

**THEME: The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus**  
***“Jesus Went Up to the Mountain”***

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – based on a sermon series by Adam Hamilton  
March 2-3, 2013 at First United Methodist Church - Durango

**Matthew 5:1-2b, 7:24-29**

*1 One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, 2 and he began to teach them.*

*24 “Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. 25 Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse because it is built on bedrock. 26 But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. 27 When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.” 28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 for he taught with real authority—quite unlike their teachers of religious law.*

**VIDEO      Sermon Starter – Jesus Went Up to the Mountain**

**SLIDE      Jesus Went Up to the Mountain**

I want to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Meditation Moments. There is a place for you to take notes and there are pens and pencils in the pew pockets in front of you and I hope you will take some time to write anything down that you want to remember from today's message. If you are watching at home or online I invite you to take out a piece of paper and something to write with and then you can download this resource off our website later. You also will find daily Scripture readings and questions to think about throughout the week. I really want to encourage you during this season of Lent, which is the 40 days and 7 Sundays before Easter, to make this a daily discipline. All of the Scripture readings that you have for this week will take you back to the places that we are visiting this week in the sermon. These readings come from the ministry of Jesus in Capernaum which was the home base of Jesus during his three years of public ministry. They also are healing stories and so they tie back into the team of today's message.

Today we continue in a new sermon series on Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus, in which we are looking at historical background, archeological findings, and stories of the faith to retrace the footsteps of Jesus from his baptism and temptation in the desert to his crucifixion and resurrection. Along the way we will meet the people he loved and healed, the enemies he made, listen to the parables he taught and see some of the roads he traveled. We are going to try and understand Jesus more clearly and go deeper in our own faith during this series of sermons.

Each week we put a map in your bulletin to give you a sense of where we are going that week and to give you a sense of the holy land.

**SLIDE      Holy Land Map – week 3 (picture)**

I want to remind you that the holy land is divided into three sections.

**SLIDE      Close Up Map with Qumran and Jordan River (from week 1)**

Two weeks ago we began in Mark's gospel with the baptism and temptation of Jesus. This occurs in the bottom section of your map which is called the Judea. You can see how the Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea and it is in this place where it is believed that Jesus was baptized. He then went to the Mount of Temptations which you see on the map. We talked that first week about how we are meant to remember our baptism in his baptism, and that we were made by God to be loved by God and to bring God great joy.

**SLIDE      Sea of Galilee Map with Capernaum (from week 2)**

Last week we looked at the healing stories of Jesus and his ministry in Capernaum, a small fishing village on the edge of the Sea of Galilee which is in the top section of your map in a region called the Galilee. We talked a bit about demon possession and what that meant in the time of Jesus and what it might mean for us today. Our aim is not just to teach you biblical geography and archaeology, but also to learn something about who Jesus is and what it means to be his follower today. The goal is to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and be the presence of Christ every day in our lives.

**SLIDE      Galilee map zoomed in with Mount Arbel (picture)**

Today we are going to look at the fact that many of the important stories in the gospels take place on mountains. It was clear that Jesus loved the water and

the Sea of Galilee but he also loved the mountains. Let's take a look at a few of the mountains in the Holy Land.

**VIDEO      Mountains in the Holy Land**

Before Jesus called his disciples he went up to the mountain and prayed all night. Jesus brought his disciples up the mountain to teach them. People brought Jesus those who needed to be healed and who were sick when he was on the mountain. It was on the mount of Transfiguration where Jesus was praying and he had a vision in which he saw Moses and Elijah with him and heard the voice of God. He prayed on the Mount of Olives many times and he was crucified on Mount Zion in Jerusalem which we call Calvary. Jesus meets his disciples on the mountain after he has been resurrected to send them out on their great commission. You can see how the entire gospel story is in some way told through the mountains.

**SLIDE      Mount Zion (picture)**

In the area around the Sea of Galilee there are a number of mountains. When we read that Jesus went up on the mountain to pray we are not sure which Mountain he went up on. Mount Arbel seems a likely candidate, so let's take a look at where it is and what it looks like on the video screen.

**VIDEO      Map of Mount Arbel**

**VIDEO      Mount Arbel**

This is Mount Arbel where you can see all of the Sea of Galilee. You can see all of the towns and villages around it. Maybe you can imagine Jesus praying for those people that he would minister to in these communities.

**SLIDE      View from Mount Arbel (picture)**

Maybe you recognize this picture as one we looked at last week so we could see the towns and villages in which Jesus healed people. It may have been from this vista that he decided which disciples to call.

**SLIDE      Sea of Galilee with Cities (picture used last week)**

In this aerial photo you can see where 80% of Jesus' ministry took place. You can see the town of Tabgha, where it is believed that Jesus did the miracle of the loaves and fishes and preached to the people from a boat. The mount of the Beatitudes is where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. We read about the

beginning of that sermon in our Gospel text today when it says that, ***1 One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, 2 and he began to teach them.***

It was here in Matthew's gospel in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus becomes the new lawgiver. Like Moses who went up on Mount Sinai to receive the law, Jesus came to the mount of Beatitudes and it was there that he reinterpreted the Law of Moses. He gave the people the new law for the kingdom of God which we call the gospel. Jesus is meant to be pictured as the new Moses who is helping us to understand God's will as we seek to follow Jesus and live into God's kingdom.

