

Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

Newspeak: propagandistic language marked by euphemism, circumlocution, and the inversion of customary meanings.

*They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries;
because I follow the thing that good is. Psalms 38:20:*

The dynamic tension between good and evil hails back to the tree in the garden whose consumed fruit jettisoned our primal parents out from the halcyon days of Eden. They mistook evil for good and in so doing plunged their progeny into the incumbent miseries of the curse. Innocency was lost and Adam's race inherited a corrupted propensity to justify evil.

The Bible is a binary book. The matters of right and wrong are not left to some arbitrary, nebulous conception, established by the whimsical fancies of an unstable mind. Moral relativism encompasses views and arguments that people in various cultures have held over several thousand years. Baruch Spinoza notably espoused that nothing is inherently good or evil. If this be true one can easily envision Isaiah's prophecy of the last days: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil".

When the devil seeks to pervert the ethos of any culture, he must first disable the infallible inner witness of conscience, which is the innate gift of God to all of humanity. Sinful minds are at all times rearranging the moral order to sate their guilty consciences; often having to disguise the evil by employing euphemistic phraseology to cloak their moral perversity. Sin is relabeled "sickness", pornography is "adult entertainment", aborting a baby is now "reproductive services", sodomy is a "sexual preference", terroristic threats are considered "free speech", rioting and looting have become "peaceful demonstrations". In Karl Menninger's seminal writing he laments "Whatever became of sin?" and the answer might well be that it still exists but that men have changed its name.

In stark contrast to these unsubstantiated notions is the concept of moral absolutism, which affirms that there are fixed moral ethics immutably ordained by divine edict. There is therefore an absolute good and an absolute evil. And thankfully, God has not left us to decipher the difference without providing His inspired written law, as well as a conscience within, to lead us to right choice making. Though all of Adam's children have inherited a degenerate mind, the Lord, in His mercy, has promised to reinvigorate the "spirit of our minds" through the "washing of regeneration and renewing of the spirit" making it possible to "follow that which is good".

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

*Faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God
Romans 10:17*

Empty Consolation

But woe unto you that are rich! For ye have received your consolation.

Luke 6:24

The teachings of the Bible cover a wide range of topics and always emphasize the importance of the eternal over the temporary. From the importance of taking time to search out a firm foundation on which to build our life so it will not collapse when trials arise, to reminding us that the saving of our soul is more valuable than all the riches in the world, the scriptures support the superiority of valuing the eternal over the temporal. As believers, we should realize that our earthly house of this tabernacle will one day dissolve, but we have a building of God, *an house not made with hands*, which is eternal in the heavens.

In today's text, the Lord Jesus is teaching the contrast between now and then, that is, the temporal and the eternal. He warns that the rich, should they choose to only invest in this life, will only find their comfort here. Riches provide the opportunity to secure material possessions. If an individual has enough money, there is a seemingly limitless supply of material goods they can acquire. Unfortunately for those who find their comfort in their temporary possessions, they will find no deep and lasting consolation in times of trouble. The flesh may find some enjoyment in some newly purchased item such as a new car or house or worldly trinkets, but will that new possession satisfy them when they are suddenly confronted with their mortality? The value of material possessions will vaporize when someone is faced with eternity as they desperately cling to life. If the deceived rich man in Luke 12 built a thousand barns to house all of his goods, that would still be void of any true consolation in the hour of his soul's greatest need. King Saul's army, Belshazzar's kingdom, Ahab's ill-gotten vineyard, Herod's throne, and Judas' silver proved powerless to vanquish their fears at the end of their lives. Whatever consolation could be found in their possessions was quickly erased when their time on earth came to an end. Like the foolish man who built his house on the sand, there have been many who failed to find any comfort when the storms of life destroyed their possessions.

As believers, we have things in our life that bring a level of comfort to us. Family and friends are a tremendous help and support when difficulties arise, but all the comfort we receive from them can only reach so far. True comfort is derived from a Source that we cannot physically see or touch. Our faith in our God and Savior is the greatest consolation to our souls. His promises to never leave or forsake us and that He will be our Good Shepherd who will guide us through the valley of the shadow of death will bring all the consolation we will ever need. In this life, the Lord is certainly our comfort, and when the day comes for us to step onto Heaven's shore, we will finally enjoy the eternal consolation that the Lord provides.

