

Extraordinary Commonness

David therefore himself calleth hm Lord; and whence is he then his son? And the common people heard him gladly.

– Mark 12:37 –

Our generation is not the first to be enamored with wealth, fame, power, and prestige. These are gold-veneered, dust-comprised trophies that men have chased for centuries. In Jesus' day, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians were the possessors of rank among the Jews. They enjoyed the accolades of the people and to be known and seen of men. Yet when the Nazarene Rabbi held the crowds spellbound with His divine teaching that was so simple a child could apprehend the heavenly verities, these cultural elites stumbled. Their social status blinded them to their spiritual need. Their privilege proved the pathway to damnation.

The devil has woven a world-system that glitters, dangling the promise of happiness and contentment via non-anonymity and material gain. Multitudes believe themselves to be nothing more than ordinary folk, and they either engage in hopelessly chasing the shimmering carrot to change that perception, or they sink into self-loathing because of their lack of socio-economic status. How few accept the extraordinary blessedness of being common!

Common does not necessarily mean ordinary. Every one of us in this crowded lot of humanity is a unique creation of Almighty God. That being said, the corresponding truth is that we all share very non-unique spiritual needs – redemption, reproof, rebuke, correction, and instruction in righteousness. No matter how many or few connections we have, no matter how much or how little money in the bank, no matter the size of our dwelling, or the number of degrees to our name, etc., etc., we all need to know Christ, and to know Him more. Owning that reality puts us safely in the camp of common people, positioning us to receive significant blessing.

Let us remember that not many mighty and not many noble are called. It is common people who can hear Christ gladly. And it is the common elements of salt and light that God uses to change the world. Be common, be content, and let God have the glory!

-- D. Murcek

Exercise for Spiritual Fitness

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward man.

Acts 24:16

In recent years we have become more aware of the many benefits of physical exercise. Personal trainers are available; fitness centers abound for people of all ages. Health insurance companies recognize the importance of fitness, and have even incorporated the Silver Sneakers program for seniors. By participating in some routine exercise regiment, we can offset some health issues and improve our quality of life. But all the availability of exercise opportunities will not profit us unless we chose to participate.

In the twenty-fourth chapter of Acts, Paul is in the midst of multiple interrogations that will eventually lead to his martyrdom. Paul testifies to his adherence to this *new way* as a follower of Christ, *believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets*. After asserting of his hope in the resurrection, both of the just and unjust, he then states his defense of how he conducts his life. First, Paul purposefully chose to exercise himself to live in such a way that he would not consciously offend God as well as man. Paul certainly had accumulated some enemies as he traveled spreading the salvation message, but those enemies did not have a just cause against him. His message of love and hope would liberate countless souls from the chains of sin, and it would convict those who had prided themselves in the self-righteousness of their false religion. Like his Savior, Paul brought no harm to his enemies, while he lived a life that shined with an eternal purpose. Having a conscience that was void of offence toward God and man was of the utmost importance to him.

Certainly, none of us would want to intentionally offend God, but do we exercise ourselves in such a fashion so as not to offend? Just as physical exercise takes initiative and effort on our part, the same is true of thoughts, attitudes, and actions before God. Are we aware of how we exercise or conduct ourselves in our interaction with others, both our Christian brethren and unbelievers? We don't want to detract from our life saving message by allowing ourselves to obscure others' view of Jesus. Exercise takes time and effort, but its benefits are worth it. To exercise ourselves so as not to offend God and man has eternal dividends.

J. Ekis

God's desire

*Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!
Psalm 81:13*

We have a relatively rare example in this text where the translators understood the need for an exclamation point from the original language. This indicates an intense desire of God for His people to walk in His ways. What follows this exclamation are reasons for such desire. He desired to subdue and bring their enemies into submission, so that His people who obey Him would perpetually endure. Had they obeyed, He would have sustained them with desirable foods that would bring tremendous satisfaction. In verse ten of this psalm, after reminding them of past deliverances, He had invited the nation to "open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Thus, we understand that the motive for God's call to His people to live and walk in His ways is so that they will enjoy His abundant blessings and prosperity.

There are those who view the commandments of scripture as a burden put upon mankind by God, and they somehow conjecture that God's purpose is simply to control men out of some selfish desire for preeminence. This was evidently the attitude of the Israelites in view here, who are described in verse eleven as not hearkening, and wanting nothing of God. How foolish it is to ignore the plain truth of scripture as well as sound reason. It is impossible for God, the maker of all and the giver to all, to be selfish. There is none with whom He must compete, and there is nothing that He needs from anyone. So scripture makes it clear, here as in other places, that His desire is to bless His people with all that He is and gives. But to truly be His people means to be reconciled and at one with Him, and in so doing to simply love Him who first loved us. Even the capacity to do that comes completely from Him through His own sacrifice on the cross and the gift of His Holy Spirit. Why would we not then simply hearken to His word, when we see His desire to bestow the riches of His grace upon all who believe (Ephesians 1)?

