

Dealing with Demands

But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed. (Luke 5:15,16)

It was inevitable that the Lord Jesus would eventually draw a crowd. Though His teachings alienated the hypocritical religious leaders, His words of hope and miraculous works caught the attention of the multitudes. The people who sought Him were from every walk of life- young and old, male and female, rich and poor- longing for relief from their circumstances. In today's chapter, our Lord displayed His power over nature in providing the amazing draught of fish and restoring a hopeless leper to new life. He charged people to tell no one of what they had witnessed, but ultimately the word of His supernatural works was trumpeted abroad. Some came to see Him out of curiosity; while most came to lay their burdens at His feet. Jesus could have easily filled every day with His healing ministry. Yet with the demand being so great and since He alone could satisfy the people's needs, we find our Lord retreating to the wilderness to pray. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost, but in so doing He longed to spend time the time He knew He needed in His Father's presence. The solitude of the wilderness provided a location where the distractions of this life could be blocked out, and He could spend uninterrupted time in sweet communion with His Father. This time of prayer was so important to our Lord that He would leave the demands of life to spend time in God's presence. The sacrifice He made by leaving heaven probably caused a deep burning within for that heavenly fellowship. After a season of prayer, He would continue His earthly mission.

Every stage of life has its demands for each of us. Some demands may seem trivial or insignificant, while others are most pertinent. As believers we want our life to have some eternal influence. Balancing occupation, family, and church ministries is not always easy; and often other external demands arise that need our attention. Our Lord Jesus' example when the demands of life pressed upon Him is the example we should follow. Even when He could continually do good for the needy people that surrounded him, He took time to retreat to the wilderness and meet with His Father. These times of solace provided the necessary recharging to meet the demands placed upon Him. Like Jesus, we also must find our wilderness to have uninterrupted time in God's presence where His divine fellowship settles our souls and renews our focus on His will for our lives.

Today, find your wilderness for your vital spiritual respite and experience unbroken fellowship with our Heavenly Father. ~J. Ekis

Calves of the lips

Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.

Hosea 14:2

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

Hebrews 13:15

In his final plea for Israel to turn to the LORD, Hosea gave them these detailed instructions for repentance. He did not exhort them to simply bring sacrifices to the LORD, for they had done so in their past, yet those sacrifices were rejected. They were rejected because they were offered with wrong motives. In many cases they were offered in addition to similar sacrifices, like calves, that were offered to idols. In other cases they were offered in ignorance, while alternately offering atrocious human sacrifices to idols like Molech and Baal. To turn to the LORD would require much more than to throw another calf to Him. They were exhorted here to “take ... words” of repentance that reflect an inward attitude of contrition, recognizing their own iniquity and pleading for gracious forgiveness. King David had understood this requirement, when he penned, “For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” (Psalm 51.16-17). So Hosea’s instruction implies first the needed inward penitence, which then would be evidenced by the words of their lips, in place of just another calf, supplying praise for God’s grace.

The writer to the Hebrews seems to echo Hosea’s theme in our second text, substituting for Hosea’s calves the sacrifice of praise as the fruit of our lips. In the context, as he expressly exhorts New Testament believers to identify with the eternal offering of Jesus Christ as our only hope of salvation, we ought to reflect with our own lips praise and thanksgiving to God as the fruit of our understanding of His forgiveness. And, as His sacrifice and resurrection are continually effectual forever, our thankful response should also be continual.

In current context, we should also observe this important order. It is not works of righteousness that we have done, or do, that provide “another calf” to please God. It is the heart, which is naked and open before Him, that matters. Doing more “religious things”, whether for justification or sanctification, is of no value if our hearts are not contrite over sin or thankful for grace. Thus, most epistles first focus on understanding the power of God’s gracious forgiveness, then follow with exhortations to the understanding and thankful heart about how we should then gratefully live.

Therefore, before moving on from the emphasis of the past week, let us resolve to apply such exhortations: “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Colossians 3:15).

Who Am I?

Ruth 2:10: Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?