J. Ekis

Perplexed yet preserved

*Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me.
Job 29:2*

We find Job in this chapter, as he continues his final answer to his three miserable comforters, wishing for a return to the past, when he was respected and his integrity was acknowledged by the community. He looks upon those days as the days of God's preservation. In comparison, it is clear that in the present time he has been forsaken by his friends and remaining family. He therefore equates this condition as also being forsaken by God, and, from our text, assumes that God is no longer preserving him. His ensuing description of the former days almost smacks of boasting, but perhaps in light of the attacks from his friends, he feels a need to remind them (or himself?) of former blessings that he felt were apparent signs of God's blessing. In some ways it may be viewed as resembling the final few chapters of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. Yet now in his current days, without knowing the reason for his dilemma, Job is perplexed.

Since we get to read the first two chapters, we might be tempted to join Job's "friends" and rebuke him for his complaint and assumption. Or perhaps we wish we could jump into the action and tell Job to hold on a little longer. Yet, we need not look far in our own experience to find times when we may have been guilty of similar assumptions. We too can compare difficult circumstances to past times that we viewed as blessed from the Lord and also stand perplexed. These times may rightly make us examine ourselves for a cause of lost blessing or chastening. Yet, sometimes we may simply find no clear reason for our perplexing circumstance.

In such cases, let us not assume with Job that the Lord has ceased from preserving us. The fact that we are still functioning, even with our questions and wonderings, is evidence of His preservation. We still have His word and the promise of His Spirit. We still have the privilege of prayer in the name of our Lord Jesus, and, in fact, such circumstances typically enhance our prayer life. And, just as we see Job throughout this book bob his head above the top of the water, in which he feels he's drowning, and make a sublime remark, such as "I know that my Redeemer liveth," we also can be perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, and cast down but not destroyed (II Corinthians 4:8-9). Let us continue to trust the grace and mercy of Him that is able to keep us from falling, and present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24).

The Knowledge of the Holy

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.
— Proverbs 9:10 —

Most of us are average folk. We may achieve some level of success in this world, very little, or none at all. We are not the movers and shakers of our time, though, right? It is quite likely that none of us boast massive wealth, power, or fame. We live day-to-day on modest means and are satisfied by simple things. The world scorns our contentment, and the influential and powerful, if they even know us or acknowledge us, disdain or pity the plight of our commonness. While most of us have a high school education, and some even college and secondary or post-secondary degrees, they nonetheless see us as dull, dim, and unenlightened. We do not focus our time, talent, or ability on temporal things, and this seems so wasteful to the intelligentsia of our time.

We must come to realize, however, that this is all an illusion. For there is none wiser or more understanding than the believer. When we were converted to Christ, we received His Spirit, and also His mind (1 Cor. 2.16). This knowledge of the Holy is understanding. We live on a different level, tuned to another channel. The simplest mind that knows his God has a perspective that cannot be purchased by all the money in the world, and cannot be persuaded by promises of power, influence, or prestige. We see things in this life for what they are and not what they appear to be. We may not be able to answer every hard question, but the most important ones we have firmly grasped and conquered. We possess a knowledge so powerful that it quells the heart in the most tempestuous of times and vanquishes entirely the king of terrors.

But there is even more dimension and hue to this amazing knowledge of the Holy to which we are granted access. The believer that walks with his Lord is in a continuous state of growth. Our God and His holiness are infinite, and we are learning more about Him on an ongoing basis. The path of the just shines more and more unto the perfect day. As we grow spiritually, it is inevitable that the “under the hood” workings of this world are exposed to us. This world and its attractions begin to lose their grip upon us. We can appreciate the most pristine enjoyments of this temporal life because they came from the hand of our benevolent Master, not from the cesspool of the devil’s cursed storehouses. But even the purest of earthly pleasures pale in comparison to the joy that is coming in the morning.

