

Make Church a Part of Your Life

WEEKLY SERMONETTE

"My Mouth and My Life"

By Jeff Nielsen, Norton Christian Church

The air is sizzling with tension. Three and a half years work has come down to this moment of intense conflict. Hatred and jealousy hang like ripe fruit waiting to drop and spew out their venom and violence. Yet far from backing down, Jesus has provoked this moment, and He will incite the crowd further. They must decide. He will allow them no middle ground. They will have to choose: Is He Savior or charlatan, Messiah or maniac, Lord or liar.

Jesus has just angered everyone in religious and political power. He has caused a riot in the Temple as people were getting ready for the big national celebration of Passover. Jesus' turning over tables, scattering money, and setting caged animals free was irresponsible anywhere. To do it in the Temple was incendiary, bordering on revolutionary. Such action was dangerous. What was Jesus thinking? What would happen to their Temple-based economy? What would the Romans think about this and do in response?

The religious and political leaders had repeatedly tried to discredit Jesus and trap Him in legal questions and technicalities. Instead, Jesus had embarrassed them with His answers and His mocking questions in reply. He has the audacity to call them out, labeling them hypocrites, moneygrubbers, show offs, abusive religious frauds, and snakes.

(Jesus said) "They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them" Matthew 23:4

Jesus' words haunt me. They sound remarkably similar to the charges often made today by critics of organized church:

They don't practice what they preach!

They weigh people down with burdens and unnecessary rules!

They don't do anything to help people with their real life prob-

lems!
To put it in Norton County English, many view Christians as overly critical, unhelpful, hypocrites.

We can quarrel all we want about the misperceptions. We can grow frustrated and cynical ourselves with those who have betrayed Jesus and the church by their abuses of power. Bottom line, however, as followers of Jesus, we have the power to do

something about this.

To make this change, we don't have to surrender our commitment to the moral call of God or our commitment to Scripture or truth or faithfulness. But to make this change, we MUST help folks lift the burdens they face. We must be about doing good and sharing God's love and grace in practical ways.

As churches and as followers of

Jesus, we are entering a situation unprecedented in most of our lifetimes. Mounting struggles, disorientation, fragmentation, unemployment, retirement concerns, and fear are seeping in around us like a river slowly swelling past its banks. So what will we DO to help?

Instead of being like those religious leaders, Jesus wants us to be like Him.

Take a look at the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and see how He was with people. Notice those with whom He associated. Can you find anyone who Jesus didn't want to be with if they were willing to receive him? Notice how He lived among them, heard their cries, saw their pain, and lifted their burdens. And now, He calls to us and asks us to be His Body, His presence in the world. When we gather around His table and take the bread, we are not only remembering His body on the cross, but we are His bodily presence in the world today. Will we continue to do for others what He did when He was physically present?

Jesus was the opposite of those who gave folks heavy burdens and refused to help them carry those burdens. And now, in times like ours, we have to decide. He allows us no middle ground. We have to choose: Is He Savior or charlatan, Messiah or maniac, Lord or liar.

And if we decide that Jesus is our hero, we are going to live with others and for others like He did! And as we do, the Lord has given us this promise: "As you serve others in My name, you are serving me" Matthew 25:40. Jesus becomes real to others through our actions. Jesus becomes real to us through the people we serve.

Such a calling is not easy ... not in our hostile and confused world. It is, however, world changing. And I can't think of a time in my life when our world needed more changing and more grace.

Divine Destiny



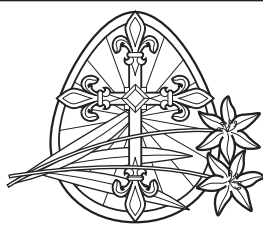
As children we attempt to determine the unknown. What profession will we choose? Will we marry and have a family? Where will we live? As we grow there are many forks in the road, even basic decisions can be difficult. Yet, when we shape our lives with God at the center, the journey is easier.

God has designed a divine destiny for each of us, "He destined us in love to be His sons (and daughters)" (Ephesians 1:5). He also gave us free will...the freedom of choice. We have to choose our path.

If we design our lives with God's will in mind, we will reap the wisdom of His Word, the serenity borne of faith, and the strength for untold tomorrows. Worship each week and follow your divine destiny.

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|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Sunday Jeremiah 32.16-44 | Monday Lamentations 3.1-42 | Tuesday Daniel 9.1-19 | Wednesday Joel 2.1-27 | Thursday Jonah 2.1-10 | Friday Psalm 74 | Saturday Psalm 75 |
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