**SLIDE      Mount Arbel Vista (picture)**

As we look once more at this beautiful vista with Mount Arbel you can see why Jesus loved the mountains. Most of us live in this area because we love the mountains because there is something about them. When I am standing on the top of a mountain, especially a 14,000 foot one, I feel closer to God. Maybe it's because I am closer to the heavens or maybe it just puts life in perspective, but there is something deeply spiritual about the mountain tops.

This has been the case throughout the ages in the Scriptures. Abraham came into the presence of God on Mount Mariah when he went to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. When Moses was tending the sheep in the wilderness he comes to Mount Horeb and he meets God in the form of a burning bush and God tells him to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. Later, Moses received the law on that same mountain. Elijah hears the still small voice of God on a mountain.

In many ways, the mountain represents the place where we meet God. We see in the Scripture stories of Jesus and how he needed to get away in order to be with God. Let me ask you a question today that I think you might want to write down so you can think about it in the coming week.

**SLIDE      Where is your mountaintop?**

Where do you go to me God?

**SLIDE      When was the last time you were on your mountaintop?**

The mountains in the Scriptures represent place where people have a close connection with God. We hope that worship in church as we gather each week is

a mountaintop experience as often as possible. But where else do you have those experiences? One of the places I have those experiences is a place that I went to every weekend when I was on my renewal leave and we were in Durango. I would take my Bible with me and especially enjoyed reading Psalm 121 as I went to the top of our hill on which we live and made my way up to Missionary Ridge.

**SLIDE        Missionary Ridge vista (picture)**

**SLIDE        *I lift my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth!* (use photo from Missionary Ridge as background)**

I feel a connection with God when I'm in this place. When was the last time that you had an extended conversation with God? This is the season of Lent and it is our time to grow spiritually so I invite you to think about where you go to meet God in your community and when was the last time you did that.

I want to give you a challenge as we begin this sermon to take 30 minutes this week and go someplace where you can be quiet and walk or sit and pray. Go to your mountaintop which may be a park or in your neighborhood or up on top of the ski hill. Don't take any headphones or music or your phone. Just listen to God in the quiet. **If Jesus needed this as the son of God then how much more do we need this as his followers?** If we are going to follow in the footsteps of Jesus then we have to make it to the mountaintop sometimes.

Not only did Jesus pray when he went up on the mountain but this is where he delivered his most critical sermon that we call the Sermon on the Mount. We find this sermon in Matthew's Gospel in chapters 5, six and seven. This is where Jesus lays out the reason that he is here and the purpose of following him. Today I want to focus on that and have a look at what Jesus actually taught. If you go to a lot of churches the impression that you get is that the primary message of Jesus that he preached over and over again was, "You must accept me into your heart as Lord and Savior. I am about to die for you and then be raised from the dead." This is what we mostly hear in today's world when we listen to Christians who are proclaiming the gospel.

What is interesting is that this is not the central focus of the teachings of Jesus. Jesus did give people an invitation to follow him. He did talk about his death and his resurrection. But the primary focus of his preaching and teaching is

heard in his very first sermon in Mark's Gospel, chapter 1:14-15 where we read this.

**SLIDE**      *Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. "The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"*

The Kingdom of God is what Jesus is proclaiming and the response to his preaching is to repent and believe and trust in God. The idea of the Kingdom of God is the central focus of the teaching of Jesus and it appears 84 times in the Gospels. More frequently than Jesus talks about love he talks about the Kingdom of God. This is the central focus of his preaching and teaching. His life was an illustration of the Kingdom of God and his death was a way of inviting people to join him in that kingdom as he made provision for us.

**SLIDE**      **What is the Kingdom of God?**

The first big idea is that God is King. Our Jewish friends say this every time they have a blessing as they say in Hebrew words that mean, "Blessed are you oh God, King of the universe."

Everything belongs to God. Everything is a part of God Kingdom. On this little planet God has given us the freedom to choose whether we submit to his rule and whether we choose to be part of his Kingdom or whether we rebel against him. The very beginning of the story of creation, we find Adam and Eve and human beings struggling with a willingness to be faithful to the King. Instead, they live a life of rebellion and choose to turn away from God and God's kingdom. This theme plays itself out over and over again throughout Scriptures.

God was the King of the nation of Israel so when the Israelites were set free from slavery in Egypt, God was their King once again. Then they got scared of all of the other kingdoms in the world and so they asked for earthly king. God was disappointed in the request but he honored that and he gave them an earthly king and it is a case of, "Be careful what you wish for."

The stories of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles in the Old Testament are the stories of how the earthly kings who were meant to serve God and serve God's people turned away from God and oppressed their own people. The abused them and took advantage of them because for them being King meant you could

do whatever you wanted. The people were led astray and there were just a few kings that were seen as a good Kings who cared for God's people.