Take heart, believer. Knowing Christ means you possess the knowledge of the Holy. This world is fast perishing. Our King is coming. Until then, continue to grow in grace and in the knowledge of your risen Lord. --- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

His Name is Secret

His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. Revelation 19:12

There are a myriad of appellations applied to the Lord Jesus. In the context of Revelation 19 He is called "Faithful and True"-the "Word of God"- "King of kings and Lord of lords". Isaiah calls Him "Emmanuel"-Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of peace". Add to this over 100 more titles that we could here delineate. Each august epitaph reveals some attribute of His divine being providing a glorious mosaic of our Lord. But with all that is given us of Him, there remains a wrinkle in His robe of revelation- a fold in the garment concealing that which is unknown of the magnificent personage.

When Manoah asked the angel for his name "the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?" Most commentators agree that the Angel of the Lord was a Christophany (an appearance or non-physical Old Testament manifestation of Christ). The name "secret" is translated with the Hebrew word *pil'î* meaning wonderful, incomprehensible, extraordinary. It is at the root of that name previously cited from Isaiah- "Wonderful".

The Lord has provided so much to learn about His character but there must always remain the boundary between the infinite and the finite. Deuteronomy 29:29: The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. Moses requested a glimpse of God's holy visage, but the ineffable Creator refused to satisfy the ingenuous request. David employed *pil'î* when describing the knowledge of the Holy: Psalms 139:6: Such knowledge is too wonderful(*pil'î*) for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

There are moments in our earthly pilgrimage when we are confronted with events that stymie our poor powers to comprehend their meaning. The looming question of "Why, Lord?" preoccupies the mind to the point of frustration. In that hour, it is well to remember that "He has a name written, that no man knew, but he himself". Let it suffice us to know that "He hath done all things well". He does not need our advice and consent, and we do not need his explanation. Take solace in that "secret" name. We have but to place childlike trust in the One who has revealed to us enough of His goodness to satisfy our doubts. In the eons of eternity, our knowledge of Christ will be progressive. Perhaps more of His secrets will be made manifest and will enhance the experience of the paradise of God.

Blessings to all who read,

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

Used by God

And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision; Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

Acts 9:10

There are several thousand people named in the Bible many of whom serve a prominent place in Biblical history. While the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles occupy the more significant roles throughout the development of God's plan for all mankind, others may be less well-known yet appear in scripture as they fulfill God's purpose. Some of these individuals of great importance are referred to as *a certain man* or *a certain woman*. Though these individuals have a relatively fleeting appearance in the scriptures, the significance of their role is not diminished. Just as there are many unrecorded works that Jesus did, these individuals who appeared briefly continued to work out the Lord's will for the rest of their lives in obscurity. Only eternity will reveal the complete account of the lives in this tapestry of individuals. This serves as a reminder and an encouragement that each of us plays a unique part in God's eternal plan.

What do we know about Ananias? There are a few scriptures that give some insight about this man who helped to set the Apostle Paul on the course that would change the world for Christ. Nothing is mentioned of how or when Ananias was converted to become a disciple of Jesus. A resident of Damascus, he responded to the Message of the risen Savior as it emanated from Judaea. Later in Acts 22, when Paul recounts his conversion, the account states that Ananias was a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews who dwelt there. In today's text, when the Lord speaks to Ananias in a vision, he quickly responds by saying: *Behold, I am here Lord*. Ananias doesn't seem to doubt the mission of going to lay his hands on Saul so that he may receive his sight, but the thought of going to the one who has been wreaking havoc on the early Christian church produced some apprehension. Hearing God say that Saul was a chosen vessel, Ananias responds to the call while asking no questions. After Ananias's encounter with Saul, he disappears from the Biblical narrative; but the results of that encounter are recorded in the remaining chapters of Acts and also through two thousand years of history.

Ananias's response can teach and inspire us to do the same. His devout relationship with the Lord put him in a position where he was sensitive to hearing the Lord speak. Though he may have felt some caution concerning his mission, he nonetheless goes obediently. Ananias seems to have no doubt concerning laying his hands on Saul so he could receive his sight, for Ananias fully knew that he was merely the messenger and God was the healer. Surely, when he first trusted Jesus as the Messiah, Ananias had no idea that his life would one day intersect with Saul of Tarsus.

Today, we have no idea whose life the Lord may cause to cross our path. If we are in tune with the Lord, we can sense His leading and then obey in all that He directs. From our perspective some of His directions may seem unreasonable; but if we trust Him, we can be assured that He will work out His will in our lives. Only God knows what the continuing effects will be from those missions.