Ruth marveled that she, in her lowly estate, should be shown such advantages in the fields of Boaz. To her this was an unimaginable kindness bestowed upon her from a man that ought to have debarred her from his property; she, being an alien, having no right to glean from his fields. And this generosity was but a prelude to what was yet to come in the bestowal of honors and privileges she was to receive at the hand of her munificent benefactor. Here we see a humble, impoverished, outcast, Moabite widow who, what some might say, foolishly cast her lot in with her Israeli mother-in-law, cleaving to Naomi's people and God without any prospects other than a life of hard labor and desolation.

As one reads on, the account will depict a familiar motif in the sacred scriptures namely, as John Bunyan once coined the phrase, "*Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*". Ruth little realized when she made her decision of faith that it would be rewarded with such benefactions; from gleaning the remains in the fields with the indigents to owning the same fields by virtue of her marriage to Boaz, from widowhood and childlessness to honorable remarriage and the prospects of a royal progeny.

God's grace is a wondrous thing indeed. The text affords us a profound illustration of the miraculous reversal of fortunes owed to the grace of a man that saw virtue in the faith of a despised outcast. It is of little wonder that Ruth should ask, "Why have I found grace in thine eyes?" And what hope it affords us who have similarly marveled that the God of heaven should lift our impoverished souls and make us sit down in heavenly places with Christ.

In our day and age we are beset by those who feel entitled to advantages simply by being born. Let us not fall prey to this egocentric mindset which, like the horseleach's daughters, is always demanding "give, give". Instead follow the humble course that Ruth took and bow with grateful heart before your near kinsman redeemer, wondering how such grace could be shown to a stranger such as I.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

More Than You Think

How many are my iniquities and sins? Make me to know my transgression and my sin.

Job 13:23

Self-examination is a good way of preserving our physical health. At home before going to the doctor, we can routinely check blood pressure, heart rate and oxygen levels to detect possible heart issues. We can check ourselves for possible signs of skin cancer and monitor any mysterious lumps appearing on our body. Of course, yearly wellness checks are necessary for our doctor to chart any changes in our medical condition, but early detection starts the process for correcting medical ailments.

Likewise, conviction of sin and understanding the consequences of that sin is one of the main tenets that brings a person to Jesus Christ for salvation. Though born innocent, all mankind inherits a sinful nature due to Adam's transgression and will manifest that sinful nature early in life. Pride, stubbornness, selfishness, greed and many other unbecoming qualities are displayed at a very young age. A person can be aware of their sinful behavior and may attempt to keep it in check, only to realize that the greater challenge lies in the inward sins of the heart and mind, which are even more deeply rooted. Jeremiah 17:9 records that *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?* Sin is so ingrained in the heart that often a person may be ignorant of their violations of God's holy laws. *Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Psalm 19:12.* We have a beautiful promise from the Lord, which is *if we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness 1John 1:9.* But at the end of the day, who of us has kept an accurate account of all the sins they have committed? It could be alarming and even discouraging to realize the total daily count of our sins. It is only when we are convicted by the Holy Spirit and recognize the depth of our depravity that we seek the remedy only God can provide. In the Psalm 32, David pours out his heart in confession and seems to recognize depth of his sin. He records that the LORD forgave not only superficial sin but also the iniquity of his sin.

In today's verse, Job wants to know not merely in general what his sin was, he wants to know any secret sin and how many were his transgressions. He longed for a thorough cleansing and so should we. When we realize the severity of our sins, and the unfathomable love of Christ and the sacrifice He made to produce our forgiveness, our hearts and lives should overflow with gratitude. The thought of God removing our transgression as far as the east is from the west should be the root of our joy. May we walk with that thought throughout this day. J. Ekis

For good – still true

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

There are times in our life experience when we are challenged to understand how this promise could be accomplished. We know what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that nothing bad will ever happen to us. It does mean that God will ultimately work whatever happens into His sovereign plan, and His sovereign plan is good by definition, since He is God. So we can know that what this verse says is true, by faith in the sovereign, holy, true, loving, and good God who called us to Himself.