By the time we get to Jesus in the first century we find him proclaiming the Kingdom of God in a time when people were expecting a new King to arrive. First century Judaism wanted a king that would restore the greatness of the kingdom of Israel. They wanted a king that would liberate them and allow God's people to become their own earthly kingdom again because now they were ruled by the Romans. They were waiting for a Messiah who would raise up an army and deliver the people from the Romans. They wanted a Messiah who would cleanse the land and the land would be once more the Promised Land and the Kingdom of God on earth. They wanted that Messiah to be a king who would rule over them in the name of God.

Jesus came preaching and he said something different. He said that the kingdom of God is not what is going to happen when the Messiah runs the Romans out of town. The Kingdom of God is already upon you. It is near you and it is even within you. The rule and reign of God has nothing to do with who is ruling over this piece of property. Right now it is the Romans and someday it will be someone else. What matters is, "Who is ruling over your life? Is God the King in your life? Have you given him your heart? Are you living according to the precepts of his Kingdom? If you do, then you will find that the kingdom of God is within you, is upon you, is near you and is touched by everything that you touch."

**What Jesus recognized is that most of us who claim God as our King don't necessarily live like it.**

Let me remind you that when Jesus is teaching he usually uses three different forms of communication. First, he uses what we learned in high school are called **similes**.

**SLIDE        Similes (add a word on each of the next two slides.)**

We use similes when we say, "This thing is like that thing." Jesus would take everyday examples of things people were familiar with and then he would say, "The kingdom of God is like..." Or, "God is like..." We find these similes often in the teachings of Jesus.

**SLIDE        Parables**

Then we find that he taught in parables which are short stories that illustrate some spiritual principle. We will look at one of those parables in just a minute.

**SLIDE          Prophetic Hyperbole**

The last way that Jesus taught was using a technique called *prophetic hyperbole*. When prophets speak they don't get into details and they don't speak in shades of gray. When prophets speak it is in black and white and they are trying to shake you up by their proclamation. Jesus used prophetic tones when he said, "This is how it is so pay attention!" Then he would use hyperbole or an over exaggeration to make his point. This is why people sometimes get unnerved by reading the teachings of Jesus. They read something and they say, "I can't possibly do this!"

In some ways, the purpose statement of our church is prophetic hyperbole when we say we want to, "be Jesus Christ to the world." Are any of us going to be Jesus actually to perfection? No, but we are trying to make a point. Did Jesus do this? You know the places where he did this kind of speaking and preaching and teaching. Jesus said, "If your hand causes you to sin then you should cut it off." That Jesus intends for us to carry a hacksaw around with us and cut off our hands? We could only do this once anyway because after you saw one hand you don't have any way to saw off the other hand!

Of course Jesus doesn't want us to go around with bloody stumps on our arms. What Jesus is telling us is that sin is serious business and it can lead to destruction. "If your eye causes you to sin then pluck it out." Again, Jesus doesn't want us to make ourselves blind, he wants us to truly see what can happen when we don't take sin seriously and we just nonchalantly go through life doing whatever we want without really looking at the consequences. Jesus doesn't want us to take him literally but he wants us to take him seriously when he speaks in this way.

Jesus tells this parable which talks about the disconnect between what people said when they gathered together at the temple to worship and claimed that God was their King and then how they acted and how they live their lives. This is what he says in Matthew 21.

**SLIDE          28 "But what do you think about this? A man with two sons told the older boy, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' 29 The son**

***answered, 'No, I won't go,' but later he changed his mind and went anyway. 30 Then the father told the other son, 'You go,' and he said, 'Yes, sir, I will.' But he didn't go.***

Jesus is telling this parable to the religious leaders of his day. He asked them to choose which one of the sons actually did the will of his father. They of course answered that was the one who actually went out into the vineyard and worked even though he said he wasn't going to.

**SLIDE**     ***Then Jesus explained his meaning: "I tell you the truth, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do. 32 For John the Baptist came and showed you the right way to live, but you didn't believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to believe him and repent of your sins.***

Jesus is telling them that the prostitutes and tax collectors may have said no at first to following God as their King, but they have repented and now they are following in my ministry. But you who claim to follow God as King are not living like it.

If Jesus were telling that parable today I think he might be telling it to a conference of Methodist preachers and any of us who think we are special and the chosen ones and somehow we have it all figured out. The reality is that the teachings of Jesus are fresh some 2000 years later because we are still human beings and we still struggle with putting God first.

We gather every week here in worship and we pledge to put God first and we sing about God as our King. We say we want to follow God but then we walk outside the church and what happens? Do we live that way every day? Of course, the answer is, "no." Not even me as your preacher gets this right. Every single day I start off by saying that I want to follow God and I even pray and ask God to help me do that. I put a note on my mirror in my bathroom to remind me, but every night before I go to bed I end up having to say, "I'm sorry I blew it today. I missed it here and there. Pastors and laypeople, all of us, are in need of God's grace and we need to be reminded to repent and remember the good news.