J. Ekis

How pure

*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
Matthew 5:8*

This statement presents perhaps the most challenging statement of all of the beatitudes uttered by our Lord in this sermon. We might attempt to allow ourselves to contemplate our human state thoroughly enough to become truly poor in spirit (v. 3), such that we would be brought to mourning over the plight of our sin (v. 4), or to consider God's righteousness to a degree that would result in our hungering and thirsting after it (v. 6). Yet, when we honestly consider the purification of our hearts, and all that we can know within our hearts, a correct assessment of our human ability to attain a pure heart should erase all hope for this blessing. Instead, we could readily agree with Solomon's rhetorical question, "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" (Proverbs 20:9). We are all too familiar with the Lord's pronouncement through Jeremiah, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). The Lord would later describe what proceeds out of our hearts as "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:19).

However, we find a contrasting statement made by the Apostle Peter when he described God's work in the house of Cornelius, "And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8-9). How could Peter know what happened to the hearts of these Gentiles? He knew by comparison of the work done by the same Holy Spirit both outwardly and inwardly in these Gentiles and the Jewish disciples who initially believed the gospel. He would later indicate this in his exhortation to all believers: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (I Peter 1:22). Thus, we understand with Peter that the purification of the heart is the work of God's Holy Spirit. It is then His work that creates within us the desire and capacity for purity of heart and life. And it is this same work that makes us conscious of, and burdened with, the impurity that still indwells us in our current state, prompting us to purify ourselves, even as He is pure, based on our hope in Him who will make us like Him, when we see Him as He is (I John 3:2-3).

The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.
— John 10:11 —

Jesus' discourse on His identity as our Good Shepherd reveals much about how He views His own. Thoughtful meditation will leave us with significant gratitude for His undeserved love and His faithful, abiding care.

First, we must recognize our own propensities and vulnerabilities as sheep...

Sheep are wandering creatures – they tend to meander astray. Isaiah 53:6 tells us that all we like sheep have gone astray and turned every one to his own way.

Sheep are all but blind. 2 Corinthians 4:4 reminds us that in our natural state we are subjects of the devil and therefore blinded in our minds and understanding of spiritual truth.

Sheep are weak and defenseless. Romans 5:6 substantiates our spiritual frailty – else Christ would not have had to die for us.

Considering this prone state of spiritual stupor, is it not marvelous, then, what our Savior has to say about His flock?

Every one of us is but one among so very many under His care, yet He lovingly watches over each of us – personally. He sees us as individuals, and calls us each by our name (John 10:3).

We are His property in a very special way. All people belong to someone – the devil or Christ. We are not our own. We are bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20). We are His, and He is ours (John 10:3-4).

Our Good Shepherd knows our tendencies – our feebleness, our waywardness. He knows we need led. He could drive us. He could herd us. Instead, He leads us (John 10:4).

His voice is critical to our welfare. He knows we need to hear Him, so He speaks to us frequently that we may learn to recognize Him and Him alone (John 10:4-5).

And He knows us. Each of us. Our bleating is music to His ears. Our prayers are His delight. He can differentiate with ease your call versus mine versus the millions of others of the flock (John 10:14). But each sigh, each groan, each shout is met with His utmost interest, and receives His undivided attention.

We are His precious lambs. We are valuable to Him. Why? Only He can answer such a profound question. But the fact is, He laid down His life for us, saving us from our rapacious enemy and vouchsafing our eternal welfare (John 10:11).

All praise to our Good Shepherd. Because He is Who He is, we shall never want (Psalm 23:1).

--- D. Murcek

Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

*Now we know that what things soever the law saith,
it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped,
and all the world may become guilty before God. Romans 3:19*

How often the case we see Jesus shutting the mouth of His critics. In Matthew 22 His fiercest adversaries, the Herodians, the Saducees, and the Pharisees, "had taken counsel how they might entangle him in his talk". They were flummoxed and "no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions". And so shall it be for all of those who now construct their specious arguments against God and His Word in our unbelieving generation. They hurl invective at the Divine Savior as they wreath the mocking crown of scorn to support their fantasy that Jesus was a deluded dreamer-the son of Joseph and not the Son of the Most High. They may now hold sway over the skeptical masses but the hour soon draws nigh when "every mouth will be stopped" as they stand before God in naked isolation. The Lord will demand of them "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless."