However, it doesn't say that we will necessarily understand how God will do this. Our faith must simply latch on to this promise and wait for Him to accomplish His purpose in His time and in His way. We can look at our circumstance, or another circumstance about which we pray, and compare it to principles and precepts in scripture that tell us generally what is the perfect will of God. For example, since the scripture commands children to obey their parents, we know that is His will. So we can pray that God will bring that to pass, knowing it is right. Yet our children do not always obey, since there is another part of the equation – the human will. We know that it is generally good for people to be healthy, and we can pray for someone to be healed. Yet we also live in a cursed world, where people also get sick and will eventually die from some cause – another part of the equation. In fact, this promise is surrounded by a context of a creation groaning to be released from the curse, of not knowing what we should pray for, and of things of this life that would try to separate us from the love of God.

Thus, when we pray for things that we know are right and good, and yet it seems that each prayer uttered is answered opposite our desire, we could be tempted to think that this promise is invalid, or worse, that we have done something to invalidate it. This can also be accentuated by accounts of those who saw everything work out in the end. But there is only one condition here, that we are His called ones who love Him. Therefore, we can view this context and see that when our condition is groaning, or all seems against us, and we don't even know if we're praying right, that we can rest in our sovereign Lord and wait, maybe until the eternal other side, for His good work to be complete. "But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." He is all we need.

The Desire of All Nations

And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.— Haggai 2:7

We are all undoubtedly familiar with the text-book definition of “nation.” A nation is a large body of people united by common descent, history, culture, or language, inhabiting a particular territory. To this day, the family and the nation-state remain the fundamental building blocks of world order (which building blocks, incidentally, have been under an escalating assault in our generation by powerful and devilish global forces). The book of Genesis offers us a divine explanation of the birth as well as the purpose of nations.

Genesis 10:32 tells us that after the Flood of Noah’s day, the nations found their origin in the bloodlines of Shem, Ham, and Japheth. We are further informed in Genesis 11 that in the days of Nimrod, a descendent of Ham, despite the familial divisions, mankind was still of a singular language. Due to man’s rebellion at Babel, God added to the merely genealogical distinctions of nations, cementing those divisions linguistically as well as geographically. God’s purpose was one of mercy (Genesis 11:6). The disunion amongst the nations is meant to restrain man from amalgamating in Satanically inspired rebellion against his Creator which would hasten the cataclysmic and decimating wrath of the Almighty. The nations are thus God’s creation, serving to His ultimate purpose for mankind.

Despite the national divisions throughout the millennia, each and every nation, made up of children of Adam, craves the same elusive goals – peace and prosperity. Why are these goals elusive? Because they cannot be obtained in a fallen world. Sin and the curse dictate that in reaching for these ends, nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. Thus, every nation remains hopelessly imprisoned in a never-ending cyclic pursuit due to the sinful heart of man.

Yet there is coming a day when the Desire of all Nations shall come. He came once already – in the prophesied yet obscure location of Bethlehem of Judea. He was greeted by Wise Men from a distant people, but God’s own nation rejected Him. He is now reaching out to every individual of every nation to assemble to Himself a glorious Bride. When the nations finally blaspheme the work of His Spirit, uniting again in Babel-like rebellion against Heaven, He will shake all nations, destroying His enemies, and ushering in the dawn of a new and eternal Creation. Only at that time will they beat their swords into plowshares, and nation will no longer lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore.

Come, Desire of Nations, come! -- D. Murcek

Unheard of Glory

1 Kings 10:6-7: And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard.

We have a complete revelation from God; that is to say we have everything that God has deigned to reveal to us. Theologians speak of the plenary, inspired word of God, but no one would think for a moment that the Bible reveals all of the mysteries of the kingdom to come. Paul was an eyewitness of the glory realm and he assures us that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” Like the apostle “we see through a glass darkly”.

The faith of every child of God is predicated on a hope of an unseen perfect place. The curse has left an indelible scar on what must be described as a world of frustrated potentiality. All of creation is groaning for its quintessence-its final deliverance from the inhibiting powers of death. All things here and for now fall short of its intended glory whether it be the dying embers of a shooting star or the fading, falling pedals of a delicate rose: beauty submits to deformity. What might have been succumbs to the harsh realities of what inevitably must be.

