

## A Lesson in Astronomy Mathew 16: 21-28

He was born in Poland in the year 1473 to a well to do family. His father was a copper trader and his mother the daughter of a wealthy businessman. The youngest of four children, he learned to speak more than twelve languages fluently and earned a PHD in church law. He was a medical doctor, a Catholic priest, a foreign diplomat, and an economist. He taught that the supply of money in an economy determines the level of prices, and changes in that money supply will result in proportional changes in prices. Up until quite recently that economic model was still widely respected, more than 500 years later.

But Nicholas Copernicus is better known as the author of the book entitled "On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres", in which he taught that the sun, rather than the earth, is at the center of the universe. His scientific model resembled an archery target, with the sun at the center and the planets orbiting around it. Published while he lay in his deathbed, the book turned the scientific and religious world upside down. In his day, Copernicus was thought by many people to be a heretic, someone teaching a principle contrary to the truth of the Bible. Like his contemporaries Aristotle and Pythagorus, who also recognized that the earth was round rather than flat, he was considered a crazy scientist. It wasn't until 100 years later that two other famous mathematicians and scientists named Galileo and Sir Isaac Newton proved that he was right. Then and now, science and scientists rarely speak with a unified voice.

Five hundred years later, there are those who now doubt Copernicus once again. His proven quantity model of economics has been widely disregarded, and as a result we continue to suffer the effects of our government printing money and devaluing the dollar. Adjusted for inflation, a dollar just doesn't buy what it used to. Even worse, despite the evidence, there are those who still choose to believe that the earth is the center of the universe and all of creation revolves around us.

Of course I am not referring to that concept in a physical sense. The telescope, science and mathematics prove without a doubt that the sun that we depend upon to provide the Earth with warmth and light is the center of our universe. The fact is that God intricately designed our world to revolve around the sun. In a sense the sun holds everything together. Without the sun, life as we know it simply could not exist. I speak of those who refuse to believe the spiritual truth that another Son, Jesus the Son of God, is not only the center of our universe but the creator and the center of all universes. Everything in existence, from the smallest ion to the largest mass, is divinely designed to revolve around Him. Jesus came to bring life, abundant life, everlasting life to a world desperately seeking love and needing forgiveness. Without Jesus there is no life. Without Jesus, there is no love. Without Jesus, there is no hope. Without Jesus, there is no one worthy of our praise.

Because we live in an egocentric society in an age where selfishness reigns supreme, it is easy to overlook the importance of those eternal truths. It is so easy for people to fool ourselves into believing the world revolves around them. Today, the temple of the unholy trinity, the dwelling place of the modern-day god of "me, myself and I" is filled with worshipers while the holy ground at the foot of the cross stands nearly empty, begging to be filled. Why is that?

There are many explanations, and they have one thing in common. When our hearts and minds are not on the things of God, they soon become filled with the things of the world. The problem is that there will be times in our lives when dwelling on the things of God might seem overwhelmingly complicated or difficult, especially when suffering is involved. There will be times when our hearts will tell us one thing and our minds will tell us another. The words of the apostle Paul in Romans 7:21 come to mind where he said: "I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand".

Additional light may be found in Isaiah 55:8. "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD*". Even a doctoral degree in science, astronomy, physics, or theology is of no help in understanding God's ways. We can either accept that truth for what it is or turn our thoughts away from Him.

Even St. Peter, the beloved apostle who spent 3 intimate years with Jesus, had problems grasping the things of God. In his mind he knew what Jesus had told him and the other disciples. As Mathew puts it in verse 21, Jesus must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and then be killed and on the third day be raised. His mind was telling him the truth, but his heart was telling him something much different. Far be it from you Lord! This shall never happen to you. Peters heart was saying Jesus should not be crucified. First, it was an awful way to die. Even the worst of criminals did not deserve to die that way, let alone God's Son, the center of the universe. Second, if Jesus died it meant He would be separated from them, a heart-breaking thought. Third, it seemed that if Jesus died, the kingdom they had been hoping for would not become a reality. What Peter's heart did not know was that the kingdom depended upon His death and resurrection.

Jesus rebuke of Peter in verse 23 was harsh, to the point and necessary. You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. Peter's sin was one many of us know all too well. He was worshiping at the altar of self rather than at the feet of Jesus. He was placing his needs above the needs of the kingdom. There is a lesson for us there. When our minds are on the things of God, when we worship at the feet of Jesus, we learn be more willing to give than to receive, because Jesus was more willing to give than to receive. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. That precept is the heart of the gospel.

When we follow Jesus, when we make Him the center of our universe, we become more willing to give than to receive. We are called to do that in three areas of our lives. The first is in our loving. Above all, **when we follow Jesus, we learn how to love others more than we love ourselves.** This principle is one that He demonstrated by willingly giving up His life on the cross. Jesus died so that others may live. His sacrificial love, putting the needs of others ahead of His own, even the needs of those who were driving 8" spikes through His hands and feet, is the model by which we must pattern our own lives.

It stands to reason that will be the best and perhaps only way for the Millcreek Community Church to become truly united in our ministry. We will need to put the needs and wants of the least and the lost ahead of our own needs and wants, even if it means giving up those physical and temporal things we tend to treasure the most. It will happen if we choose to love others more than ourselves.

**The second way we are called to give more than we receive is with our resources.** When we follow Jesus, we learn to trust upon God to provide more than we trust ourselves. It is easier to give our things away when we don't need them any more or when we have so much that we won't miss them. But if we are to take up our cross and follow Jesus, we must be willing to give away the shoes on our feet, the clothes on our back, or even our lunch to a stranger in need all the while knowing that we will have to go shoeless, naked or hungry for a time and realizing that the stranger will probably never pay us back. What profit is there in gaining the whole world, having everything you need and more, if you forfeit your soul in the process? I don't know about you, but I need help carrying that cross.

That brings us to the third way in which we must be willing to give more than we receive. **We must be more willing to forgive others than to ask for forgiveness for our own sins.** Often, we are quick to blame others rather than admit our sins and mistakes.

Those things may sound foreign if our minds are not set on the things of God. The god of self says love yourself first and if there is anything left over then love others. The god of self says grab all you can and let others grab for themselves. The god of self says forgive yourself and then blame others. But for those of us who follow Jesus, we realize the cross of self-denial is much easier to carry than the one Jesus had to bear.

The journey to holiness begins when we see Jesus as the center of our universe, learning to give more than we receive, giving back to God through our witness and our ministry to others. That is almost impossible to do, because we have received so much in the way of God's grace, always getting better than what we deserve. But all things are possible with God. As we move closer to eternity, I pray that we will thank God for that grace by ministering in the name of Jesus as we strive to put the temptations of the world behind us. May we have the grace and strength to take up our cross, whatever it might be, and follow Jesus to eternity.  
Amen