

Week of Sunday, January 24, 2010

Our BOOK OF FAITH Journey Continues with: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

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SUGGESTED READINGS FOR THE WEEK:

+ Matthew 4:1-11 (Jesus is Tempted by Satan in the Wilderness)

+ Matthew chapters 5-7 (The Sermon on the Mount -- Jesus compares and contrasts his Way - the Kingdom of God - with the world's typical or expected way of doing things.) Matthew 5:1-12 are what we call "The Beatitudes", and Matthew 7:12 is "The Golden Rule"

+ Matthew 25:31-40 (Whenever we act on behalf of "the least of these", we are doing it to Jesus, we are seeing Christ in them. They are Jesus the Christ!)

+ Matthew 28:16-20 (Matthew's Jesus Commissions the Church)

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COMMENT ON MATTHEW:

Matthew was very intent on people recognizing their power to make choices, just like Jesus did in the story of the wilderness temptation. Each day we can choose to walk the WAY of Jesus, and be a part of God's Kingdom on earth. On the other hand, every day we can choose to do things the way the world says how things should be done. The power to choose wisely comes from God, but we are free to exercise that freedom as we choose. And our choices have powerful consequences, implications, for ourselves and for all of God's world. Our life can be a curse or a blessing to God and for others. Matthew doesn't see the world with much "gray" but rather as a constant struggle with choices that either enhance or diminish life. Matthew's Jesus shows us the possibilities of our full human potential, striving to choose life and love -- God's Way -- every day.

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MOVIE RECOMMENDATIONS:

Your two pastors give two recent movies FOUR BIG THUMBS UP, WAY UP!!! (Yes, we each have two thumbs!)

We encourage you to consider seeing AVATAR and INVICTUS if you haven't already done so. Both movies give us glimpses into living life as a blessing and not a curse. Both highlight the power of our ability to make choices, even hard or unpopular choices, for the sake of a greater good. Both help us compare and contrast God's Way as opposed to "that's just how things work." And both help us reflect on the consequences and implications of our choices -- good and bad, wise and unwise. They both, in some way, reflect the heart of Matthew's gospel story about Jesus. Choices matter. Choose wisely. Choose life!

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QUESTIONS TO PONDER DURING YOUR WEEK...

+ Jesus was tempted three times in the wilderness. One had to do with exercising power over other people, using personal power to make people do what he wanted them to do. Another had to do with using personal power to feed his need for material gain, prosperity, and the accumulation of food and "stuff". And the final had to do with the temptation to think that God loves me more than anyone else, and that "my God" exists primarily to take care of me, not everyone, and that God exists to do me special favors that God wouldn't do for others.

How do you relate to or experience these temptations in your life? What other temptations cause us to lose sight of God's priorities for our lives?

+ The "Golden Rule" has common equivalents in virtually every major world religion. (Check out the web site: www.religioustolerance.org/reciproc.htm, listing similar statements in 21 different religious traditions.) Jesus said, "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." In other words, the entire Bible of Jesus' day, and all of his Jewish faith, could be summarized for Jesus in this one statement, the Golden Rule. If everything about God, the Bible and religion can be summarized in this one line, what does that say about everything else in religious traditions? What does that say about what it means to follow Jesus?

+ Have you ever met Jesus face-to-face? Read Matthew 25:31-40, and think of the times and places you have encountered Jesus, according to Matthew's story. Mother Teresa has a famous line: "We don't love the poor and the dying because they are *like* Jesus. We love them because *they ARE* Jesus." This week, where will you look for and find Jesus in your world?

+ Each gospel story begins with a different "personal mission statement" of Jesus, and each one ends with different "marching orders" for his followers. Read through Matthew 28:16-20. How do you personally help Jesus fulfill this commission? How do we fulfill it as a faith community? What questions might you ask Jesus or Matthew about this particular commissioning statement? How might you put this statement into your own words? Take a few moments to offer your answers to God in prayer.

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IMPORTANT REMINDER: You can find a free and complete on line NRSV Bible at: bible.oremus.org AND you can find a free and complete Message Bible (along with many other versions and translations) at www.biblegateway.com

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Thanks for sharing the Journey!

Pastors Jay & Charlie