The queen of the south beheld a kingdom that had reached its maximum potential, at least as far as can be accomplished in this temporal state. She, like Job, had heard “by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth”. What innumerable marvels await our curious eyes when at last we arrive at that predestined terminus and enter that city “whose builder and maker is God” and behold the exquisite spectacles that no earthly evangelist could begin to describe. Oh! the half has not been told.

Have a blessed day,

Pastor

Little faith

And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

Matthew 8:26

There are three instances recorded in Matthew's gospel where He refers to His disciples as "ye of little faith." In our text, it is when the storm on the sea of Galilee had them convinced that they were about to die. While the wind was howling and the waves poured water into the ship, Jesus had been asleep. When they desperately awoke Him, and requested "Lord, save us," His response reflects a vast difference between His faith and theirs. While He had humbled Himself to be made in the likeness of men, as a man without sin He exhibited perfect faith in the love of the Father, which casts out fear (1 John 4:18). His description of their faith answers His own rhetorical question – they were fearful because their faith was little, especially in comparison to His perfect confidence that His Father was in control of present circumstances. They did have some faith, enough to ask Him to save them, yet it was little.

Before this, in the Sermon on the Mount, He applied the description to those who would be anxious about daily necessities (Matthew 6:30). His exhortation to them was to look to the birds and the flowers of the field, for examples of the loving care of the heavenly Father to feed and clothe His creation, and to rest in the fact that they were much better than the birds, in the Father's estimation. Thus, to worry about such necessities is to exhibit little faith. He spoke this again in comparison to His own, having not long before this endured forty days of testing and temptation, including hunger, in the wilderness, and yet yielded not to the tempter but maintained faith in the Father's loving provision. Finally, this point is later accentuated to the twelve, when the disciples' preoccupation with the need for food distracted them from understanding the meaning of the metaphor in His teaching about the doctrine of the scribes and Pharisees, leading to the third application of this same descriptive expression (Matthew 16:8).

How often can the negative effects of our little faith keep us from the peace and confidence, or even understanding, that should belong to the children of the King! So many of this world's mundane activities and necessities can cloud the lens of faith, while the larger storms that inevitably come to each life would dare to further diminish our confidence in Him. In such times of testing or trial, let us remember these examples and admonitions, and turn the eyes and ears of our faith unto their author and finisher (Hebrews 12:2), who calls us, "which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3), to press in the Spirit toward His example of perfect faith, and to rest, knowing that He is in control of all.

Unto You

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. – Luke 2:11

The text is so familiar to us that we are apt to forget its context and import. The angelic message of good will toward men began with the glad news not only that Christ the Lord had arrived, but that He had done so in saving garb. A Savior. And not just a Savior, but a Savior for “you”, the “shepherds”, simultaneous symbols of Jehovah’s gentle care for His people (Psalm 23:1; 80:1) and the outcast, crude representatives of the masses of the nation (Isa. 56:11). What must have raced through the minds and hearts of these lowly local nomads, these people of plain and simple life and experience? Unto – me? A Savior for even me? Yes, good herdsman. Even you.

What lessons can we glean from so bare a narrative? What thoughts can we take from such an unobtrusive account? Let us meditate herein but a few moments...

Unto you. The Savior and the salvation He embodies is quite personal. He is for all mankind, yes. But He is just as truly, if not even more so, for each individual who will humble themselves to receive Him. Jesus is not just a Savior – come to provide a redemption ordained from the foundation of the world. Nor is He merely the Savior, as sure as such an exclusive title belongs to none other but Him alone. Yet again, He is not only our Savior, even though His salvation was to the Jew first, then also to the Gentile. But in the most impactful sense, He is MY Savior – come to live a life I could not live, to pay a debt that only I owed, to suffer a torment that should have been mine for eternity, and to raise me to newness of life and being.

