

1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Psalm 15; Matthew 5:1-12
Pastor Mattei (February 1, 2026)

There is an inner longing familiar to all people but acknowledged only by those with faith: unity with God. Our life pilgrimage is marked by “Aha” moments when we discover new things about God and ourselves, and our ethical life gets adjusted accordingly. The evolving image we make of God dictates how we relate to God, to ourselves and to the rest of the world.

We want to please God but not always for the right reasons. We want to fear God, as we should, but we don’t understand that fear as respect and awe for the Creator acknowledging God’s holiness, justice and grace and our place in the universe.¹ We feel that fear in our bones and in our psyche as the relentless terror of being pulverized at the slightest error.

Thus, we seek God’s approval. But what’s this nagging drive to please God about? Where does it come from? What does it say about God, you and me, and the purpose of our life?

Certainly, if we think of God as a distant and demanding father, our existence is marred by fear and anxiety, and questions such as: “What must I do to be saved?” carry the specter of the not-good-enough syndrome.

But if God is “Love-in-Action”, that is, a relational power and community building energy (or shared, vivifying Breath, or stirring Wind, or creative Wisdom, or whispering Breeze, or divine Shalom) then, responding ethically to “Life” as it happens means honoring God and working towards one’s holiness and wholeness. Then, being holy as God is holy² is not any more a scary proposition too lofty to achieve but becomes attentiveness to one’s conscience and enthusiastic and grateful response to God’s goodness.

¹ See the Book of Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; and Deuteronomy 10:12-13

² Leviticus 11:44-45

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The call to live in the presence of God is an invitation to align one's life with values that reflect God's character, such as integrity, honesty, and compassion. It means expressing genuine concern for others. True closeness to God is found in everyday choices that show compassion, justice and kindness towards all God's creatures.

True attraction to God moves toward one another and not away from each other; it moves people to seek unity and wholeness by affirming and celebrating differences and not by forced assimilation and cultural erasure.

By embodying ethical qualities, individuals are drawn into deeper relationship with God and contribute to a more just and loving community. But when evil forces are at work, when people lose their moral compass, when predatory behavior expects submission, when lust for power takes over, when love of money corrupts the heart, and violence and lawlessness are rampant, when an endless stream of lies obscures the truth and replaces it with propaganda, then the followers of the crucified God cannot remain silent.

Profound questions of conscience emerge: How do we manage ourselves in the face of evil? Can the Church afford remaining silent? How can the Church maintain her moral credibility if she remained silent before the current social turmoil? Is the Church not to show concern and call out lies and abuses? Is the Church not to lift up kingdom values? Is the Church not to step up, speak out and protect the most vulnerable? Of course, she is. But often she doesn't.

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Martin Luther King famously lamented, “We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.”³

The issue is that the Church is made up of people and as such, she is not immune to the human condition: the capacity to do evil, to inflict cruelty, to associate with power, to bend under pressure, to neglect higher values, to give in to the lure of money, to hoard, to steal, to believe the delusion that there’s security in hoarding rather than sharing.⁴

Jesus overturned tables and upset the logic of domination of this world. Through his death and resurrection he showed that true power resides in vulnerability and not in might. He declared blessed the poor, the meek, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful. Would he not expect his followers to do the same? If God is for them, who is going to be against them? Who is going to separate them from the love of God? Does the Evil One even have a chance?

If the Church embraces the poor, the unjustly treated, the persecuted, stands in solidarity with them and becomes one with them, she will partake of the same blessings. If she embodies them, she will be God’s highly favored, a title reserved for Mary (Lk 1:28).

A vulnerable God who risks the wounds of love and the generosity of mercy and compassion can be viewed only as total madness and can appeal only to the fools, the weak and the naïve. This is not the kind of God who appeals to the powerful and the well positioned. The god the respect and worship is the mighty god of war and profit.

³ MLK, Letter from a Birmingham Jail

⁴ Jarvis Williams, a pastor turned pro-democracy organizer, in an interview with Betsy Shiley, https://sojo.net/magazine/june-2025/we-have-what-we-need-fix?utm_medium=email&utm_source=engagingnetworksSJN&utm_campaign=email-magsubscribernewsletter&utm_content=Newsletter+--+1.28.26

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With this in mind, a choice for silence by the Christian would speak loudly of negligence, indifference and apathy. Would that be considered complicity?

It is even worse when the Church silences prophetic voices in her own midst forgetting that she is called to remain firm and faithful and affirm the dignity and preciousness of all lives.

Addressing Christians, Matt Molberg, a Minneapolis artist, asserts:

Peace isn't what you ask for
when the boot is already
on someone's neck.
Peace is what the powerful ask for
when they don't want to be interrupted.

Unity isn't neutral.
Unity that refuses to name violence
is just loyalty to the ones holding the weapons.

Stop using scripture like chloroform.
Stop calling your fear "wisdom."
Stop pretending Jesus was crucified
because he preached good vibes
and personal growth...

You don't get to ask God to
"heal the land"
if you won't even look at the wound.

The scriptures you love weren't
written to keep things calm.
They were written to set things right...

And sometimes the most faithful thing

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you can do is [to] stop praying around the pain and start standing inside it.⁵

The questions that should make us uncomfortable are:

How do we reconnect with a God who cares, a crucified God who suffers the pain of the world?

Are we too busy, too distracted, too apathetic, too discouraged, too confused and too numb to care?

Whom do we say we are, but more importantly, whom does *God* say we are?

If our neighbor is harassed, thrown into a ditch and left for dead, wouldn't we care, cure wounds and cast out demons?

How would God want us to treat our neighbor? How do we articulate and share our faith in a just God?⁶

Psalm 15 offers a way through, a profound meditation on the kind of character God desires from those who seek to dwell in God's presence. In straightforward language, it outlines qualities like integrity, honesty, kindness, and a commitment to doing what is right even when it is difficult.

The righteous person is driven by an overriding concern for the well-being of the neighbor. Personal holiness requires a commitment to the wholeness of the community. God responds to this commitment with an unshakable promise: "Those who do these things (i.e., walk blamelessly,

⁵ Quoted by Gianluigi Gugliermetto, Meditations with Matthew Fox, January 29, 2026: <https://dailymeditationswithmatthewfox.org/2026/01/29/powerful-statement-from-the-rev-matt-moberg-artist-and-chaplain/>

⁶ https://sojo.net/magazine/januaryfebruary-2026/what-history-social-gospel-can-teach-us-today?utm_medium=email&utm_source=engagingnetworksSJN&utm_campaign=email-magsubscribernewsletter&utm_content=Newsletter+--+1.28.26

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do what is right, speak the truth, do no evil, don't charge interest on loans, stand by your oath, do not bribe) shall never be moved." (verse 5b).

This psalm reminds us that a life rooted in righteousness and truth is pleasing to God and brings us closer to Him.

Another psalm (Psalm 99) sets us straight about the kind of God we worship. It proclaims:

The Lord is king; let the peoples tremble! (v.1)

Mighty King, lover of justice,
you have established equity;
you have executed justice
and righteousness in Jacob.

Extol the Lord our God;
worship at his footstool.
Holy is Yahweh! (verses 4-5)

Jesus proclaimed the beatitudes soon after he overcame the seductive temptations of the world, called his disciples to follow him and started announcing the kingdom's arrival. With his statement of faith in God, the Beatitudes, he turned the world upside down. The last become first in God's eyes.

One must be a fool to accept and embrace this scandalous God. The Church is a society of fools. Let us be rooted in his foolishness. Amen.