

# On Purpose

## Sharing the redeeming love of God

a Homily by The Rev. Andrew Downs

5th Sunday after the Epiphany  
Isaiah 58:1-12, Matthew 5:13-20  
February 5, 201

### Drive

What drives you? What gets you out of bed in the morning and puts one foot in front of the other, stumbling to the coffee pot? You get up and you move.

I wake up and I drink water and shower and dress and get my kids to school. I don't want them to miss the bus. But why? What drives me to do this every day?

I love the word drive for this reason. For me, I get in the car and I drive away by myself with a podcast playing and I am completely free. In this way, drive reminds me of the open road.

It can also speak to motivation. The drive to succeed. The drive to push past the limits and achieve greatness.

But drive can be something done to us. The rancher drives cattle from one grazing spot to another. Or a yoke or harness is put on the neck of oxen and someone drives them.

So when I think of drive I think of both freedom and oppression. When I think of what drives me, I think not only of motivation or claiming the open road but as one who is yoked and prodded. Branded and owned.

And there's another thing about yoking oxen and driving cattle. If you're yoked you're not alone. Your safety is not for you to worry about. And you don't get to only think about yourself. We're all here with you, yoked together.

### Lifting Yokes

When we here from Isaiah:

"If you remove the yoke from among you"

What do you notice? You! This is plural you, of course, but there are two. "If **you** remove the yoke from **among you**." This isn't God doing the lifting. And it isn't a burden born upon one or a few of those people. The burden is shared. The conflict is ours. And it's in our midst.

And **we** lift the burden from **among us**.

This is why the prophet continues with direct words which demand we don't scapegoat, pointing fingers and speaking evil. That's our burden. Our yoke.

Now this thing that drives us, our yoke to scapegoat is a deep sin. Richard Rohr calls sin "whatever stops the flow." He means the flow of love and divine relationship between us which mirrors the very love of God.

Stopping this flow of love does not yield punishment, he argues, "we are punished by our sins!" By being in a state away from communion with God and one another.

**Our burden, then, this yoke of sin is finger-pointing.**

And we have the power and privilege to stop! Whether that's scapegoating someone at church or work, the refugee or the politician, the preacher or the person in the pew, we can stop it. Get rid of that yoke!

And what freedom comes from such a simple thing! Not freedom to just drive our cars without a care in the world. But also not be driven by guilt or anger or someone else's expectation for us. Freedom as Isaiah writes to

offer your food to the hungry

and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,  
then your light shall rise in the darkness  
and your gloom be like the noonday.

[in other words--gone! Finished. Outta here!]

And

you shall be called the repairer of the  
breach,  
the restorer of streets to live in.

Shalom-makers. Peacemakers. Children of God.

## Being Righteous

This is what Jesus has been saying in Matthew here in chapter 5. Last week we started the Sermon on the Mount and today are still toward its beginning.

He's been saying this work of doing what God wants us to do is hard. But you don't hide. And more to the point, we mirror the love of God, the love God has given us. The light shines into us and reflects out of us. So hiding it is hiding God.

We aren't a shining city on a hill, but we are people who build on hills so God's light can be seen. Light that's often obscured by our yoke, that burden of finger-pointing and evil-thinking.

So when Jesus gets to his own liberating moment, his own version of "remove the yoke from among you," it feels even bigger, like a heavier yoke to lift:

"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Because remember, the Pharisees and scribes weren't known then for hypocrisy as they are now. They were known for their faithfulness, righteousness, and fidelity to scripture.

For Jesus to invite us to have more righteousness than the most righteous people we know is the biggest weight we could bear! Oh my word! You know the acronym, BHAG? Big Harry Audacious Goal? That's the BHAGiest BHAG: Biggest Harry Audacious Goal. To be more righteous than the most righteous!

But this isn't about doing the impossible or merely striving for the impossible. But that we

remember even the best among us fail. What we do in light of our weakness and sin and that yoke we need to lift is that we act with intention, purpose.

## Love as God Loves

Which means we love like we are loved. Share grace with one another as God has shared grace with us. We are merciful because God has shown mercy.

This is the light reflected out of us; the light we're told not to hide. Not the light of our own righteousness or the symbol of our piety, but the light which emanates from God and breaks through the darkness. The light which gives hope to the prisoner and the refugee. The one fleeing a literal life and death situation.

**This is our divine purpose as Christians and as a Christian community.**

As individuals and a group which embodies the very communal character of God.

We share light because we are light. We are light because God is light. And when we are in relationship, we are one.

We aren't righteous because we're Christians. Or because we piously keep all the commandments. As Richard Rohr writes:

"You cannot earn something you already have.

You cannot achieve something that is already freely and totally given to you."

**We are God's purpose, the trinity in translation.**

We are the very love of God because God is love itself. The fruit of love.

So our purpose is to reflect that love on purpose. Don't worry about screwing up or whether we're doing it right. Chances are we aren't! But if we're that divine relationship with one another, reflecting that love, there's no such thing as screwing up. Just a diversity in expression. Creative cheers of love and affection for God.

May the love of Christ transform all that drives you to be and do into an eager gratitude. May your hopes and fascinations reveal the love already bestowed upon you. And may all our work be crafted with purpose and steeped in love. Amen.