Unto – Me, with all my sin and shame? Every one of my ill-spoken and idle words, whether unconsciously uttered or purposely spewed in vile rebellion. Each and every one of my vile thoughts – entertained within the chambers of my imagery as if I sat upon the throne of the universe and was accountable to none but me in my fabricated godhood. Every one of my wrong and vile deeds, whether born from impious intent or illicit motive, executed time and again throughout the course of my self-centered and self-serving pilgrimage. Unto me. Even me? How can it be?

Unto you. As much as He came for me, He came for you. He came for your friends, and He came for your enemies. No matter who you are, no matter what you have done, if you are a member of Adam’s race, He came for and unto you. He is able and willing (and we confidently say, even delights) to save unto the uttermost them that will come to God by Him.

If He came for me and for you, let us, like the shepherds go again today to see this great salvific sight of God manifest in the flesh, made to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Bless His Name! -- D. Murcek

You're in the Will!

Hebrews 9:15: And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

When Antony delivered the panegyric at Caesar's funeral, he deftly turned the hearts of the citizens who, at first, held with the perfidious conspirators that put their leader to death. But then the sentiments were abruptly turned when Antony announced that Caesar had left his inheritance to them.

"Here is the will, and under Caesar's seal
To every Roman citizen he gives—
To every several man—seventy-five drachmas.
Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,
His private arbors and new-planted orchards,
On this side Tiber. He hath left them you
And to your heirs forever—common pleasures,
To walk abroad and recreate yourselves."

The Lord's Last Will and "New" Testament

In Luke 19:14, Jesus puts forth a parable describing the ultimate rejection of his own people towards Him: "But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us". Like Caesar, Christ was betrayed by those who ought to have been His most ardent devotees. Upon His death and resurrection the New Testament was activated. The laws of inheritance have immutably demanded: "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth" Hebrews 9:16-17.

We can only marvel at the grace of God that would take us, who caused Christ's death, and write us into the will; thus making us joint-heirs with His only begotten Son. Shakespeare thus framed the expectant desires of the Roman citizens that attended Caesar's funeral: "Read the will; we'll hear it, Antony; You shall read us the will, Caesar's will." With even greater fervency the believer longs to hear the reading of the Last Will and New Testament of their Savior. "Read the Word" we might be heard to say, "You shall read us the will". For herein lies the copious promises of eternal inheritance that have been stored up for us since the ascension of the Lord Jesus. The ears of all heirs tingle at the recitation of the benefactions imparted to those unworthy of the least of such mercies. No Death! No Sorrows! No Crying! No Pain! All Things New! Mansions! Glorified Bodies! Sumptuous Feasts! Glorious Music! And above all living in the presence of the Everlasting Father who bestowed such love upon us that we should be called the Sons and Daughters of God! Enjoy your inheritance.

Have a blessed day,

Pastor

Future Payment

But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

Luke 14:13,14

Once we come to the light and trust the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation, we are then to follow Him and be lights in a dark world. He has commissioned us to be His witnesses and carry the light of the Gospel to those with whom we come in contact. Being a witness goes beyond just saying words, it is also doing good deeds so others can see Christ in us. Sometimes our efforts are received with gratitude, but other times no thanks are given. While expressed gratitude can be encouraging, ingratitude can cause someone to be discouraged. We must remember that the good deeds done in the name of Jesus should be done as an act of love for Him. His welcoming words of “well done” will far outweigh any earthly gratitude or praise that we receive.

In today's text, Jesus teaches that we should not forget to make sacrifices for people who cannot reciprocate the good deed extended toward them. What is done in the name of Jesus should not be done for the praise and thanks of men, but should be done in gratitude for what God has done for us. In eternity God will recompense for all that is done for His cause here on earth. He sees all acts of love done in His name, whether they be extreme sacrifices or seemingly insignificant charitable acts. God intently watched as Stephen laid down his life for the advancement of the gospel just as he watched when a certain poor widow cast her two mites into the treasury. Both of these would later be recompensed by the Lord who is always aware of His children's good deeds. Though Paul spent much of his time and love on the Corinthian people, he felt a level of ingratitude from them. He expresses it in 2 Corinthians 12:15 *And I will gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.* The Apostle would later make the ultimate sacrifice by dying a martyr's death, but once he set foot on heaven's shore, Paul would receive his eternal reward from the One he served.