During this season of lent we are looking at those places where there is disconnected in our lives. We look honestly at those places where God's path goes one direction and we choose to go another. This is a time for us to say,

"Lord, forgive me and bring me back. Help me to remember your path and to walk in that direction." This brings me to the second question I want to ask you today.

**SLIDE        Where is your life currently not lining up with your promise to follow God as your King?**

Whether it is by thought, word or deed—the things you do or the things you leave undone—where is your life not in sync with this call for God to be your King? In this season of lent we do two things. We remember that God has already made provision for grace and mercy in the suffering and death of his son Jesus Christ. He has already shown us what that way looks like and so we repent and believe the good news and go in a different direction.

When Jesus talks about what the kingdom of God looks like he says that we can take all of the laws of God and summarize them into two Commandments that are the greatest from the Hebrew Bible. The first is from Deuteronomy chapter 6.

**SLIDE        Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.**

This is the task every day. The second great commandment is like the first.

**SLIDE        Love your neighbor as you love yourself.**

All of the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments according to Jesus. If you want to summarize the teaching of Jesus then it would simply be that the Kingdom of God has come near and his presence is meant to be living in your heart and we must love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Because we don't perfectly do that, he calls us back to repent and walk in this path.

The Sermon on the Mount is meant to be a representation of what it looks like to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and love our neighbors. The Sermon on the Mount is meant to tell us what it means to live like God is our King.

The Sermon on the Mount is three chapters long in the book of Matthew, chapters five, six and seven. I'm going to skim through these three chapters in the next few minutes just to outline for you what we find in this teaching from Jesus. If you have your Bible, you might turn to Matthew chapter 5. If you don't have your own Bible then you can use one of the Bibles in the pews and you will find that on page 735.

The introduction to the Sermon on the Mount is what we know as the Beatitudes in Matthew five. Maybe you remember the statements.

**SLIDE      3 "God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. 4 God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. 6 God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. 7 God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8 God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. 9 God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. 10 God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs."**

When we look at these statements from Jesus we are meant to recognize that he is turning the world value statements on their head. The world says that you are blessed if you seize power and you have control and wealth and fame. You are blessed if you have the corner office. You are blessed if you are the big man or woman on campus and you are really somebody in everybody else's eyes. If you have a type A personality like me then you are really good at using what you want. You are goal oriented and you work to be the best. You might do this without really caring about what other people think is important because you are in charge.

We see that in the kingdoms of this world today, who often live by these values. Jesus says that this is not the way it is in the Kingdom of God. Later on, Jesus will say that the first will be last and the last shall be first, and the truly great among you will be those who were servants. Here in the Beatitudes he puts it another way when he says, "You know who really is blessed in the Kingdom of God? Blessed are those who are poor in spirit and realize they need God. Blessed are those who cry when they are sad and feel grief. Blessed are those who are humble and don't think they are the most important thing in the world. Blessed are those who seek out justice. Blessed are those who are merciful and care about others. Blessed are those who have pure hearts. Blessed are those who don't hunger for power or wealth but instead hunger for doing what is right.

Jesus describes the values of the kingdom in these ways to paint for us a picture of what it means to be the presence of Jesus Christ to the world and to truly be blessed.

Jesus then goes on to tell about the mission for those who want to be the people of God. If you are seeking to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God then this is the mission. He puts it in these words that you might be familiar with.

**SLIDE**      ***You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.***

Maybe you remember that in ancient times salt was used to preserve things before there was refrigeration. The fish caught on the Sea of Galilee were packed in salt which allowed it to stay good for a long time and be shipped to different parts of the Roman world. Salt kept the fish from becoming spoiled. Jesus is telling us that those who are followers of his and citizens of the Kingdom of God keep this world from spoiling. That is part of our job.

Salt also brings the flavor out of something. There is nothing like a fresh piece of corn on the cob with butter and then a sprinkling of salt. Jesus said that we bring the flavor and the goodness out of other things when we're the salt of the earth. This is part of what we do if we live in the Kingdom.

Jesus then says that we are the light of the world in a world that is blind and confused and often people are stumbling in the darkness. In a community where the blind are often leading the blind, we are to be a light in the world. Jesus goes on to talk about being a city on a hill which cannot be hidden. Then he says these words.

**SLIDE**      ***15 No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.***

Is not that you are trying to show off but rather that you can't keep that light hidden because you long for others to see God shining through you. By virtue of doing these good deeds people will be reminded of what it means to be authentically human. You will give people a virtual picture of what that Kingdom of God looks like by how you live your life. Others will look at that and say, "I want a piece of that. I want to live like that."

It is interesting that the Greek translation for the phrase "good deeds," is **colos** quite literally means beautiful or when some or attractive. It is where we get the word "colors" from. When you do your beautiful deeds people will see them and give glory to your Father in heaven. What Jesus has said is that our lives are meant to be made up of a collection of these beautiful deeds. When other

people see you doing those things they find themselves saying, "That inspires me to want to be more than I am. It inspires me to want to live this way."