Effective wisdom

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

Matthew 10:16

The wisdom of Jesus can be simply overwhelming. Often in reading the accounts in scripture of His exchanges with His adversaries, our minds stand in amazement considering the superiority of His answers and admonitions delivered plainly, yet with great power. His instruction to the disciples here is a descriptive way for Him to say, “deal with them as I do.” Although His enemies hated Him, and through the course of his ministry their hatred intensified, they had no choice but to be confounded by His clearly truthful replies and teachings. Even the officers who were sent by the Pharisees and chief priests to take Him returned empty-handed, proclaiming, “Never man spake like this man” (John 7:47). In addition to His wisdom as the Son of God, it is perhaps beyond speculation that another aspect of His harmless wisdom came from the fact that He was filled with compassion for not only the multitude, but also for these adversaries. After His excoriation of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew chapter 23, we see Him lamenting over the Jerusalem that they led, describing His frequent desire to have gathered them to Himself. How keenly He demonstrated His unity with the Father’s compassionate desire for His people.

He therefore instructs his disciples, and thereby us, to seek the same compassionate wisdom, from His word and from His Spirit, in our dealings with those who would set themselves as adversaries against us as His children. The spirit of the age seems to be plunging people into contests of nastiness on issues large and small. Gone are the days of dialogue. Communication platforms have been devised such that people can hide behind imagined electronic walls and hurl vindictive insults with no perceived need for moral basis or sense of reason. Into this den of wolves we must enter, and still seek to cultivate the attitude of the Master in seeking to win, not arguments, but hearts in desperate need of Him, with few yet right words. As James exhorts, let us seek that effective wisdom from above, which is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17). Then shall the preparations of our hearts and the answers of our tongues be from the Lord (Proverbs 16:1).

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Straight Course

"Straightway they forsook their nets, and followed Him." — Mark 1:18

The temporizing spirit of the adamic nature is all too willing to defer to a *"more convenient season"*. How evanescent is that moment of inspiration that quickens the soul with divine urgings. If we do not act decisively, that moment will so rapidly dissipate. Desire must be met with resolution; and resolution with action. The love of many will *"wax cold"* and so it is best to act while the heart is hot.

The Roman poet, Horace, coined the aphorism *"Carpe Diem"* (seize the day). The opportunity may never present itself ever again. Bartimaeus knew he had but one moment to beg for his petition. He forcefully, obtrusively cried out and His plea was received and duly rewarded. The kingdom of God is taken by *violence (Matthew 11:12)* not inertia. How many intentions are left withering on the vine of inactivity. What for the moment was a fervent resolution so soon degrades to a task best left to another time.

The thought may come at an inopportune time, but there is no mistaking that the call is from the Lord. Some kind act or thoughtful word needs to be discharged. Go at once for the king's business requires haste! By tomorrow the prompting may not strike your heart with same urgency. There is a soul in eternal danger and the Lord has given you the burden. Discharge the commission posthaste for the next week may bring an untimely death. There is the peculiar sense that some loved one is in need of protective prayer. Straightway to the closet and offer up the needed intercession though you may never learn the outcome of that petition until that eternal day of discovery.

That old serpent, the devil is the grand procrastinator. He populates the realm of the damned with the foolish who hear the Master calling *"Follow Me"* but they with one consent begin to make excuse. How eternally vital it is to *"seek the Lord while He may be found"* and make a *"straight course"* to His receiving arms *"while it is called today"*.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Sitting By

And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.

– Luke 5:17 –

The Carpenter-turned-Rabbi from Nazareth had created quite a stir. His acts of mercy and miracle were incontestable and as He unraveled the mysteries of God, His words fell like showers of blessing to those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness. Never before was there any that spoke like this Man, nor had a people been so blessed as to witness a Man heal by the finger of God. Most of the crowds were anxious to hear and to see. As Jesus confirmed His Person and His mission with each passing parable, discourse, or miracle, more began to be persuaded to place their trust in Him.

