

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.

Amen.

Faith And Facebook

Mark 5:38-43

“When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue Jesus saw people weeping and wailing. ‘Why do you make such a commotion? The child is not dead but sleeping.’ They laughed at him, but he took the parents aside and took the child’s hand and said, ‘Talitha cum’ (which means ‘Little girl get up’) And immediately she recovered, and all were amazed. And Jesus strictly ordered them all to tell no what had happened.”

Mark 7:32-36

“They brought to Jesus a deaf man with a stutter and begged him heal the man. Jesus took him aside in private, put his fingers in his ears and spit and touched his tongue and, looking to the heavens, said, ‘Ephphatha’ (which means, ‘Be opened’) And immediately his ears were opened and his eyes released and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them all to tell no one. But the more he ordered them, the more they wanted to proclaim it.”

Matthew 6 selected verses.

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen. God rewards no such thing... And when you pray, don’t heap up flowery empty phrases such as the Gentiles do, for they think God loves such eloquence ...When you pray go into your room, shut the door and pray to God in secret. For your heavenly Father sees in secret and rewards in secret...”

At the outset, I want to clarify;
even though my title targets Facebook,
its bigger than that.

Throw in “Twitter”, “Instagram”, “Buffer”, “YouTube” etc..
and my sermon could just as well be entitled
“Jesus and Social Media”.

And social media is indicative of something
much bigger than itself as well;
something much more significant than right now.

It reminds me of those sets of Russian nesting dolls;
you open one and there’s another inside it,
and another and another.

Go back in history to the invention of the printing press.
When German goldsmith, Johannes Gutenberg
invented the moveable-type in 1436,
it created a social revolution.

It made books accessible to the masses,
which, in so many ways, is a good thing!
It helped provoke the Reformation!

But the printing press also created a spiritual earthquake.
It recreated our entire Faith-world,
and we have been feeling its tremors ever since.

It encouraged the belief that truth had to be written.

It bred the attitude that ideas -
to be considered worthwhile - even sacred-
had to be in printed form.

This was contrary to the time of Jesus
when wisdom was oral,
and ideas were meant to be spoken, discussed, debated
and ultimately remembered.

God's truth was verified - not by a printed page,
but by how faith was lived out, practiced, embodied.
God's Word was a personal and private revelation
more than it was letters printed on a page.
It allowed a book - the bible - to be idolized.

The printed book also perpetuated the belief
that truth needed to be "black and white".

This opened the door for fundamentalism;
a religion that enjoys reading truth, and using it
to judge & scrutinize others self-righteously.
Fundamentalism defends itself by believing
"Humans wrote this, but God dictated it."

Oh yes! When books became common, faith changed.

Next came the great social media revolution called TV.
With the invention of television,

our world of ideas changed again,
and so did the spirituality around them.

What was deemed valuable, powerful, even holy
should be on a screen, visible, appealing to look at,
well-packaged, captivating, even sexy!

The Human “amazement” scale sky-rocketed,
and couldn’t be restrained.

TV also turned people into an audience
more than participants.

It made our relationship with truth more passive
and us more blindly obedient - like spiritual robots.
That also contributed to fundamentalism.

And TV also reorganized truth.

Instead of a steady stream of argument
or a layering of logic like building a foundation,
truth was shrunk into sound-bites,
increasingly making us lazy thinkers.

And, to stay engaged, we needed commercials!

At first, every 15 minutes, then every 10 minutes,
now, every 7 to 8 minutes.

Which made belief as much about entertainment
and sales-man-ship, as it did the power of ideas.
Truth was a matter of packaging, not existence.

And this brings us to our current social media scene;
yet another cute little doll nesting in the nest.
Spiritual changes that started centuries ago
have been magnified, hastened and added to
by Facebook etc.

Celebrity has been heightened to god-status.
And now, everyone craves their 15 minutes of fame -
even if it's killing people with an AR 15
while streaming your crime in real time.

Social media has elevated everything public.
What was once, for Jesus, the field of action
for taking what one worshiped and practicing it,
has now become the object of worship,
the altar at which we worship.

People's sense of value, esteem and success
is dictated by what the public thinks about them.
One of the reasons teen-age suicide has sky-rocketed
is because so many fragile egos are trampled
by Facebook, Twitter and internet gossip.
Publicity and popularity have become
the great addiction of the 21st C.

Now, friends, the survey we're doing thus far
is something called "epistemology";
"studying how we think what we think".

Neil Postman, in his classic book entitled,
Amusing Ourselves To Death, warns that

“Changes to media change the structures of our minds.”

The famous Marshall McLuhan put it a more pithy way:

“The Medium Is The Message”!

When we analyze the spiritual changes throughout history
brought about by social media

books, TV, the internet, cell phones, Facebook etc.

it almost makes the teachings of Jesus eerily prophetic.

Time and time again,

when he did something miraculous

that inspired people’s amazement,

the first thing he said to his followers was this,

“Tell no one about it.”