They may not have heard the name of Jesus yet but they have seen you do something that leads them to want to live like you've been living. My hope and prayer is that here in this community when people think about First United Methodist Church that they think, "I know about that church. I know what those people do to care about other people. The people I know from the Methodist Church are authentic and caring and sacrificial. They give their blood and their time and their money to lift other people up. When I am around them I want to be more like them." That is what I pray people see in us as we seek to live out the gospel and be the presence of Jesus Christ and build up his Kingdom in this world.

Unfortunately, what the world sees most days when it looks a Christian is not beautiful deeds most of the time. When I talked to nonreligious people and they talk about Christians they usually say something like this, "The Christians I know or judgmental and narrow-minded. I feel worse rather than better when I'm around them. I don't see them practicing beautiful deeds."

The really cool part of being a part of this church is how many times I see many of you getting it right. We have a whole new crew of people going to Manna Soup kitchen the other day I heard a really cool story of a couple from our church who befriended a young man who just needed someone to care. They have been meeting up with him and bringing him to church and been investing in his life in numerous ways that I have no doubt will make a lasting impression.

Here is my next question for you on our little quiz about how we are doing as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

**SLIDE      Are people around you seeing your beautiful deeds?**

If I were to interview your neighbors or the people who work with you, would they say, "I know what she's like. I see her do things and it touches me when I watch the way she lives. I have seen him and he amazes me the way he cares for other people." Are people seeing our beautiful deeds?

Jesus then says, "I have not come to abolish the Law of Moses but I have come to fulfill it." He spends the rest of chapter 5 teaching what the law is meant to really look like. Matthew is portraying Jesus as the new Moses and the audience for Matthew gospel is primarily Jewish so they knew the Law of Moses. He says things like, "You have heard it said of old that you shall not murder." He is

quoting Moses and the 10 Commandments. Then Jesus catches them off-guard when he says, "But I say to you, don't use angry words at each other. Don't say hateful things about other people. Don't gossip about others or slander them. Don't hurt other people with your words and hold anger and grudges against one another."

Jesus has taken a commandment that most of us could fulfill because most of us are going to go out and murder someone, and suddenly said it is about much more than murder. It is about all the thoughts you have towards the people who irritate you. It is about all the things that you said about other people that you don't like. Jesus tells us that when we do this we are in danger of hellfire.

He does this several times until he gets to the end of chapter 5 when he says once again, "You have heard it said of old to love your neighbor. But I say to you, love your enemy as well and pray for those who persecute you." Jesus is making it clear that it is not just about the letter of the law but it is about the spirit of the law. The spirit of the law looks different.

We just finished an election year in which many of us probably wish we could've moved to Canada because we can hardly stand the way that we pit ourselves against one another with the words that we say. We take things that we hardly know anything about and they become a really big deal to us and we argue with people and we nitpick. We say hurtful things about one another and while the election season is over and most of us were hoping the rhetoric might die down a bit, it now is coming back full force as our nation and politicians debate budget cuts and gun control legislation.

This is a congregation that is divided fairly equally between the political parties and probably even around the gun debates. Some of you might have been part of congregations where everyone believed the same thing on these topics. You will not find that in this congregation. The people that you sit next to and that you pray with and that you sing songs with are as likely as anybody to be part of the other political party or on the other side of the aisle from you when it comes to a controversial topic. As I listen to most of the people who are politicians in office or who are complaining at politicians, most of them claim to be Christians of some sort. One of the questions I want to ask them when the debate gets heated and they start to lob insults at each other is simple.

**Which part of the Sermon on the Mount didn't you understand?**

Many of the most ardent supporters a particular candidates or particular political positions are people who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ and I simply want to ask them, "Do you think Jesus didn't mean this when it came to politics or budget discussions or gun legislation? Was Jesus talking about every other area but we can say whatever we want to and say hurtful things about other people and not worry about it because Jesus didn't really mean it when he came to politics?"

I want to ask this question of Christians both on the left and on the right, or whenever they find themselves on opposite sides of an issue, especially when they pass on e-mails they haven't researched to find out if it is really true about one politician or another or a particular topic. I want to ask them this question when they post things on Facebook or twitter which are intentionally slanderous or take particular comments out of context. I don't care who the candidate is because what I really want to say is, "Are you serious? Which part of the Sermon on the Mount didn't you understand?"

I have this fantasy that one day the President of the United States and the Speaker of the House of Representatives each looking at each other and then looking into the camera before their next confrontational speech and saying, "I just want to say this upfront. I am a Christian and he is a Christian and he is my brother in Christ. I love him and I am not going to do anything to intentionally hurt him personally. We are going to debate about the issues because they are really important issues and we might disagree, but when it is all said and done, the most important commandment Jesus gave me was to love him and so I'm going to do that. I am going to assume the best of him and not the worst. No matter what happens at the end of the discussion and however the vote turns out I'm going to stand behind him and ask how I can help in what I can do."

Maybe that is too much pie-in-the-sky thinking for how politicians will behave themselves in public, but let me ask you what would happen if we chose to do that here and every follower of Jesus chose to take seriously the words in the Sermon on the Mount. What would happen if we decided to practice how we speak to one another and how we treat one another, especially those we disagree with, like we are asked you in the Sermon on the Mount?