Within those multitudes were the religious leaders. After all, the good news was for them, too. But these who should have been seasoned to recognize that the God they claimed to know was doing a new work were instead salty and cynical. They did not come to Him with anticipation but with an axe to grind. They did not bring sincere questions, but rather their own answers. They did not join His movement but sat upon the sidelines to scorn. “Sitting by”, particularly when the Lord is active in the midst, is quite an awful thing.

Sitting by is safe. It requires no risk of heart, nor engagement of soul, both of which are requisite to true spiritual advancement, even if we have walked with God for quite some time.

Sitting by is easy, allowing one to rest content in the status quo, even when God Himself is shaking things up.

Sitting by is self-serving. It is the (non) action of a heart that has exalted itself to the throne within the inner sanctum, never to be challenged, much less to be changed.

Sitting by is the antithesis of faith. While faith is internally anchored and steadfast, it is always externally moving, doing, active, vibrant. It is impossible to be a person of faith and watch God move from the sidelines. Faith wants in on the action. Faith gets on board. Faith moves the heart and then the body to be a part of what God is doing.

Let us be on guard. Even if we are converted, the longer we live, the more susceptible we become to “sitting by”. The seat of the scornful should be scorned by the faithful.

Lord, revive Thy work, and make us part. Deliver us from sitting by.

Great Escape

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2Peter 1:4)

Taking time to observe the natural world around us, it is easy to see simultaneously the creative hand of God and the corruptive principle of the curse. This corruption process affects everything from both natural and man-made objects to all the components of society. Unless there is some intervention, everything will eventually tend to disorder and decay.

In today's text, Peter warns of the corruption that can occur to our Christian life. When we surrendered to Christ and placed our faith in Him, our eternal destiny was changed; but while we live on this earth, we are still subject to corruption. The world's systems and values will constantly pressure and try our faith. Temptations through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are ever present trying to take our focus off of God's eternal purpose. The scriptures are replete with warnings such as: be sober, be vigilant, take heed, resist, flee, be strong, all of which are necessary if we want to fight off the corrupting principles of this life. All of us would like to wish away trials and pressure, but God has allowed those things to serve as a means of strengthening our faith by learning to depend on Him. As physical resistance can help strengthen muscles, so resistance to temptations helps to strengthen our spiritual muscle. The Lord, our Great Provider has given us exceeding great and precious promises that we might escape this world's corruption. With His prescribed plan of adding, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity to our faith we have the necessary ingredients to prevent corruption in our spiritual life.

It is sometimes easy to see the corruption that occurs in someone else's spiritual life; but we want to be aware of any that works its way into our own life. God has prescribed a preventative that only works if we take advantage of it. The Holy Spirit within, His Word to guide, and the obedient application of His promises help not only to escape corruption, but enable us to thrive in our Christian walk.

J. Ekis

Holy Habits

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

– Luke 4:16 –

In our love and awe of our Christ, we tend to magnify His divinity. This is well and good and safe, but it does at times preclude us from admiring His sinless and complete humanity. The mysteries of the *kenosis* and the *hypostasis* are mind-boggling, but they nonetheless leave us certain of a number of facts, and one of those is that Jesus knows experientially what it is to be human – to hunger, to thirst, to learn, to grow, to slumber, to hurt, and to rejoice. Our text unassumingly highlights, in just a few words, some very human aspects of our beloved Savior. “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day.”

Mary and Joseph must have made a habit of attending synagogue consistently. These were humble and holy people else they would not have been entrusted with the task of raising the Son of God. The implication in the text is that this habit of sabbath-day gathering with the people of God was adopted as a worthy custom and became a willful habit of our Lord in His adult life. For lack of a better designation and in order to put it in a more contemporary syntax, Jesus was a faithful churchgoer! He made it a point to gather with the people of Jehovah regularly. A careful reading of the remainder of the gospels will show that Jesus had other holy habits as well – prayer, fasting, giving of alms, etc. These are things He did as a matter of life as a Man living by faith. And a careful perusal of the book of Acts will attest to the fact that His disciples – Peter, John, Paul, etc. – all followed their Master’s example, setting certain life-long habits that were honoring to God, furthering their spiritual growth and usefulness.

Human existence tends toward slothfulness or discipline. Habit-forming is the hallmark of disciplined folk. Spiritual habits – regular and recurring activities – are quite necessary, if not vital, for serious Christians. Bible study, prayer, fasting, corporate worship, church attendance, fellowship, sacrificial giving, witnessing – all of these are holy habits that should be well maintained and unpretentiously executed regularly as a matter of living for Christ. After all, the Son of God Himself had holy habits – why would we not form and adhere to them as well?