What can we say if we live our lives in disrespect of his commandments, if we reject His tender appeals to come to Him, if we trample under foot the blood of the covenant, if we refuse to give glory to the One who granted us life. He who healed us from so many afflictions, who supplied us with every meal, who filled our lungs with oxygen, who caused our heart to beat countless times, who times without number the Holy Spirit strove and convicted the conscience but "ye would not come" to him. How many the times the voice of conscience bade "Come unto me" only to be met with impenitence and hardness of heart. What defense can be proffered? There is nothing we can say when the Almighty makes holy inquisition of our lives and we are found ungrateful and unbelieving. We who have arrogantly questioned the Everlasting God will then hear Him say: "Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me". There will be silence in heaven in that hour when God puts to silence "the ignorance of foolish men". Our text affords us a foreshadowing of that dreadful hour.

How blessed will be the outcome for the humble in heart who have visited the fountain of the water of life and have drunk freely thereof. The hour of final revelation will find them ceaselessly, fluently speaking, with mouths that can never be stopped, of the wonders of His saving grace.

Have a blessed day .

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

Strengthening Power

And said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong.

And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou has strengthened me.

Daniel 10:19

In the Old Testament God used prophets to convey His message to His people. Years of national disobedience had brought the nation of Israel into captivity. God selected prophets to be His mouthpiece for warnings and encouragement to the people of Israel. In the book of Daniel, we find the prophet in captivity in Babylon. With much of Israel's national culture and religious life disrupted, a message from God was of great importance. Much of Daniel's message pertained to the destruction of the Gentile powers and the establishment of God's kingdom. Being far from his homeland, Daniel is strengthened when he finally hears from the Lord after a season of prayer and fasting. May the Lord help us to see some parallels in this text from which we can benefit spiritually as we seek a word from our Lord.

God always has a means by which to communicate with His people. Though the days of the prophets have passed, God has not abandoned us. Today, we have the inspired Word of God accompanied by the Holy Spirit who delivers the divine message to us. As Christians, like Daniel, we are sojourning in a foreign land. Although our living conditions are considerably more comfortable than Daniel's, we are quite a distance from our eternal glorious home. Sometimes, God's voice can seem distant and His message obscured to us. We read and search His Word, but the full impact is diminished by the frailties and burdens of this life that can be like static drowning out the voice of the Lord. The resulting distant feeling can only be alleviated by sincerely and prayerfully seeking the Lord though the answer is not always immediate. There are seasons when our prayers are hindered leaving us wondering at His divine silence. But He knows our frame and promises to hear the cries of His children and always arrives with an answer in His time. After enduring a season of trials, the Lord comes to us with strengthening power.

Today, we have the constant availability of God's word to strengthen us. At times we may not enjoy its full power due to our lack of focus, but when we turn from all distractions and prayerfully meditate on God's Word, the Holy Spirit is unrestricted to reveal its full power. How refreshing it is to hear the Lord personally speaking to us through His word. He speaks words of encouragement, rebuke, comfort, grace, and inspiration at the right time. In His message, we have a fresh supply of strength for the journey He has planned for us.

J. Ekis

What is good

*Hear my words, O ye wise men; and give ear unto me, ye that have knowledge.
For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat. Let us choose to us judgment: let
us know among ourselves what is good.
Job 34:2-4*

Sometimes we hear someone express dislike for a certain food by claiming to not “have a taste for it.” The truth of the expression is that the person’s mouth had previously tasted such food and determined that it was not good. Most of us include such judgment of the mouth in the regulation of our diets, since we like to enjoy the eating experience. We employ discerning taste buds, not only to optimize the enjoyment of our eating experience, but also to protect ourselves from unpleasant or even harmful experience. For example, we discern to not drink the soured milk by the smallest possible sample. In childhood, we may have also deprived ourselves of good experiences because we did not allow our mouth to sufficiently appropriate and appreciate the benefit of the food to our taste.

