

Our Readings

Our readings today help us focus on ourselves. When we do, what do we see? So often selfishness. But what do we see in Christ? Selflessness and a desire to serve us by dying as our Savior. Finally, Lord willing, we see everyone else as ones who need us to love them as much as Jesus does.

OLD TESTAMENT: Hosea 5:15-6:3 *The people were guilty of selfish repentance, saying the right words, but their hearts didn't want to repent. Listen to the Lord plead with us to turn to him in true repentance.*

Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me." "Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth."

THE PSALM OF THE DAY: Read Psalms 42 and 43

EPISTLE READING: Romans 8:1-10 *We find one of the sweetest passages in the Bible as God declares there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. In fact, we are free to live for him.*

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

GOSPEL: Matthew 20:17-28 *Through a mother's request, Jesus shows what it means to be a part of his kingdom, you serve instead of being served, just like Jesus.*

Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The Sermon

Matthew 20:17-28

Rev. Matthew C. Rauh

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP? A SLAVE JUST LIKE JESUS?

The first grade teacher asks her students what they want to be when they grow up. One student eagerly says, "I want to be a fireman." Another says, "I want to be a policeman." Another says, "I want to be just like my mommy." But let's just say that your first grader stood up and said, "When I grow up, I want to be a slave." You would think there was something terribly wrong with that kid.

But isn't that exactly what Jesus tells us to do today? ***"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your SLAVE."*** This isn't a mistranslation or loose interpretation. The word here literally means "to tie or bind someone" and make him subject to someone above him. At first, the word "slavery" conjures up in our minds all sorts of bad thoughts: whips, chains, beatings, being sold on an auction block, etc. We don't like the word. We fought a bloody war to end it. But when we reflect on the life and work of Jesus Christ, then this word doesn't sound so bad after all. In fact it sounds like something we want to do. We pray the Holy Spirit works in our hearts so we become slaves like Jesus. Jesus is praised because he became a slave to us, and that is our highest calling as well, to be slaves to him and others.

I. Jesus became a slave to us.

Jesus just predicted in our text what would happen to him in the upcoming days. He is going to be betrayed to church leaders who hate his guts, condemned to death, handed over to Gentile Romans to be mocked, flogged, and crucified, and to rise again from the dead on the third day.

Obviously something is coming to a climax. So James and John asked their mother to do something for them. ***“Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”*** To sit at someone’s right or left means honor. Go to a wedding reception. They always seat the wedding party at a special table with the maid of honor and best man at the right and left of them. They always get served first where the rest of us have to just sit there and wait our turn. James and John wanted to sit at the head table in heaven, so they asked mom to make the request. What mother wouldn’t want that?

“When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.” The disciples were friends. They worked together. But now a spirit of competition has erupted among them. Instead of serving Christ and his kingdom, they were more interested in serving themselves.

Sinful man can commit all sorts of sin from idolatry to adultery to coveting. But in 57 years of life and 29 years in the ministry, I am convinced that all sin begins with a selfish attitude in the heart. Why does a husband and wife, or brothers, fight? Because someone wants his way. Why does a thief steal? To get what he wants. Why does a person commit adultery? To satisfy a desire even if it will ruin a marriage. Why does a person covet? Because he wants more. Why do children fight over a toy? Why do we look out the window and see the neighbor’s new car and feel jealous? This is normal in a sinful world.

But it is completely opposite in the kingdom of God. ***“Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many.’”*** Why do we consider Jesus great? Is it because he is the Lord of the universe and sits at the right hand of God? Is it because of the crown on his head? Is it because he is all-powerful?

Jesus tells us why. ***“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”*** We don’t praise a murderer when he is executed or child when he is spanked. We do not consider it an honor to be spit upon or whipped or called names. Yet, that is exactly what makes Jesus great. I mean, if all we had was the crown on Christ’s head and no cross, we wouldn’t praise him. We’d be afraid of him like Adam and Eve when they hid in the Garden. We would hate him because he tells us to do things we don’t want to do. We’d despise him because he didn’t use his power to remove grandma’s cancer.