-- D. Murcek

United hearts

*Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.
Psalm 86:11*

In his famous commentary on Psalm 23, Philip Keller made a point with words similar to this: “you can know the will of God, if you want to know the will of God to do it, not to vote on it.” As David asks in this psalm to be taught the way of the LORD, he declares in tandem that he will walk in that truth that he is taught. However, he also understands the frailty of his human condition and determination, as he quickly follows with the plea for a united heart. One of the greatest detriments to our spiritual health is a heart that is divided by competing thoughts, priorities, and other distractions from learning and applying His truth. To be able to focus on God’s way and incorporate it in ours is the delight of the heart that properly fears His name. David understands that result of a united and focused heart, when he declares in the next verse, “I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with *all* my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore.”

It is interesting how, when in pursuit of holiness, our hearts can be so easily distracted. Perhaps that’s because it is within the heart that holiness must begin. To perform acts that appear to be holy, without our whole heart engaged, is to be no better than the scribes and Pharisees, whom Jesus condemned with the words of Isaiah: “This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Mark 7:6). As the devil tempted the people of Israel to half-hearted religion, so he continues to tempt us today. David seemed to understand that problem in our text, and so he prayed accordingly. Let us recognize and follow his example. Then we can consistently pursue both knowing and doing the will of the Lord, and realize the blessed benefit.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Well Pleased

*For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people:
Psalms 149:4*

What father does not take joy in the obedient spirit of his sons and daughters. The same is most certainly the case with our Heavenly Father who takes great delight in His born ones that assiduously apply themselves to a life of service and obedience to their Creator. It is a humbling notion to consider that the self-sufficient God, the "I am that I am", somehow takes pleasure in finite, imperfect creatures such as we.

God, being identified and defined as self-sufficient, means He possesses within Himself every quality, ability, and supernatural command with never-ending measure. Every attribute or mighty and wonderful power is His endlessly. Theologians call this attribute of God his aseity. The true and living God lacks no good thing. He isn't advanced or improved by our existence or efforts. God wants for nothing and lacks nothing; He is complete and yet, that said, our text affirms that He derives pleasure in beholding His people.

Let us then, as the object of His Divine favor, press forth with ardent zeal advancing the causes that please His magnanimous heart. May we always and ever win His affirming smile and may we one day hear Him say of us, as He did of Jesus, this is my beloved child in whom "I am well pleased".

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

The Power to Persuade

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

– Luke 16:31 –

The closing statement of Jesus' lesson of the rich man and Lazarus is astounding. The rich man's request for Lazarus to be sent to his brethren to warn them of the flaming torment that awaits them on the other side of death is met with a truth so profound and yet so frequently forgotten by those of us who claim to believe the Bible. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Contemporary Christendom is filled with churches and movements and initiatives trying to timidly coax unbelievers into getting aboard the gospel ship. It is almost as though the collective conscience of the people of God blushes at the brashness of the Word we profess to hold dear. The tools and methods of this modern evangelism are many, and they range from the noble to the deceptive. Motion pictures attempt to present the gospel via fictitious stories and characters and settings. Books about current events or phenomena are penned from a "Christian" perspective. Open-ended, non-threatening Bible "discussions" (masquerading as Bible studies) are held on recurring bases. The airwaves and internet are filled with carefully woven, "seeker-friendly" "messages" that intermingle some Bible verses into an otherwise Freudian lecture. The list could go on.

We have sadly forgotten that it is the Word of God alone that has the power to save the soul. Abraham prophetically informed the rich man that even a resurrection from the dead was not God's chosen witness to convict and convert the sinner – it is the Law and the Prophets. The Word of God does not change. It stands firm and does not bend. It is relevant in every age whether its hearers deem it so or not. It shocks the intellect and makes no apologies. It seeks no approval, but forthrightly condemns the guilty while offering hope to the helpless. It is enigmatic to the skeptic but plain to anyone who wishes to hear from God in its text. It uniquely and solely has the power to cut to the heart of the sinner and convince them of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come.

God has graciously vouchsafed to us His word. It is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of joint and marrow, and is the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Let us rediscover the divine power in the plain use of the Scriptures, and may we continually re-embrace the simplicity of preaching, teaching, sharing, and trusting the unvarnished Word of God – and it alone – in order to persuade lost souls to flee for refuge from the wrath to come.

Prison Relief

Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name; the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.

Psalm 142:7

When someone enters the prison system they are confronted with a very restrictive way of life. Their freedoms are lost in multiple ways. For the most part, inmates are cut off from the outside world and their freedom to make choices becomes very limited. Where to go, what to eat, who to talk with, are all determined by the powers that be. Because of this oppressive change, inmates are under surveillance when they enter prison. Depression is common because of the pressure and the loss of freedom.