In today’s text, Elihu compared this principle of the sense of taste to actually making sense of the words that we hear, as he exhorted Job’s friends/critics to examine his own words, since theirs, though in some general sense true, had provided no remedy for Job’s situation. Just as the tongue discerns the goodness of food, so the critical ear, which metaphorically refers to the discernment of what is heard, tests and judges the goodness of the words and the concepts expressed by them. His invitation was appropriate for both their own pontifications and his own that followed. It is, in fact, appropriate for us as well.

Do we actually expend as much effort discerning what we hear as we do what we eat? Have you enjoyed a good exchange of ideas lately, as you would enjoy a good meal? Then, in addition, have you chosen to apply right judgment to what you have heard, so that you actually consume with your mind what is wholesome and pleasant to the edification of the soul before the LORD, and expel that which is detrimental? Is this not in line with the exhortation of the apostle to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (I Thessalonians 5:21)? With so many avenues for information to bombard our hearing in this age, there seems to be an intention for its consumption to be parallel to that of “fast food,” which is generally not absorbed in a healthy manner and therefore rarely beneficial. Let us instead put aside such temptation, and choose to us judgment: let us know among ourselves what is good.

A Place of Refuge

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

– Psalm 46:1 –

Trouble and sorrow are the currency of this present world. We all trade in it frequently. Some more than others, it sometimes seems, but make no mistake – everyone knows problem and pain. It even comes in waves at times. We think the worst is past, and another shoe drops. Our heavy hearts swell under the duress until there is no recourse but to erupt in strong crying and tears, lest we grow callous and embittered by the battle.

But He that searches the heart and tries the reins knows our struggle and supplies us with the singular sustainable solution to our miserable condition. The LORD of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. Stop. Consider. Ponder. Ruminant. Stand in awe. Relish. Adore. God – Himself, with all of His eternal being and resource – is our refuge and strength. He is our sure and steadfast hiding place from the violence of the tempest that relentlessly beats against us. He has donned the mantle of humanity and was tempted in all points as we are. He was touched with feeling of our infirmities, so He can truly be present with us in the midst of every storm, awaiting our frightened call to rouse Him to still the winds and waves that threaten our bark. He wept like us. He knows experientially the salty taste of the raindrops of human lamentation. When confronted with the misery of the curse, He groaned in Himself, just like us, heaving in spirit when the sorrow-spawned tears fail to express in entirety the anguish of the soul. And at Calvary, He was forsaken (Mk. 15:34), so we never have to be. In the midst of our trouble, we have access to this sweet river of solace whose streams actually make us – glad (Ps. 46:4).

Dear Christian – what trouble are you experiencing today? Be still and know that He is God. His promise is steadfast, His character is immutable, His love is overwhelming, His presence is sure. And He is yours. The LORD of Hosts is with you; the God of Jacob is your refuge. Believe it. Embrace it. The storm will past. Your Christ stands. --- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Liberation of Sisyphus

Isaiah 61:1-2: The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.

In John 8:34: the Lord addresses the inveterate power of sin in a person's life and then provides the key to freedom from this bondage: Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin...If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed

Men have sought to provide their effete programs and behavior modification instructions to try to abate the addictive enslavements. It is Christ, alone, who provides recovery from the snare of the devil. II Timothy 2:25-26: : In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will

For every Christian the sin burden was lifted at Calvary. Our soul has been liberated from the ill and odious effects of the curse though the flesh remains subject to the corruption of Adam's sin. The glad day is coming for complete deliverance from this corruptible carcass that still must bear up under the onslaught of the devil's curse.

The burden of sin weighs us all down innervating and vitiating us of the joy of life. Jesus knew that man living under the weight of sin needed a deliverer and so he exclaimed "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". Sisyphus, a figure of Greek mythology, was condemned to repeat forever the same meaningless task of pushing a boulder up a mountain, only to see it roll down again. Life without Christ and the hope of heaven is a burdensome weight. In 1949, the French existentialist Albert Camus wrote the Myth of Sisyphus in which he compares the absurdity of man's life with the situation of Sisyphus-that life is inherently devoid of meaning and consequently absurd, but humans will nevertheless forever search for meaning.