But we don’t worship him because of the crown on his head but for the nail wounds in his hands. We don’t praise him for ascending to the throne in heaven but for being raised up on the cross. We praise him because he came solely to serve us

and to be obedient to death, even death on a cross. We praise him because he did this for you and for me.

This means we can praise him in every situation. We praise him when he restores health or gives extra money. But if God says “No,” and he doesn’t remove the cancer or we never have enough money, we still praise him because he has given us something so much better. He gives us treasure no moth or rust can destroy. He gives us in a place in his holy and perfect heaven where we will never need to pray for healing again. Jesus humiliated himself for us and came to serve us. That’s what makes him great. This is why we praise him.

II. We want to be slaves just like Jesus.

By going to the cross he has saved us from sin and death and hell. But we get to enjoy a taste of that life now. Our goals change. Our desires change. As Jesus explained to Nicodemus, when the Spirit brings us to faith in Jesus, we are born again. A new man is born in us and now the believer is asked the question, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” And that new man says, “A slave just like Jesus.”

It is exactly this kind of career choice Paul describes for us in Galatians 5, ***“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*** That’s one way we could go. Or, knowing that Jesus died for our sins and has freed us from the world, we could choose another path. ***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”*** So, children of God, what do you want to be when you grow? Which path do you want to follow?

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.” Greatness in God’s kingdom isn’t measured by how high you go but on how low you are willing to go. It isn’t measured by how many trophies or certificates you have. It is measured by how many times you did the laundry and no one said thank you. The trademark of every Christian is a servant mentality just like Jesus. Paul was moved by God to first state in Ephesians 5, ***“Submit to one another out of reverence of Christ.”*** The key here is the phrase, “. . . out of reverence for Christ.” Every problem in every relationship starts with the heart. Instead of a 12 step program or list of dos and don’ts to make things better, we first need to assess one’s relationship with God in heaven. If you baked me a wonderful chocolate cake, the first words out of my mouth would be, “Thank you. Want a slice?” And we sit down and enjoy cake together. Moved by his gift in Christ, we say, “Thank you Lord,” and we want to share that generosity with him and with others. That is what “out of reverence to Christ” means.

We all know what the world suggests. Not happy or not satisfied, just get a divorce. Don’t like your job? Do only the minimum. But what does Jesus suggest?

The greatest among you is the least, the servant, the one who places others always before himself. Sure, we all get things out of our relationships: in marriage we get love and companionship; at work we get a means to support ourselves; at school we get an education. But we aren't in it just for ourselves. In fact, the greatest people in all of these relationships are the least, the servants, the slaves.

What does this mean during a pandemic? Read the text again. See what Jesus did as your slave. Remember the cruelty and the suffering and the cross. He did that so we have hope, a living hope the Bible calls it. We know we will stand before God as his dearly loved, redeemed children who are heirs of eternal life. The best this world offers is mere rubbish compared to heaven. Yes, we suffer along with the world. We still get tossed back and forth. It hurts here. But it will only get better. In fact, the perfection of heaven is such that we will not even have a memory of the bad things of this world. We want to leave it all behind.

But that is not all we learn from this text. The advice out there is to be cautious and to practice social distancing. We are told to avoid gatherings (which is why church is canceled for the time being). Restaurants are closing. I see it when I need to go shopping. There is little eye contact. People are staring at the ground with a mind preoccupied with the thought, "Get it done and go home." So we find ourselves isolated.

Yet, how can we be the greatest? By still being the least. I never want to tell someone to put themselves at risk. But we all have neighbors. Keep an eye on them. We have these wonderful things called phones. Why not call your uncle today? Ask how he is doing. Call your widowed sister. See if there is anything she needs. This is a time to focus on ourselves. It is also a time to focus on everyone else. I noticed something this week. When someone needed me for something, my anxiety level went down. Yes, I washed and sanitized, but I did that so I can help them.

So what do you want to be when you grow up? You will be a slave, but to whom? A slave to yourself or a slave just like Jesus? INJ Amen.

RECITE THE NICENE CREED: page 31 of your hymnal if you have one.