

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Moses expresses the burden of leadership with God and uses some rather interesting language: Why have you treated your servant so badly? Did I conceive all these people? If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once... if I have found favor in your sight...and do not let me see my misery.

Well, things have not changed much in 3000 years, as we still appear to have a burden to carry when it comes to our brothers and sisters in the community of faith and the Kingdom of God. We live in a time and place where faith varies within the people and lives we encounter. God alone grants faith and we are called to welcome the stranger in the name of the Lord and serve as we are able.

We have heard the words of the gospel before. Many of us take concern with the words that refer to dismemberment for the sake of entering the Kingdom of God. But when we focus on these words, we miss the meaning of the essential message that Jesus tells us immediately before these words. You see it is very easy to remember if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out because it is better to enter the Kingdom of God with one eye than go to hell with two eyes that caused you to sin.

Furthermore, the text goes on to say cut off a hand and/or a foot if that also causes you to sin. It is easy to remember these words because they scare, frighten, and threaten our entrance into the Kingdom of God. And here my friends are the essential truth that is revealed to us through faith. Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God and still that Kingdom Jesus is speaking of came to *us* when the Word became flesh; when heaven itself came to earth.

Now place ‘the Kingdom’ in context to ‘the text’ just prior to the uncomfortable words. The disciples tell Jesus they see someone ‘outside’ of their group doing something that Jesus taught them to do; something good, proper, and right. But, because the others are not among the group of disciples, they tried to stop them from continuing the good works they were doing; to which Jesus replies *the words we are to remember*; “whoever is not against us is for us.”

But hear my friends, Jesus further clarifies His words so there is no room for misinterpretation or ambiguity; “truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.” When Jesus speaks of water, He is speaking of the Living Water that comes from God to sustain and preserve life! Jesus is speaking of the acts of generosity, kindness, human compassion, and social responsibility for one another that does not reflect our outward faith, but reveals our inner Spirit!

This is what this gospel text is sharing with us and what is echoed in the Old Testament lesson when the people in Moses’s care are complaining that the Spirit of God has rested upon a few people instead of everyone. Their gifts of prophecy are not to undermine the work of God within Israel, but to advance the work of God among His people.

The meaning of this teaching to the disciples in the context of our lifetime is both necessary and essential for the understanding of our responsibility to our neighbors in community, country, and the world cultures. You see, when we come together, it is not about

Christian, Jew, Muslim, or any other faith; it is about the children of God helping one another to improve the quality of life by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sitting and comforting the lonely, sick, and isolated. It is about helping and loving the neighbor and stranger first and asking then questions later... much, much, later.

A Christians, we see this as our calling, our charge, and our command from our Lord, and still the world is full of generous people of faiths different from our own who support relief efforts when storms arise; provide assistance when rebuilding is needed, and bring the Living Waters from God alone when even the Christians of the world find themselves in times of trouble, need, and care.

Jesus reminds us my friends, “I have other flocks...” and if they are not against us, then they are for us. The ones that oppose us are the ones that have opposed God from the day they fell from heaven and will be dealt with as God chooses. But that is not a destiny that God has chosen for His children. God has chosen to grant us life and life abundantly through the life, death, and resurrection of His only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Yes, as Christians, we have been given the gift of faith. We have the gift of understanding God’s work in the world and His desire to be known to all people. We use this gift not against our neighbor and we do not ask our neighbor to stop doing beneficial acts in the name of God. Instead, we use our faith to understand that God is working through all the people and cultures that are His alone to solve the problems that we *can* solve together.

Hunger is one example of many social problems that are impossible to solve when we attempt to do this on our own. However, when we come together as people of all faiths with the will and desire to help all those who belong to God, we reveal the true Spirit within us that unites us and identified us as members of the same team.

Consider what our world looks like with each faith being on the same team; the Jewish faith contributing, making a difference, and solving problems in the unique and gifted way; our Muslim brothers and sisters making advances in medicine, healthcare, technology and science; our Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and extended family in other faiths each continue to make strides forward for the benefits and care of humanity with the gift and promise of God’s care; because when we act towards the least of any of God children, we acted towards God.

We serve with a willing heart that has been provided with the gift necessary for today’s challenges. Our faith is not a stumbling block to those of other faiths, but a real and present strength a support for the collective work we are called to accomplish together in the Kingdom of God.

We know the tree by its fruits; love kindness, compassion, care, and generosity are the fruits of the Tree of Life that sustains and preserves life’ regardless of the faith. We have everything we need from our Lord to engage with people of every faith in the name of our Lord to make a difference in this world and in the Kingdom of God; here and now... where the peace that passes all understanding will keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.