Overcoming victorious living is the birthright of every believer. We are not to cower and wither under the seductions of the evil one as some pusillanimous weakling. We have learned to arm ourselves in the mighty power of Christ. To lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus as Hebrews 12:1-2 instructs us. Making straight paths for our feet as we follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord:

Live in the power of His resurrection,

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

God's Value System

And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

Luke 16:15

One of the all-time greats in Major League Baseball is Mickey Mantle. His career spanned two decades with multiple awards and championships. Mantle is a prestigious Major League Baseball All-Century team member and a 1974 inductee to the Baseball Hall of Fame. In 1968 the final year of his career, Mantle was making one hundred thousand dollars a year. At that time, this was an incredible amount of money for an athlete to make. Even more incredible, is that a mint condition of his baseball card sold in 2022 at an auction for 2.6 million dollars. It's hard to imagine that an image of a person on a 2.5" x 3.5" card could be valued as such. Most of us would consider that inconceivable amount of money paid for a card ridiculous, but it should also stir thoughts of evaluating our personal value system. What do we consider valuable? Does what we value align with what God values?

Today's verse is our Lord's answer to the covetous Pharisees. Reading through the Scriptures, it becomes obvious that God's value system greatly differs from that of sinful men. The progenitor of the human race Adam, initiated the corruption of man's value system. His self-centered desire caused him to ignore God's instruction and seek an impossible dream thinking he would not die while becoming as wise as God. He valued his selfish desire more than his obedience to God. Because of the curse and the resulting separation from paradise, man has replaced faith and trust in God with a desire for material wealth to satisfy fleshly needs as well as endless wants. Hence the warning found in 1 Timothy 6:10, *For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* Achan's stealing a wedge of silver and a Babylonian garment from the spoils of Jericho brought him no satisfaction. Desiring recognition and spurred by their greed, Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Ghost and held back some of their professed donation. And of course, Judas's infamous treachery was rooted in his valuing silver over his commitment to the Lord.

Though *the love of money is the root of all evil*, many other things are highly esteemed among men. Fortune and fame produce many favors in today's world system, yet they cannot influence God, who is no respecter of persons. For many people, concern about their outward appearance, while ignoring the condition of their inner man causes spiritual endeavors to take a back seat to the entertainments of this world.

When we become a new creation in Christ, old things pass away, and all things become new. A change in our hearts should produce a new and sanctified value system. With God's grace, we can see through the vanity of what is highly esteemed by the world, so that we may pursue what our Lord esteems as valuable.

J. Ekis

What or why

He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy... Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out...

Job 37:13, 23

Who would have imagined even a century ago how much our non-agricultural population could be so preoccupied with the weather, that they could be entertained by the likes of a “weather channel?” Beyond that, most of us now have available continual access to weather forecasts within a few swipes of the addicting “phone” in our pocket. With all the attention on the climate, not much has changed since Elihu uttered these statements to Job, as he continued his discourse on the greatness of God, describing His power over the natural world He created, including the effects of weather. So while men have devised different means to predict weather trends for many years, now to the extent of applying continually changing computer models, we still cannot from these means determine the “why” of the weather. With much research, some have come closer to modeling the “what” with respect to the causes and effects observed in weather patterns. Yet even those models must be continually updated to keep them as close to accurate as they can, and even then, they often get it wrong.

So mankind has again invented a new distraction, so that we can be wrapped up in the details of the “what,” and miss contemplating the possibilities for the “why.” One thing to learn from the weather patterns is that we cannot control them. While many desire to entertain the delusion that we can, history past and present continues to defy that delusion. What mankind should instead contemplate are the three possibilities posited by Elihu. Sometimes it is for correction, in which case we should be reminded to seek the Lord to understand our helplessness, and our need for repentance and dependence upon Him. At other times, it is simply for His land. He takes care to replenish the land He created with its needed precipitation in appropriate form at the right season. Then, of course, it can be for mercy, when the dry, parched ground is finally infused again with the life-giving water so needed, and so uniquely designed by God.

Men may think themselves smarter because they have invented sophisticated predictive tools. But it is a shame that many have not become wiser, able to recognize that God is Almighty, and we cannot find Him out. Let us seek such wisdom, and learn our dependence on Him who is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice.