In Psalm 142, David was under a different kind of pressure and a type of spiritual imprisonment. The shepherd boy, who one day would become king, was now being hunted down by the jealous King Saul. Fearing for his life produced fear and anxiety for David imprisoning his soul and removing him from his normal way of life. Feeling that no one cared for him and completely alone, his praise for God also seems to have been incarcerated by his circumstances. As all prisoners long to breathe the fresh air of freedom, so David longed to have his soul liberated to sing praises to his God. Even in this time of bondage, he retained his faith and hope that the Lord would deal bountifully with him. We can learn many lessons to apply in our own lives from David's trial-filled life.

When the pressures of life's difficulties confront us, our soul may feel imprisoned. The consuming nature of trials often dominate our thoughts allowing our souls to be oppressed. Self-determination alone is not enough to set our downcast soul free. Trying to suppress fears and worries by our own self-will may bring short relief, but the weight of pressing burdens quickly returns. To find the desired relief, we must do what David records in this Psalm. If we cry with the voice of supplication, pouring out our complaint before the Lord, and show Him our trouble; even if our life circumstances may not change, He is able to bring our soul out of prison. Then with our souls free, we are at liberty to praise and bless His name.

Today, the Lord can not only free us from the burden of sin, but He also can open the prison doors of fears and worries. Praise Him for what He has done and what He will continue to do!

J. Ekis

What He Didn't Do

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; But these are written that ye might believe...

John 20:30,31a

The Gospels record the life of Jesus and the many things He did as He walked this earth. From His heavenly teachings to the wide variety of miracles, His life was filled with a divine purpose to accomplish salvation for mankind. The record of His deeds gives us hope and inspiration to also live a life in accordance with God's will. The gospel of John states that there are also many unrecorded things that Jesus did, which can only be left for our speculation. But not only can we focus on the things that He did, let us also consider some things that He did **not** do.

During Jesus' great temptation in the wilderness, after forty days of fasting the devil tempts Him to command stones to be miraculously changed into bread. Because He did *not* do it, the Incarnate Creator our Lord Jesus kept himself from sin so that He could become the perfect sacrifice for our sins. When He encountered the Samaritan woman at the well, He could have chosen not to speak to her. Instead, He does *not* observe a long-held tradition of hatred and bigotry and speaks to her the words of eternal life. This account sets the example for us to follow in loving all of mankind. Jesus could have observed the Sabbath, but by *not* observing it and instead choosing to heal a woman bound by an infirmity, He taught that attending to the needs of others is more important than the outward observance of a ceremonial law. When the scribes and Pharisees tried to bait our Lord to make a severe judgement of the woman taken in adultery, He instead directs His words to their guilty consciences, then demonstrates mercy by *not* condemning the woman, but warns her to go and sin no more. When Judas and the multitude came to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane, Peter's feeble attempt to defend Him was met with these words "Put up thy sword, thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels"? Jesus could have called to be delivered, but He did *not*, and because He did not, salvation's plan would be completed.

Everyday there are lessons we can draw from the mighty things that Jesus did, but we can also meditate on and be thankful for the things that He didn't do.

J.

Ekis

Good things

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High: To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night.

Psalm 92:1-2

Are you looking for good things to do? Psalm 92 gives four suggestions right at its outset. Give thanks unto the LORD. Sing praises unto His name. Demonstrate His lovingkindness at the beginning of our day. Then at the end of every day also recognize and show forth His faithfulness. If these are good things to do, then they are acceptable at all times. It is true that men have instituted some seasonal traditions for giving thanks or praise, on or for certain occasions, and these should be welcome opportunities for us to show forth to all God's lovingkindness and His faithfulness. However, we should be admonished by the declaration before us to practice these good things regularly. It is noticeable how at this time of year we seem to receive more mail, much of which asks us to charitably consider diverse enterprises. Could it be that they recognize the seasonal nature of people's inclinations to do good things? As believers, we should not need to be prodded to do these things. We give thanks and sing praise to His name because He is the most High – every day. Every morning we can look about us and enumerate the blessings of the LORD that surround us, and then we can be ready to express these to all who need to hear of His lovingkindness. As we retire each evening, there is opportunity to look back upon our day and recount God's faithfulness throughout the day, in all that He is to us, as well as in all that He provides, whether materially, spiritually, or emotionally. And it is not sufficient to leave these only as thoughts locked up in our minds. The good thing is to manifest our thanks in singing His praises or in showing them otherwise with the manifold means at our disposal.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Under Foot

*And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.
Romans 16:20*

Here is a promise that brings an unqualified "Amen" to the lips of any believer. How often has that arch enemy of the soul, that accuser of the brethren, wrought havoc, hardship, and mischief to the lives of the redeemed. All too often we have found ourselves cowering like pusillanimous weaklings at the mere invocation of the name of Satan. He has bullied us, beaten us, and berated us in countless ways. What little success we have had in averting his relentless assaults can only be owed to our taking cover behind the invincible Name of Jesus.

