

*“God Has Work for Us to Do: Faithful Disciples”*

[SOME INSTRUCTIONS WERE SHOWN ON THE SCREEN.] I suspect some of us recognize what is up on the screen. Instructions, especially, when putting something together, can be very helpful, of no help at all or any point in between. The least helpful ones are those, which were obviously written by someone, who is not very familiar with the English language. Unfortunately, if you don't have good instructions or you don't follow them closely enough, then it is easy to make significant mistakes! I have had a few experiences in which I had to undo some steps in the construction of a project because I skipped installing something and was unable to install it after doing those steps. Many instructions in English also come with the text being in one or more other languages. What is especially a problem for English only readers is when the instructions are only written in some other language!

**The Children of God have often had difficulty understanding and following God's Instructions – our work, as the People of God.** During the time of Jesus' Public Ministry, the Pharisees, the Teachers of the Law, the Priests – the Legalistic and upstanding religious leaders of the Jews sought to enforce their views, positions, and power upon Jewish Society by claiming God's approval for their positions and activities. They claimed strict adherence to the Law of Moses, especially their interpretation of it, was the only way to understand God's Instructions – Commandments. **Their influence has continued into the present public understanding of Judaism and Christianity.** For example, the mall down the street has a new owner, who gave it a new name – Music City Mall of Lewisville. In that mall there has been placed a large stone sculpture of the Ten Commandments. Obviously, they assume Christians and Jews are committed to following those Ten Commandments and it was placed there to encourage everyone visiting the mall to follow the instructions of the Ten Commandments. I suspect, most of us think of ourselves to be persons, who strictly follow the instructions of the Ten Commandments. However, there is one commandment, which the vast majority of Christians, mistakenly, believe they follow because Society has over the years changed the understanding of what that commandment means. Have you guessed which commandment I am speaking of? It is *“Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.”* I'll bet there is someone present, who doesn't understand why I am saying that, since we are all here Worshipping God on the Sabbath! As I have pointed out on previous occasions, the Sabbath referred to in the commandment is not Sunday but sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, when followers of Judaism worship. Although the early Christian Church came to understand Christians are not bound to the Jewish Sabbath, since it was on a Sunday when Jesus was raised from the dead, that did not change or amend the Ten Commandments.

During Jesus' Public Ministry, the Jewish Legalist Leaders sought to impose their understanding of the Old Testament Law upon their society – demanding strict obedience to all of what they called God's Commandments. **But, on the other hand, the great Prophets of God, such as Amos, Elijah, and Isaiah provided a different view of God's Instructions – what God wants the Children of God to do – how we are to live in relationship with one another.** Jesus was clearly in line with that Prophetic Tradition and was frequently in confrontations with the Legalists. In fact, when Jesus went to his hometown synagogue early in his Public Ministry, he was handed the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah to read and he read aloud Isaiah 61:1-2. Those verses have much in common with today's Scripture Reading from Isaiah. After reading those words from the Third Part of the Book of Isaiah, Jesus declared in **Luke 4:21, “This passage of Scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.”** Clearly, **Jesus associated himself with the Prophetic Tradition's view of God's Will and our Calling – How God has work for us to do – How we are to live as Faithful Disciples of Jesus the Christ!** Specifically, instead of the Legalists' long list of God's commandments being our Instructions, we are to follow the Instructions of God's Son, Jesus Christ, by following his Teachings and Practices – his self-giving agape Love.

It is very instructive for us to understand the basic Prophetic Tradition's message about how God wants us to live our lives – a different way from that demanded by the Pharisees, Teachers of the Law, and Priests. **Our Reading from Isaiah revealed in vs. 6-7 that God's Work for us includes:**

- \* *Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice,*
- \* *let the oppressed go free.*
- \* *Share your food with the hungry and*
- \* *open your homes to the homeless poor.*
- \* *Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and*
- \* *do not refuse to help your own relatives.*

The Law of Moses does not exclude doing those acts of justice and love but the focus of the Legalists during Jesus' Ministry up through today is usually on puffing oneself up and benefiting oneself by radically obeying all the rituals and

practices they consider to be pious – doing God’s Will – earning God’s Love, instead of thinking about someone else’s rights or justice or needs. Indeed, Jesus alluded to that when he spoke of the Legalists in **Luke 20:46-47**, **“Be on your guard against the teachers of the Law,**

- \* who like to walk around in their long robes and**
- \* love to be greeted with respect in the marketplace;**
- \* who choose the reserved seats in the synagogues and the best places at feasts;**
- \* who take advantage of widows and rob them of their homes, and then**
- \* make a show of saying long prayers!**
- \* Their punishment will be all the worse!”**

**Unfortunately, the public understanding of Jesus’ message and of our calling of what God wants us to do is closely aligned with the Legalists’ approach.** I recently read an article, which was published by the New York Times and written by Campbell Robertson with the byline of Fort Worth. In the article, the author describes the struggle a Black Evangelical Christian, Charmaine Pruitt, has experienced in recent years. She had been a very active member of a primarily white mega church but its focus during the Presidential election and afterward was just too much to stomach. The author of the article explained, **“As the headlines of the outside world turned to police shootings and protest, little changed inside majority-white churches. Black congregants said that beyond the occasional vague prayer for healing a divided country, or a donation drive for law enforcement, they heard nothing.”** The writer also wrote, “Black congregants — as recounted by people in Chicago, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Fort Worth and elsewhere — had already grown uneasy in recent years as they watched their white pastors fail to address police shootings of African-Americans.” **“They heard prayers for Paris, for Brussels, for law enforcement; they heard that one should keep one’s eyes on the kingdom, that the church was colorblind, and that talk of racial injustice was divisive, not a matter of the gospel.”**

Ms. Pruitt was invited by a white couple from that mega church to come to their house for a visit. The description of what took place is frankly disturbing – like the way the Pharisees of Jesus’ day acted. The article states, “Sitting in the living room over a plate of brownies, Ms. Pruitt explained to the wife how disturbed she had been by the clear inference from the pulpit that she should support a candidate whose behavior and rhetoric were so offensive that she could not bring herself even to say his name.

The woman” – the hostess – “explained that a Trump victory had been prophesied and handed Ms. Pruitt a two-page printout, which began: ‘The Spirit of God says, ‘I have chosen this man, Donald Trump, for such a time as this.’” Barack Obama, the woman continued, should never have been president, since he was not born a United States citizen.” **“The visit ended with the woman suggesting that Ms. Pruitt’s discomfort at the church was God telling her it was time to move on.”**

**Instead of ignoring the oppression and suffering many different persons are experiencing, the Children of God are called by God through the Prophet Isaiah to:**

- \* “put an end to oppression, to every gesture of contempt, and to every evil word;**
- \* give food to the hungry and satisfy those who are in need”.**

If we work for justice and love in our New Relationship with God, God through Isaiah also promises:

- \* “And I will always guide you and**
- \* satisfy you with good things.**
- \* I will keep you strong and well.**
- \* You will be like a garden that has plenty of water, like a spring of water that never goes dry.”**

Let’s not be like the Legalists – the Pharisees, the Teachers of the Law, the Temple Priests, the white racist Evangelical woman, who ignore the needs of suffering people and God’s Demand for Justice! Instead, “Let Justice, Roll!” Let’s follow God’s Instructions through the Prophets and Jesus’ Teachings and Actions – demanding and working for Justice, and helping – agape loving those who are in need! **Turn to someone near you and tell them, “Let’s get to work!”** Let’s get to work! Amen.