What would happen if we would speak up when people begin to call names about another candidate? What will we simply said, "I don't mean to be judgmental or anything, but I don't think we should be personally attacking these

people who are willing to risk their lives to serve our country in this way. How about if we talk about the issues but let's not personally attack are politicians even if we disagree with them?"

I have found that when a group of people is talking in this way and then just one person calls the group to accountability it changes the whole tone of the conversation. What if we were to live as salt and light in this way? What if we showed people how we could take issue seriously but still treated people positively?

In chapter 6 Jesus turns his attention to piety. Jesus talks about praying and fasting and helping the poor which are all good things. But he reminds us that if we pray so that people notice and if we fast and tell everyone why we are fasting and we help the poor so we can get our name on the side of the building, then you already have your reward. God is looking for people who do this for the right reasons. Not to have other people praise them, but so that God who sees in secret will know and so that people who are in need will truly be helped.

He reminds us to be careful about the motives for why we do what we do. The moment we do something spiritual and tell somebody about it and make a big deal about it, then it stops being a spiritual act.

At the end of chapter 6 Jesus talks about money which is clearly something that we struggle with in today's world. Can you see how Jesus' message is timeless?

Our money says, "In God we trust," but is that actually how we live our lives? I find it an interesting paradox that our money says, "In God we trust," but our lives say, "in money we trust." This is why Jesus said these words.

**SLIDE**      ***19 "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal.***  
***20 Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.***  
***24 "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.***

There is a question we are meant to ask when we get to this place in the Sermon on the Mount.

**SLIDE        Who is Lord of your life?**

Is it your 401(k)? Is it your retirement? Is it your desire for more? Is it your possessions? Or is it God? How willing are you to give away what you have to those who are in need and to God's work in the world?

Over the years I have been able to put more and more money away for retirement as part of our United Methodist pension program. I can choose where to invest it and I find myself some days checking to see how I am doing. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and I wonder if I am putting away enough. Why do I do that? Do I spend more time worrying about how my retirement fund is doing then I spend in prayer or studying in God's word? So far that has not been the case but I can see how easily this could become the center of my life. This is why Jesus said this in the middle of that Scripture passage at the end of chapter 6.

**SLIDE        *21 Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.***

He then goes on to say, "Don't worry about stuff so much. Don't worry about what you were going to drink or what you're going to eat or what you are going to wear. God knows that you need those things."

**SLIDE        *33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. 34 So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.***

We finally come to chapter 7 and Jesus recognizes that our human tendency is to point out all the people around us who are not living according to the Sermon on the Mount—those Democrats who want to spend too much; those Republicans who want to cut too much; those people obsessed with their guns; those idealists who want to take our guns away; my neighbor who is so focused on his money; the person who is always gossiping about somebody else at work.

I think that's why Jesus began chapter 7 with these words.

**SLIDE        *1 "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. 2 For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. 3 And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own?"***

Here we find Jesus using prophetic hyperbole to set us up. This whole sermon was a setup job and the whole way as we are beginning to point our finger at other people, we finally realize that we have three fingers pointing back at us. This sermon is really about us and not about all those other people that we want to name.

Jesus sums it all up right here in chapter 7 with what many of us have come to know as the "Golden Rule."

**SLIDE**        **12 *"Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you.***

Jesus closes the sermon with a simile to drive home everything that we have heard so far. It is the text we heard as we began today's message.

**SLIDE**        **24 *"Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. 25 Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. 26 But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. 27 When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash."***

The words of Jesus to close out the sermon leave us with one final question that we are meant to struggle with.

**SLIDE**        **Are you building your life on a premise of sand or on the solid rock of the teachings of Jesus?**

The day will come, if it hasn't already, where the storms will come in our lives and if we have been building our entire life on this false idea that if you have enough money and enough power and if you just don't slit anybody's throat then everything will be great, we will find one day we have built your house on the wrong foundation.

I heard another great story this week about a member of congregation that I want to share with you as we close. Many of you know that we have teams that go to Kenya, Africa to serve at an orphanage we sponsor and to connect with the Spring Valley slum area where more than 20,000 people live in one square mile. Those who live in the slum are the poorest of the poor in that country and many of them have little hope of getting out of those conditions. Our church in the past

year has helped build a well in Spring Valley which now provides not only clean water but a source of income for the school run by Pastor Stanley and his wife Alice.

While our group was visiting families in Spring Valley this last year they met this family.

**SLIDE        Doris, Ellis, Susan and Pauline**

**SLIDE        Pauline's home**

Doris is 14 on the left, her brother Ellis is next and his is 11, Susan is the youngest at 8 (she is sponsored by a member of our church to attend school in Spring Valley) and Pauline is their grandmother who cares for them. Their house you can see behind them is made of tin and had a large hole in the roof which turned their floor where they slept into mud in the rainy season. One of our team members decided to do something about this and so they gave ALL of their remaining money for the trip (which meant they couldn't buy water or any souvenirs) to repair the roof. This person has very few resources and literally gave all she had for this family because she heard the grandma had worked all day and was supposed to be paid \$2 but they decided NOT to pay her because she did not get enough work done.