We could never repay the Lord for what he has done for us, but we will never regret gratefully offering our life back to Him. Our heavenly Father is a God of detail. If He knows the number of hairs on our head and collects our tears in a bottle, He certainly knows all that we do in His name. For now, let us serve Him and patiently wait for that day of recompense - J. Ekis

Come to worship Him

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

Matthew 2:1-2

The mystery of the Magi is multifaceted. From where in the east did they actually come? How far had they traveled, and how long did it take? What exactly were their positions or ranks, or expertise? How did they identify the star, how did they know it was the sign of the birth of a king, and how did they determine that it was the king of the Jews? Many commentators and theorists have spent much time and copious pages conjecturing on the subject, yet we remain with no more certain answers than when they began. However, a significant mystery must be that, with whatever they knew about this one that they had set out to find, they understood that he was not just another earthly king. He was a king to be worshipped. In fact, their main purpose in coming was to worship Him.

When they were finally led by the resumption of the star to the place where He was, Matthew provides the details of their accomplishment: "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11). We must note, along with understanding the meaning of the Greek word for worship, that they *fell down* to do so. On such occasion, the state of the body must come to match the attitude of the heart. Thus they indicated how infinitely greater than themselves they esteemed this young child. Wherever and however they received the revelation, it was sufficient to affect them to this extent. Note also that it was only after their worship that they deemed it necessary to present their treasures of adoration.

So what will we learn from these men? Have we followed, or will we follow, their example to allow the truth of His person to so affect us that we will come to worship Him? Surely we have not traveled as far as they did. And it is quite possible that the revelation provided to us in His word in both testaments makes us much more without excuse. We hop into our vehicles, make a relatively brief trip to the meeting place, open our easily obtained Bibles, and then what? Do we worship ... as they did? Do at least our hearts bow before His majesty as we consider the incarnate one, now risen to the right hand of the Father, and truly worship Him, so that even when we offer our gifts, they come from hearts humbled by awe and gratitude? As we consider how He humbled Himself to become what was needed to save us, may that mind be also in us (Philippians 2:5-11), so that we may also come to worship Him in spirit and in truth, and reflect the attitude of the worshippers in heaven: Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4:11).

Unto Him

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen. – Jude 24-25

Last week I wrote about the astounding depth of the glad Christmas evangel, “Unto you is born this day...a Saviour...” This week in my daily Bible reading, I came to meditate a bit on Jude’s stunning doxology (our text for today), which got me musing about the wonderful transformation of the heart that happens “unto us” when we find Christ – and how our hearts and minds and lives and purpose become so radically transformed as to be all “unto Him”. It is no surprise when we think about what He reveals to us in our conversion and sanctification – but it will nonetheless leave us awestruck when we permit ourselves to drink in the riches of His kindness toward us. Let us attempt to do so just for a moment...

Unto Him Who is able to keep you from falling. We may stumble, but we cannot fall. He is holding us up. Indeed, He makes us stand, and He keeps us standing. It is impossible for a child of the living God to fall from grace. There is no losing of one’s salvation if it is the genuine work of the Holy Ghost. He grants it to us by our repentance and faith, and He preserves it in us by His power and might. What a comfort to know that our standing is sure.

Unto Him Who will present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. This is so remarkable it leaves us speechless. On that day when we stand to give account of our lives to Him with Whom we have to do, He will be our benevolent Friend. Because of Christ, we will be faultless. Not sinless but rather bearing no blame for our selfish lives. The truth can and must be known before the throne of eternal Holiness, but a guilty verdict will not be found because of the nail scars in the hands of our Advocate Who stands beside us. Faultless before Him! How can it be? But it WILL be. And it will be exuberantly so – on our part, and on His – that we enter into the joy of our Lord.

Unto the only wise God our Saviour who is both glorious and majestic. How beautiful His Person and marvelously august His presence. Here we see but glimpses of His majestic glory – in a newborn babe, in a brilliant sunrise, in a dazzling sunset, in His mighty works of creation and the still, small nature of His movements in our lives. But there – before Him – we will behold the fullness of His magnificence without limitation and without end.

