

Reflection

May 28, 2014

“Bad and Loved”

Silent -Thank You Lord

“Good afternoon to each and every one of you.

Lord may these words bring honor and praise to you and serve your people in some way.
Amen”

Well, here I am.

A second sermon.

And so quickly after my first sermon a few weeks ago.

And like last time, I’ll start with a quote from Winnie-the Pooh:

“I’m not lost for I know where I am. But however, where I am may be lost.”

— *A.A. Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh*

Yes, that was Pooh Bear.

In my last talk I spoke of three truths:

- God is a God of the living...
- Our relationship with God is everlasting, and
- God would have us experience joy to the greatest extent possible.

I also gave some advice. Advice I struggle to follow myself. Today is less advice and more reflection or observation...

Last time three truths, today only two - both of which I also struggle with:

- In and of myself I am more sinful than I ever dared to believe.
- In Christ I am more loved than I ever dared to hope.

I’ll read those again, as these are hard to get your head around, at least for me...

- In and of myself, I am more sinful than I ever dared to believe.
- In Christ, I am more loved than I ever dared to hope.

These truths are as elaborated by a European missionary, Stephen Beck, in his book:

smart builder – A God-centered Spirituality in a Me-centered World

I had the distinct pleasure of meeting Mr. Beck a couple of years ago at a spiritual retreat which he headlined. More than headlined really, nearly the whole show. At this particular retreat, the formula is for a single speaker to share insights for the better part of four days. Canned talks don't really work. Retreaters get to see the whole person, or at least a lot of the person. And through reflection (and a little bass fishing on the lake) the retreaters get a deeper view of themselves. This retreat takes place in a bucolic place called Lake Champion in upstate New York.

This September I will, God Willing, be attending again for the 23rd time. I've attended every year since 1991 except for 2013 in which the retreat was cancelled due to the 9/11 attack. That sinful act is a segway into my reflections today.

As you've heard already, I'll be using the politically incorrect "Sinful" or "Sin" word. Not a favorite word for any of us. But, let's face it, however we slice it, we're not perfect. Surly we can agree on that. And we might even agree that in large part, we humans are...well, "jerks."

This is a matter of degree, we say. Some of us are significantly less "jerky" than others – say Mother Teresa.

But is the degree that significant in eternal terms? And do we individually underestimate just how "jerky" we are?

In and of myself, AM I more sinful than I ever dared to believe? Are the things we don't do, our omissions, enough to make us "jerks." For most of us isn't it the things we don't do rather than the things we do that are most indicting?

How can we possibly be more loved than we ever dared to hope?

Let's look at the words of wisdom in our scripture lesson for today:

Again reading from **John 16:16-24**
New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Sorrow Will Turn into Joy

¹⁶ “A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me.”¹⁷ Then some of his disciples said to one another, “What does he mean by saying to us, ‘A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and ‘Because I am going to the Father’?”¹⁸ They said, “What does he mean by this ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.”

¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Are you discussing among yourselves what I meant when I said, ‘A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’?”²⁰ Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.²¹ When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world.²² So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.²³ On that day you will ask nothing of me.^[a] Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.^[b]²⁴ ***Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.***

This last sentence is key. (Read again)

Here Jesus is talking about a new relationship between a believer and God. At that time and place, the believer largely approached God through priests or Godley intermediaries. After Jesus’s resurrection, his sacrifice, his Hover Vacuum of sin for all time, a believer, any believer, even unbelievers, could approach God directly. A new day had dawned and now all believers became priest in a fashion, talking with and listening to God personally and directly. We today, this very day, can approach God directly, not because of our own merit (because we are, or at least at times, can be “jerks”), but because Jesus changed the rules, banishing all but two (love God and your neighbor as yourself) and made us, in all our imperfection, acceptable to God.

And not just acceptable, but loved, loved inexplicably, beyond reason, more than we ever dared to hope.

It is this hope that can encourage us not to be bound by our sinful ways. Jesus modeled and taught through his parables the great Methodist entreat: “Do all the good you can.” And the apostle James in the book of James, made it clear, “Faith without works is no faith at all.”

Enjoy the good doing. Know you are not just, “OK”, acceptable, tolerated, but more loved than you ever dared to hope.

“Ask and you will receive, so that your Joy may be complete.”

Our two truths again:

- In and of myself I am more sinful than I ever dared to believe.
- In Christ I am more loved than I ever dared to hope.

And closing with another thought from Pooh:

“If ever there is tomorrow when we're not together... there is something you must always remember. You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think. But the most important thing is, even if we're apart... I'll always be with you.” — A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*

Thanks be to the Lord, Amen.