Pastor Stanley runs the ministry in Spring Valley and when our congregation member met with him about fixing the roof they said, "Why do you just put a band-aid on this problem? Why don't we build her a real house that will stand up against the rain and wind and elements?"

Pastor Stanley agreed and so our team member's money and some money from our church went to build this family a new home.

**SLIDE        New Home**

**SLIDE        Pauline's New Home with Alice**

**SLIDE        Johnny**

**SLIDE        Johnny's New Home Interior**

**SLIDE        Johnny's New Home**

**SLIDE        Johnny's House Courtyard**

We built another home like this for Johnny and his family. Johnny is a young boy our church members have fallen in love with the past few years. He too lives

with his grandmother and he cannot speak, however through being in the school he has begun to communicate more and more each time we visit. We are called to build our spiritual homes and physical homes and the foundation of Jesus Christ, being salt and light to the world.

One of the jobs that I had in the summers when I was in college was in framing in construction. I learned how to build a house from the foundation up from a very wise and old builder. One of the first things that he did was take me to a development of fairly new homes that should've been selling for \$500,000 each but they were on clearance at \$120,000 each. He took me inside and we could barely open the front door. There were cracks in the drywall even though the homes were only a few years old. We went down into the basement and you could visibly see cracks in the foundation. The foundation had been built so poorly that each of these homes was a mess.

As he pointed out all the flaws to me he looked at me and he said, "Do you know what we call these homes?" I shrugged my shoulders and he said, "We call them 'dozer bait.' It's cheaper to bulldoze these homes and start over again than it is to try and fix them up. The only thing these homes are good for is being bulldozed to the ground and then starting over again."

Jesus does not want us and our lives to be "dozer bait." Instead, Jesus invites us to repent and believe the good news, for the Kingdom of God is near. What foundation is your house built upon?

Let's pray together.

**SLIDE          Prayer**

*Oh God, we thank you and praise you as our King, the King of the universe, the King of the church and the King of our lives. We confess to you that we fall far short of your will for our lives each and every day. We are grateful that you sent your son Jesus to call us to repentance, to show us the way, the truth and the life; to suffer and die on the cross for the sins of the world; and to be raised up to give us hope and life.*

*Help us this week to walk with you, honor you and serve you. May we build our lives on the solid rock of the teachings of Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.*

# “Jesus Went Up the Mountain”

## Theme: The Way – Walking In the Footsteps of Jesus

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-2, 7:24-29

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:

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**Meditation Moments for MONDAY, March 4** – Read **Matthew 5:1-16** – Biblical scholar William Barclay noted that the verb translated “taught” from the original Greek mean, “repeated and habitual action, and the translation should be: ‘This is what he used to teach them.’” This sermon’s principles have been called the platform, the foundation of all that Jesus taught about God’s Kingdom and those who are its citizens.

- The Common English Bible renders verses 3-11 as “happy are,” not the more familiar “blessed are.” Jesus would have used the Aramaic phrase “O, the blessedness of ...” Scholar N. T. Wright said, “In our world, still, most people think wonderful news consists of success, wealth, long life, victory in battle. Jesus is offering wonderful news for the humble, the poor, the mourners, the peacemakers.” Which of Jesus’ statements ring most true for you? Of which do you feel, “I sure wish I had some of that?”
- Jesus told his followers, “You are the salt of the earth ... the light of the world.” Legalistic morality too often brings gloom, criticism and fear. Have you known people whose goodness adds flavor and light to life? How can your allegiance to Christ make you “salt and light,” making your life and that of others brighter and better?

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want the kind of happiness, of blessedness, that your Kingdom offers me. Shape my heart to value what you value, to rejoice in the eternal life you give. Amen.*

**TUESDAY, March 5** – Read **Matthew 5:17-42** – In today’s reading, Jesus quoted five different snippets of Old Testament law. In each case, he echoed the Old Testament prophets by saying God didn’t want just outward compliance. God cares about the inner spirit behind our acts (see Isaiah 1:10–15; Jeremiah 6:20; Amos 5:21–24). That’s why Jesus said he hadn’t come to “do away with” the law. He wanted to apply it to the true source of both good and bad in life: our (often hidden) inner self.

- Jesus, like many Hebrew teachers, used hyperbole (rhetorical exaggeration) to grab attention and underline a point’s seriousness. So “tear out your eye ... chop off your hand” says, “Temptation is serious business. Don’t play with it in your mind, but avoid it.” Reflect on each section. What insights do you get about the basic life principle Jesus wants you to take seriously, and about your own inner attitudes and motives?
- In verse 29 Matthew said people were amazed because Jesus “was teaching them like someone with authority.” Jesus quoted even two of the Ten Commandments, and on his own authority gave them a deeper heart meaning than most people ever saw. Scholar William Barclay said, “One of two things must be true: Jesus was either mad or unique. Jesus was either megalomaniac or else he was the Son of God.” How can accepting Jesus’ authority over your life move you to search your heart more deeply, and open it to his transforming power in new ways?