Unto Him whose power and dominion are both now and forever. Everything in every corner of the universe is His. He possesses both might and right to disarticulate the heavens and the earth at His pleasure and to create a new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. And He has promised He will do just that. Yet how humbling to think that He has raised us to be part of that redemptive plan and to dwell in that kingdom for ages upon ages to come.

The Babe born in Bethlehem – born unto us – has redeemed us unto Him. All this, that unto Him may be the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen. — D. Murcek

Immanuel-God With Us

Hebrews 2:14: Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

There was ample reason for great rejoicing that night of nights, for there, lowly lying, was the One and Only God-Man. He could have chosen a more phantasmal form with which to accomplish His purpose, but it behoved him to be made like unto His brethren and to experience life in every facet so as to defeat the challenges of human temptation in all of its malignant variants. This concept is one of the most exhilarating doctrines in Christology and is the cause of much jubilation amongst the redeemed.

The heretical Gnostics of the first centuries of Christianity could not expand their narrow minds to comprehend the divine paradox of the immortal God condescending to human mortality. To these high-minded skeptics, flesh itself was evil and prevented the spirit from connecting with God entirely. And so they went to work constructing elaborate aberrations to explain away the glories of Christ's incarnation.

The incarnation puts to rest the argument that God doesn't know what mankind has to endure in the ways of the curse, disease, and death. He has experienced life in all of its nuances or as the apostle wrote "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted". And Isaiah offered this consolation as well "In all their affliction he was afflicted".

Now the Lord of creation could have made His entry in a fully matured physical frame. He could have averted the humiliation of gestation and the passing through the normal matrix of human existence via the virgin's womb. But if He was to conquer the power of death, He must enter and exit the conflict in the same manner as those He came to save. Let us note the volitional language of the text asserting the emphatic nature of our Near Kinsman Redeemer who "also himself likewise took part". No coercion, no external pressure pressed Him into that decision. It was His choice to come into the world and to likewise leave the world as He did. The seraphs of heaven remain stupefied by the magnanimous, self-abasing act of His descending beneath their realm of glory all to seek and to save that which was lost.

At this holy time of the year, let us not lose sight of the grand truth that God came to be as us and to be with us.

Have a blessed day,

Pastor

A False Sense of Security

*The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped:
therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.*

Psalms 28:7

Due to the atmosphere of our current world there is a heightened awareness regarding security. Half a century ago banks were likely the only buildings to have some type of security system. Today, most schools, hospitals, office buildings, parking lots and even many homes have surveillance cameras operating twenty-four hours a day. Our homes have smoke, fire, and carbon monoxide detectors to give advance warnings of danger. All of these devices can certainly be a help, but are they really the source of true security?

Today's verse is a reminder of the true source of safety. Any man-made device and even our human faculties can be faulty, and most of us can cite some case where a safety device failed. Cars are certainly made to be safer today than they were years ago, yet car-related injuries and fatalities are a common occurrence. The scriptures give us examples of individuals who took precautions to ensure their safety, but they were truly relying on the LORD for help and safety. David took five stones and a sling into the valley to face the warrior giant Goliath, but he stated in the Psalms that he would fear no evil, because God was with him. After Gideon's army was reduced to three hundred men, he and his men shouted "the sword of the LORD and of Gideon" as they attacked. Gideon definitely understood that their swords were secondary to the Sword of the LORD. When Zerah the Ethiopian came against Asa with an immense army, Asa cried unto the LORD his God saying, *LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God, for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude.* The victorious outcome for Asa was not because of a well-trained army, but rather their security rested in God's intervention. When reading the Biblical history of the nation Israel, it becomes apparent when their enemies came against them, the Lord Jehovah was their security.

As children of God, we have been set free from Satan's clutches, but he still tries to assault us with fears. Fear can not only negatively impact us mentally, but it can also hinder us from effectively serving the Lord. The safest place for us is to be in the will of God. We should take advantage of all the safety resources that are available, while we trust that our real security is the Lord.