. I am not sure who hears it now.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.