In that curious text in 1 Corinthians 6:3 it is said that "we shall judge angels". It would have to refer to the fallen angels and thus would include their perverse general, Satan. So the tables shall be turned and we who have suffered so long under the attacks of that malevolent adversary, will, in the day of victory, be given the same authority as our Lord Jesus, who sublimates all "enemies under His feet" I Corinthians 15:25. And so, in that moment, the one whose evil machinations plotted for our damnation shall find himself squirming under the omniscient scrutiny of our defender, advocate, and friend. We will sit together with Christ in the high places of judgement and pronounce the sentence of eternal doom: "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." Revelation 20:10.

For now, we must continually walk circumspectly. The devil has carefully laid his traps to make us stumble in the journey. He is well aware of our vulnerabilities and so he furtively "walketh about, seeking whom he may devour". He is equally aware of his soon coming defeat and that he "hath but a short time" to wreak his mischief on the saints of God. "The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming." Psalms 37:13. The Lord Jesus will fulfill that most ancient of prophecies and shall bruise his head and we shall share in the triumph.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

A Good Word

*Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.
– Proverbs 12:25 –*

If we permit ourselves to see beyond the facades and defense mechanisms of such things as small talk and social media, we will be certain to find the depth of Bible truth about the human heart – it is heavy, very heavy. And why not? Sinful people living in a cursed world is a recipe for heartache and sorrow. While people generally try to avoid the reality and go from moment to moment searching for something to fill, numb, or distract from the nagging inward fear and hurt, “alone-times” inevitably birth the realization that happiness is transitory, and trouble, if not present or nearby, is most certainly on the horizon – it’s just a matter of time before it comes around again.

The Christian, though, holds the antidote to the heaviness caused by sin and the curse. Our shackled hearts were freed when by faith we appropriated Christ’s sacrifice. Sorrow had endured for the night, but joy came in the morning light of forgiveness and redemption. He pulled us out of the miry clay and placed our feet upon a rock and established our goings. We now host the Spirit of the Living God within our very being, and our Savior has borne our grief and carried our sorrows such that our grateful hearts now know a peace that passes understanding and a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

But heavy hearts are all around us, and we interact with them daily. They are in the office or on Zoom or Teams. They are in the restaurant, at the checkout counter, or on the street corner. They are processing our transaction at the bank, changing our oil, delivering our package, or right next door to our house. There are opportunities in our every day to give a good word of encouragement to heavy hearts. A kind compliment, a warm expression, a playful joke. These are all “good words” that have the ability to lift the heart and expose the heaviness, and possibly open further opportunity to sow the full gospel that holds the explosive power that would enable that heart find permanent resolution and gladness. Let us be on the lookout.

Lord, help us to have a spirit like yours. Shine through us and let our words to others reflect Your wonderful love for their souls. Help us regularly make hearts glad for a moment, and give us opportunity to help them become glad for eternity.

-- D. Murcek

Glory in This

But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD

Jeremiah 9:24

Self-exultation was the cause of Lucifer's fall, and self-exultation was at the root of Adam's sin, which has been passed on to all of the human race. Self-centeredness has been the source of many of the ills that plague the world. Though there have been great accomplishments throughout history, it behooves mankind to remember that without God we are nothing. The world and everything in it were made for our sustenance and fulfillment. Man, created after God's image, was the pinnacle of the creation, and though at the center of the creation, man's existence is still dependent on the Lord. In Him we live, move, and have our being; the air we breathe and the heart that beats is from God. And yet we still tend to glory in what we perceive as our own accomplishments. We need to remember that God is before all things, and by Him all things consist.

In today's text, Jeremiah was sent to God's wayward nation. Idolatry and glorying in their own accomplishments had taken Israel away from their relationship with God. Judgment and captivity were knocking on the door of the erring nation. This is the background in which the LORD inspires Jeremiah to cry out. The prophet clarifies that the focus of our glory should be that we can know and understand the LORD. Knowing and understanding that God is a perfect blend of lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness helps us to accept the things that run contrary to our natural understanding. Some people fall into the trap of trying to make God fit the mold of how they think He should be and have difficulty understanding the blending of His characteristics. Israel's national sins were destroying their very existence; God in His love would send righteous judgment their way in hope of bringing them to repentance to reestablish divine blessing on His people.

