

Finding Purpose in a Flower

Isaiah 40:3-8
Matthew 6:25-34

September 9, 2018
Faith Community

Today's New Testament passage contains some of the most beloved portions of the Sermon on the Mount, if not in all of Scripture.

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?
(Matthew 6:26, NRSV)

Then Jesus says,

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. (vv. 28-9)

And then, to cap it all off, this time from the King James Version:

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (v. 33, KJV)

These are all dearly and deeply loved, but they can all too easily become trivialized, the stuff of greeting cards and campfires, slogans and sayings to get you through the night, but not much else.

There might be something to that if this passage had to stand on its own. Instead, thanks to one word, it's so much more. It's a textbook on how to live. The one word that injects so much power is this:

THEREFORE

A simple little conjunction, preposition, what have you, this one word links today's passage with what comes before in a way that makes it doable, livable, and downright exciting.

I love the 'therefores' in Scripture. They tell you to take another look, to reexamine what you just looked at because the big time stuff that follows is based on it.

Think of some of the great 'therefores:'

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. THEREFORE we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. (Psalm 46:1-2, TNIV)

After listing some of the great figures of the faith, like Abraham, Deborah and David, the writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews goes on to say,

THEREFORE, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses....let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. (Hebrews 12:1)

You gotta love a well placed ‘therefore!’

Just before the one for today, we find a collection of disciplines and habits that Jesus assumes his hearers are about:

When you give to the needy....(Matthew 6:2)

When you pray....(v. 5)

When you fast....(v. 16)

Notice that there’s no ‘if’ in any of those; instead, each one is introduced by a ‘when.’ Even before those things, in chapter five Jesus calls us the ‘light of the world’ and the ‘salt of the earth’ and tells us to act accordingly.

Jesus assumes we’re all about this stuff, not because it’s a kind of cosmic checklist; instead, we do them because they’re second nature. These practices help identify us, strengthen us, and even energize us. Distinctive differences and behaviors emerge as we become more like Jesus in our character and in our emotional and spiritual maturity. We’ve got something to offer a hurting world precisely because of the Jesus blood that flows in and through us.

Because of all that, we arrive at today’s ‘therefore!’

THEREFORE I tell you, do not worry about your life.... (6:25)

All of a sudden this passage is not so much wishful thinking but rather basic training in how to live, and it’s so very simple. He gives us examples:

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?
(v. 26)

See how the flowers of the field grow. (v. 28)

Remember the ‘therefore.’ This is one part of a way of life.

As you build these practices into your life, watch the world change because you yourself are changing.

There’s nothing fancy here, but instead there’s something critically important to our wellbeing as well as the state of the world itself.

And so we arrive at the first of a four part series of presentations about this church's logo, which is, in reality, a visual form of our mission statement. It's out there on our building, big enough for everyone traveling Ten Mile to see. It's on our stationery, our newsletter and our weekly bulletin. It's deceptively simple, which all good logos should be, but in reality is full of wonderful symbolism. All four parts of our mission statement are there:

Hearing
Trusting
Acting
Sharing

Today, in honor of the lilies of the field, is the outline of a flower. You'll see it in today's bulletin. Notice how it frames the entire thing. A frame, when it does its job right, directs our attention to whatever it contains, whether a painting, announcement, or something else.

When Jesus says,

....if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? (v. 30)

The lilies, the flower, the grass, all point to something deeper. In our case, right at the center of our logo, is a cross. Because of that cross we're told that,

The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. (Isaiah 40:8)

All this is wrapped up in the last two verses of this magnificent sixth chapter of Matthew:

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. THEREFORE do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.
(vv. 33-4)

Dig deep, friends, we're just getting started!