*Prayer: Lord, my motivations are hidden even from myself much of the time. Through your Spirit’s presence, and the words of the Bible, open my heart to your divine authority. Amen.*

**WEDNESDAY, March 6** – Read **Matthew 5:43-6:18** – “Don’t blow your trumpet,” is another use of hyperbole. Many charity boxes were trumpet-shaped, which may explain Jesus’ image. Hebrew rabbis often stressed the need for pure motives behind good deeds—but that was hard to live. It still is. Scholar Myron Augsberger notes that today “one-upmanship, competition for bigness, assurances that God blesses the faithful with material bonanzas or with health and healing” tempt many of us.

- Jesus set the straightforward yet profound Lord’s Prayer (verses 9-13) in contrast to showy, ornate prayers filled with “empty words” (verse 7.) How can Jesus’ example make your prayers more honest and direct?
- Verses 2, 5 and 16 used a business word that literally meant “payment in full.” Jesus said showy piety does often produce human admiration and praise—but that’s all it brings us. If the choice is between human praise here and now, or God’s appreciation in eternity, which (if you’re really honest with yourself) does your heart prefer?

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to live out God’s generous love, a love that is about blessing and serving others, not about making myself look good. Teach me more every day how to do that. Amen.*

**THURSDAY, March 7** – Read **Matthew 6:19-34** – Understanding Jesus’ use of hyperbole can serve us well in applying this section’s principles. Taken literally the words would seem to say that any saving, any planning for the future on this earth, is wrong and shows a lack of trust in God. Jesus’ point was simply that the stuff of this world is not the most important reality. True wisdom values God’s gift of an eternal life of joy and freedom over this life’s transient treasures.

- For most of us, the idea of “slavery” has no connection to our daily lives. In Jesus’ day it was a legal and practical reality for many people under Roman law. Verse 24 literally said, “You cannot be a slave to both God and wealth.” When push comes to shove, which of those concerns most dominates your thoughts and behavior?
- Scholar Craig Keener notes that “most people in antiquity had little beyond basic necessities—food, clothing and shelter.” Most of us live well above that subsistence level. Sadly, it often seems that our stress level rises in proportion to the additional resources we have. In what practical ways can you apply Jesus’ teaching to “stop worrying about tomorrow” to your attitudes and practices?

*Prayer: Lord God, give me a deeper appreciation of the love, joy and peace you promise to give me as your beloved child. Free me from slavery to things that will pass away. Amen.*

**FRIDAY, March 8** – Read **Matthew 7:1-14** – In today’s passage, Jesus taught some crucial relationship principles. Since “all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory” (Romans 3:23), we need to take responsibility for our own life, rather than spending our energy judging or condemning others. Jesus also told the disciples to “ask,” “search,” and “knock”—in other words, to pray. Deepening our relationship with God through constant communication and trusting that God has our best interests at heart is a key to this.

- Taking responsibility for our own thoughts, emotions, words, and actions instead of pointing the finger of blame can be difficult. Yet healthy, authentic, loving relationships depend on our ability to “take the log out of our own eye.” What is your “log”? What are the issues that keep you from living as Jesus taught us? How can you more fully reflect God’s grace in the way you relate to others?
- How have you experienced “Ask ... search ... knock”? Has God sometimes given you just what you asked for? Sometimes not given you the answer you wished for? Have you sometimes felt the “no” had actually been “wait” when the answer came later than you asked? Have you ever asked God for one thing, and seen in retrospect that God gave you something better? Do you trust that God is good, and with a larger perspective, always wants the best for you?

*Prayer: Loving, caring God, keep me asking, searching, knocking as I seek to live with you and others in loving caring ways. Amen.*

**SATURDAY, March 9** – Read **Matthew 7:15-29** – Jesus didn’t offer quick and easy surface change. He was concerned about the deep roots from which life springs, about whether we build our lives on solid rock or shifting sand. Like prophets before him, he warned about false prophets (see Jeremiah 6:14; Ezekiel 22:28.) These words challenged the early followers of Jesus (see Acts 20:29). But Jesus’ main concern was not for us to play “gotcha,” and live with contempt for others’ weaknesses (remember Matthew 7:1-5). He asked us to focus on the foundation for our life, and the kind of fruit we bear.

- Jesus said, “Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder” (verse 24). What paths to greater freedom and joy have you seen offered to you as you’ve read Jesus’ sermon this week? How can your life, and your impact on the lives of others, be stronger and better as you open your heart to the inner transformation, the new way of seeing life, that Jesus offers you?

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, transform me from the inside out. Plant the roots of my life deep in your words, and give me the security and peace that come from grounding myself fully and solidly on you. Amen.*

**Family Activity:** Jesus taught us how to pray. He used his words and actions to show others how to pray. Spend time in prayer

as a family. Together, walk around the different rooms in your home. Where does your family feel most comfortable and at peace? Where would you enjoy spending time talking to and listening to God? After listening to each other's ideas, discuss and agree upon a special place where you can pray together as a family this Lenten season. Invite each person to place a symbol or an object in the prayer area that will help your family focus on spending time with God.