As God's adopted children through the New Birth, we should be mindful of the traps that plagued Israel. God uses us and works through us for His glory, not ours. We will never fully understand the totality of God and His ways; but God has enabled and longs for us to know Him and His ways. We can live everyday in the glory of this wonderful thought; that we know God.

J. Ekis

Happy thanksgiving

*O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.
Psalm 107:1*

Happy Thanksgiving. We say it to many when this event arrives in America once every year. The short phrase implies an imperative that the receiver experience happiness during the Thanksgiving holiday. What if, instead, we took a scriptural approach? Instead of applying it to the emotional state of a day, why not apply it to the attitude of our thanksgiving at any time? Is our thanksgiving happy, or do we almost or altogether perform it half-heartedly, either because someone made a holiday or another reminded us of our duty? Why is it that thanksgiving must often be dragged out of us, yet complaint can flow easily?

The imperative in our text is repeated four other times in the Bible exactly as it reads here, and two other times with a slight variation. All but one of these instances is in the Psalms. An expanded search would find many other variations of essentially the same command. The famous exhortation of Psalm 100 ends with essentially the same reasons seen here for giving thanks unto the Lord, plus one. The two common reasons are that He is good, and that His mercy endures forever. Should we meditate on those two reasons alone, we would not need an exhortation, nor an annual celebration, to remind us to give thanks. The logical conclusion of such rumination would make us happy to give thanks unto the Lord of lords.

Unfortunately, the human condition is often not given to such realizations. Most of Psalm 107 describes this problem. The cyclical history of the Israelite nation is rehearsed like a roller coaster, from their low points of sin, their crying unto the Lord from the resulting troubles, and God's merciful response, only to be followed by another downturn. So the psalmist oft repeats the refrain, "Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" Each refrain is followed with good reason to praise Him for His mercies.

As disciples of Christ, we have a remedy for the natural human condition. Ephesians 5:18-20 equates being filled with the Spirit to giving thanks always for all things unto God. So be filled with the Spirit, and have happy thanksgiving.

Thanks abounding

*As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:
Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught,
abounding therein with thanksgiving.
Colossians 2:6-7*

We who are Christ's received Him by simple faith in His word, which told us that He is the way, the truth, the life, and the only way to the Father in heaven. His word told us that He exchanged our sin for His righteousness (II Corinthians 5:21), and that we could not attain righteousness by our works, but only be made righteous by Him through His death and resurrection (Titus 3:5-7; Philippians 3:9-11). Our response to these and many similar promises was thanks – that this is indeed the truth and that by faith we could receive Him through His Holy Spirit (John 1:12). In today's text, the apostle Paul exhorts us with the Colossian disciples to walk in Him in the same way that we received Him as our savior and Lord – with faith and thanksgiving. One of the marks of true Christian faith is a life that responds with thanksgiving to the unspeakable gift of redemption unto eternal life. Without faith there is no thanksgiving, since faith brings into view the object of our thanks. Yet that faith is appropriated within a context of thanksgiving, since that is the operative motive of saving faith.

This understanding dissolves many arguments about justification and sanctification. A thankful faith is the common key to both. Paul makes this point clearly in Galatians 3:3 and 5:6. Thankfulness for God's salvation brings us to His justification in a similar way that thankfulness motivates our response to His continual sanctifying work in our lives. This leaves room for neither the bondage of legalism nor the shame of antinomianism. The apostle John makes this clear in his first epistle, summarizing simply: "We love him, because he first loved us" (I John 4:19). Subsequent to our text, Paul writes to the Colossians to "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly ... And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:16-17). While the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, a thankful love for the Lord will implement the wisdom of His will (Ephesians 5:17-20). May a simply thankful heart motivated by His Spirit continually cause us to bring honor to our Lord every day.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Speechless

Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.
II Corinthians 9:15:

There aren't many times that we find Paul with nothing to say. Of the New Testament writers, he is most known for his somewhat verbose literary style. Peter perhaps makes an oblique allusion to that when he said of Paul: "speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood". Yes, Paul had much to say regarding doctrinal issues of which we are all the beneficiaries these many centuries later. But the apostle, who with such eloquent, descriptive syntax gave the church some of the most profound insights into some of God's deepest mysteries, finds himself mute when attempting to describe the gift of salvation.