Can you imagine what would happen

if he performed such miracles today?

Hundreds of cell phones would be recording it

and it would go viral in moments!

And he would be judged by how many “likes”

he received.

And, is it any wonder that his anti-publicity stories
are stories about healing?

The human ego can turn sick & narcissistic in an instant.
Popularity can become an addiction, a cancer.

Doesn't the fate of the little girl,
who looked dead, but was only asleep,
describe what the internet can do
to our alerted-ness, our clarity of thought,
our ability to be spiritually awake?
Next time you're in a restaurant
do some people watching.
Watch how animation and interaction goes to sleep
because everyone's on their phones.

And doesn't practicing piety in public
describe modern evangelism to a "T".
Right there may be the greatest indictment for
how media has changed our faith.

And when Jesus said,
*"Shut the door and pray to God in secret.
For your heavenly Father sees in secret and rewards in secret..."*
we are compelled to ask,
where is the sanctity of privacy now a days.
Certainly not in bedrooms,
certainly not in doctors offices,
certainly not in people's honesty about themselves,
when politicians can live lies with impunity.

One reason God's rewards seem so missing now a days,
may be because humanity has traded in
the truth of the personal, & the honesty of the private,
for the seduction of the public.

"What does it profit us?" posed Jesus,
"If we sell our soul but gain the world."

So dear friends, to conclude,
when it comes to Social Media,
we seem increasingly like fish - fish
who never think about the water in which they swim.

And let's face it,
social media in all its forms helps us live
like water does the fish.
Books have democratized ideas.
TV has informed the masses and comforted the lonely.
And social media has made amazing connections;
many of them more superficial than people realize,
but connections nevertheless.
And let face it - the jobs, the money, the industry,
the problem-solving that social media has facilitated
is beyond imagination.

And today, I don't wish to abandon all the good of
social media for the sake of all the bad it also does.

But we are not fish!

We are followers of Jesus Christ.

And as such, we are called to think, to assess,
and to live IN the world, but not OF it.

Jesus was an expert in epistemology.

He knew that the medium is as much the message
as the message itself.

And the truth that drives the human soul
and which we must never abandon is
whether we're young or old or in-between
is captured succinctly in John's Gospel

*“(God’s) Word was made flesh,
and lived among us full of grace.”*

Prayer of Pastoral Care Easter 7, May 21, 2023 Scholarship Sun.
In Psalm 68, a psalm of praise that reminds us of Easter promise,
we read these words: *“Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth;
sing praises to the Lord. He gives power and strength to his
people. Blessed be God!”* Redeeming God, you call us to
devote ourselves to prayer as we follow Jesus. Let us offer our
prayers this day on behalf of your church and the world, saying
fill us with your Spirit’s power, **that we may be one
with Christ, as Christ is one with you.**

Rescuing God, parent of orphans and protector of widows,
you give the desolate a home to live in and lead out the
prisoners into meaningful lives. Help us to order the patterns
of our common life to support the health of your human family
and the welfare of your world. Fill us with the Spirit’s power,
that we may be one with Christ, as Christ is one with you.

Steadfast God, you have given to your church an inheritance
of faith and trust in Christ, and bestowed your Spirit’s love
upon us to make us one in you. Help us to grow in strength
and courage to witness to this hope: that all may find your
saving love everlastingly and eternally in Christ. We thank
you for the scholarship students with us today. We join them
as they look forward to meaningful futures, and in hope for a
better world.

Fill us with the Spirit’s power,
that we may be one with Christ, as Christ is one with you.

Life-giving God, you send rain to relieve the parched crops
and thirsty land, and make clean the winds of heaven.
We pray for all areas of ongoing drought, for places of
flooding and storm, and for all facing smoke and danger

from wild fires. Help us to find sustainable solutions as we seek to honor and care for the well-being of *all* your creation.

Fill us with the Spirit's power,
that we may be one with Christ, as Christ is one with you.

Loving God, you hear the sufferings of your people, and their cries. You sent a Son into our world that was no stranger to the world's pain. May your power be with the people of Ukraine in the midst of war. We pray for the people of Sudan, for Palestinians in Israel in Gaza, the West Bank, and old Jerusalem, as well as Rehinga victims of a cyclone in Myanmar. Help us to offer you healing and compassion as we minister to others in the mercy of Christ. Fill us with the Spirit's power,
that we may be one with Christ, as Christ is one with you.

Hear our prayers for those on this church's prayer list. ...

Resurrecting God, you draw near to those who are sick and dying, and you call them home to you. May we all know the joy of life shared with you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Hymn # 609 Take My Life and Let It Be*

OFFERING Let us offer to God this day our lives
 and our labors in the service of Christ's love.

***DOXOLOGY**

***PRAYER** Glorious God, everything that is given to us rains forth out of the abundance of your love. Bless these gifts and our, lives together, that all we are and all we offer may give glory to you, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
 Amen.

**CLOSING HYMN # 75 I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry*