The Seven Spirits of God

And out of the throne proceeded lightnings, and thunderings, and voices, and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

– Revelation 4:5 –

In Revelation 4, the Apostle John relays this curious vision of the “seven Spirits of God”. While somewhat enigmatic, the diligent student will come to realize that this is a robustly meaningful manifestation of the Holy Ghost. Permitting Scripture to interpret Scripture, Isaiah 61 becomes our parallel text. The prophet’s inspired pen reveals this seven-fold nature of the Advocate we intimately know, and Whom John was permitted to see in all His fullness in the third heaven.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is an anointing Spirit (Isa. 61:1). He chooses His people for a special purpose, preparing and equipping them for that for which they were designed. How humbling to know we are anointed of the Spirit of the Almighty.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is a healing Spirit (Isa. 61:1). He binds up our broken hearts. He speaks peace to our frightened souls. He gently repairs the damage that sin and the curse have wrought within us.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is a liberating Spirit (Isa. 61:1). He removed the shackles that once bound us and ushered us into the glorious liberty of the children of God. He stays resident within the heart to keep us free from the sin that enslaved us. As we yield to Him, our members which were once the instruments of death, become the instruments of righteousness.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is a proclaiming Spirit (Isa. 61:2). Once He moved in, it became impossible to ignore His prompting to share the gospel of Christ. He motivates us, yea, constrains us, to share the good news of God’s acceptance of sinners, and the warning of His coming vengeance upon His enemies, by our word and by our witness.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is a comforting Spirit (Isa. 6:2). He is the active Agent of the triune God of all comforts. He dries our tears and cheers our hearts on our pilgrim journey. He guides. He encourages. He leads. This and more He continuously performs on our behalf as our Comforter.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is a gifting Spirit (Isa. 6:3). He gives us beauty for ashes, joy for mourning, praise for heaviness. It is impossible for a son or daughter of God to say they were forgotten. Each of us is bestowed many times over with spiritual gifts that are for our edification, the church’s good, and God’s benevolent use through us.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is an establishing Spirit (Isa. 6:3). He makes us trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD. Peter said he establishes, strengthens, and settles us. The believer that yields to the Holy Ghost shall not be moved. We shall bring forth fruit in season and prosper in all that God has for us, because of our indwelling Friend.

All praise our God Who sits upon the throne, Who has sent His Spirit and changed our lives!

--- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

¶And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms....But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: Luke 14:7,10:

This intriguing text brings to light the essence of His call to true humility and service to God. In the seventh verse the Lord "marked how the pharisees chose out the chief rooms" - the seats of highest honor being closest to the master of the house. One's seating arrangement was a designation of their societal importance. Sycophants would often jockey for higher positions by flattery and by proving their ability to enhance the status of the host. It is interesting to note here, that very little has changed in 21 centuries. There are those who adulterate the rich and famous in hopes of gaining some standing with them. Movie stars have their legion of devotees. Athletes are swarmed by their admirers. Political leaders amass huge rallies of supporters. Religious luminaries attract multitudes to their meetings. All of these hoping to gain some place of distinction by association and the objects of their devotion carefully filtering through the masses to see who among them might best inflate their station and so find the highest seats..

Now note here the glorious Maker of heaven and earth chooses for his holy cadre the ignorant, the common, the persona non grata. Could we sinful miscreants find a more congeal text than *Luke 15:1-2: Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.* The Divine Messenger made himself of no reputation so he could include the disenfranchised and call them his friends.

So the Lord makes His point, When deciding who to invite to your soiree put at the top of your guest list the undesirables- the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. These that have no means to repay your kindness. No quid pro quo. No handsome return on your investment. Let the unworthies of society, the forgotten men, women, and children be the objects of your benevolence and expect no recompense. Beloved Let us as His church today act in His behalf, for surrounding us we will find all of the above cases, worthy of our love and attention. The Lord is careful to add the reminder: thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

Matthew 25:34-40: Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Oh what consolation shall be ours as we celebrate at the marriage feast of the Lamb. We have hope that seated next to us will be those many who on earth were beneficiaries of our kindnesses. On earth, they could offer us nothing but a word of thanks but here we can now harmonize our praise to our common King. But do I with wonder hear Him say "Friend, go up higher" and now be seated with me in heavenly places! Hope deferred would thus be recompensed. How good it was to seek out the lowest seat in the service of God that we might hear that glad promotion. "Go Up Higher!"

Have a blessed day .

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17