He had already journeyed to paradise and heard "unspeakable words" and saw things that the earthly "eye hath not seen". Those few moments in the glory land would have convinced him of the inexpressible nature of a salvation so wonderful that human words could never delineate.

Even on earth there are those rare occasions when we receive a gift of such inestimable value that we are bereft of utterance. We can only imagine that moment in heaven when our faith becomes sight and we realize for the first time what the value of that eternal gift. Perhaps then, the Lord will grant to us the language of heaven and, with the tongues of angels, we will finally fitly frame the words of thanksgiving that such an unspeakable gift deserves.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Relativism

And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.

– Mark 6:26 –

Our text is jaw-droppingly astonishing. In context, Herod has just indulged himself in the disgustingly illicit desire to ogle his stepdaughter in the presence of his advisors as she performed a sensual dance at his request. This he did in clear violation of his conscience, for he had been consulting with John the Baptist from John's prison cell. The gospel writer indicates that Herod visited John regularly and listened to the prophet, even enacting some or significant portions of the forerunner's spiritual exhortations. But now, with the requisitely relinquished inhibitions that accompany strong drink, he pledges under oath to fulfill the request of his fantastical infatuation to the half of his kingdom. And though the vixen's request for John's head is equally criminal, Herod suddenly finds a moral excuse for justifying his inward transgression and adds sin to sin by executing God's man.

When God and His Word are not considered the absolute authority, intrinsic concepts that govern human life – right and wrong, good and evil – are hopelessly marred and endlessly skewed in the morass of philosophical relativism. Herod was a willing victim of this construct. When power grips the human heart, pride begins to define (or re-define) fundamental morality. Things become right or wrong on a sliding scale. Whoever holds the power and whatever the immediate perspective become the arbiters of justice. All of this can and does have severe consequence in the every-day-lives of people. In Hitler's Germany, it led to the slaughter of six million Jews. In our text, it cost John his life, and Herod his soul.

A philosophical rebellion against the revealed Word of God began to reshape Western Civilization during the Renaissance and it is culminating today. The deification of man leaves morality in flux. The State ultimately becomes the adjudicator of the meaning of good and evil. Foundational concepts such as equality, justice, and virtue are being "re-imagined" and re-defined before our eyes as unstable souls increasingly and collectively embrace the same moral relativism that Herod personally leveraged for his expedience and to his damnation.

The people of God must stand steadfastly against this devilish assault. Let us be circumspect about the pseudo-moralistic language and messaging that pours forth from every media outlet and purports to be today's *vox populi*. Hungry souls will ultimately want to know what is good and right and true in a world that calls evil good and good evil. May God make us stalwart witnesses of the truth, that we may serve as an oasis to the casualties of mankind's collective blasphemy of the Spirit.

Wait and Seek

The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.

Lamentations 3:25

One definition of the word *contrary* is *things that are opposite in nature or character*.

Throughout the scriptures we find verses that seem to be contrary, yet their seemingly opposite truths are spiritually understood and appear compatible. *If we lose our life we will find it, when we are weak, we become strong, if we give it will be given to us, if we humble ourselves, we will be exalted*, are all examples that demonstrate contrary truths. Today's verse tells us that God is good to those that wait and also to those that seek.

A definition of *wait* is *to remain inactive or in a state of repose as until something expected happens*, while the definition of *seek* is *to go in search or quest of*. One definition indicates inaction, while the other definition implies action. Though wait and seek seem to be opposites, reading through the Bible will reveal the interplay of *wait* and *seek* and the merits of both for our faith.

Waiting on the Lord involves having faith to expect a profitable outcome sometime in the future. Waiting teaches us the discipline of allowing patience to strengthen our faith and resolve that God is faithful and true. Scripture gives many of the positive effects of waiting, such as- renewing our strength, inheriting the earth, He shall exult us, He hears our cry, and God supplying our meat in due season- to name just a few examples. If the scriptures say, *blessed are they that wait for Him*, then our restless souls may find the true comfort that comes from patiently waiting until we see the fulfillment of His promise.

Seeking involves initiative and effort on our part. It is what was needed when we came to God for His forgiveness and salvation, and it is also what is needed for us to continually draw closer to Him. Seeking also develops patience, because we do not immediately find that for which we are seeking. Diligent seeking with heart and soul will serve us well as we endeavor to follow the Savior. Seeking strength, knowledge, God's kingdom, and the Lord Himself, helps us to grow stronger in our daily walk.

Though they may seem to be opposites, we can profit from both waiting and seeking in our walk today. It takes some effort on our part, but each will help us to draw closer to our Savior.

J. Ekis