

Sermon Notes Aug 27, 2017

Today is an embarrassment of riches. Each reading is so full of wisdom. I am going to focus on Matthew in my sermon, but need to give props to Romans 12. For all lectionary readings go to www.lectionarypage.net

The Epistle (Romans 12:1-8)

Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship

A life of faith is not in your head. A series of ascents or beliefs is not what God built us for. We are to bring our whole selves to God – head and heart, skin and bones. I'm not saying that belief is unimportant, it's just not the most important thing. What if we gave the same weight to what we do, as to what we say? You know – “walk the walk and talk the talk.” And if you don't live up to this standard, congratulations! Join the rest of us hypocritical fools and stumble back onto the path of grace.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God— what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Perfection is a loaded term, but does not need to be. Perfection is showing up to God. When you give God the whole stinky mess of your life, God's perfection begins to take shape in you.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

We owe Jesus our lives. He is the living sacrifice that gives us our success, our breath, and our lives. Any wonderful thing you are or have become is not an occasion for arrogance, but gratitude. Paul exhorts us that when we get a little too full of ourselves that we shouldn't “think of yourselves (ourselves) more highly than you (we) ought.” I was at a diocesan convention years ago. The youth commissioner got up to pray at the start of the meeting with a simple invocation “Love Jesus, don't be a jerk”. Maybe a little harsh for your taste, but I think most jerky behavior comes from not taking Paul's words about humility to heart.

In sum – what you believe and what you do hold equal weight in faithfulness. What we do as the “Body of Christ” is not just a mental thing, but a physical one too...but that is another sermon!

The Gospel (Matthew 16:13-20)

“When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi...” Location, location, location. Caesarea Philippi an ancient city with a history of Pan worship. In Jesus' day, this city was rebranded to honor one of Herod's son – Phillip the Tetrach (hence Philippi). It was extremely pro-Roman, pro-status quo. It's a city dedicated to the God's of the past (Pan) and the God's of the present (Phillip and Caesar).

I don't want to get lost in the geek details, but Jesus is speaking while surrounded by actual and symbolic imperial power. He asks Peter *in this place* “who do you say that I am”. Peter answers correctly – God, not Caesar; God, not Pan, is in charge. In the middle of a city devoted to the propaganda for Roman power and heritage, Peter's answer is direct rebuke of the status quo.

Peter, and we, have the “keys to the Kingdom”. We have the terrifying freedom (through faith) to proclaim where God is going and what God is doing. This is the heart of what I hope to communicate in my sermon – we have been given the keys to the car. What are we going to do with it? The “Keys to the Kingdom” often devolves into a tedious Roman Catholic debate about who is really in charge, but this idea is powerful when we think about authority and how we get to figure where God is leading us. Often quoted in the black liberation movement, we can also apply a proverb to the church - ***We are the fulfilment of the wildest dreams of our ancestors.*** Peter is happy to know that we continue to show up in faith, and God has handed us the keys to keep going forward.

The Symbol referred to in the sermon – Sankofa bird



The Sankofa bird is a bird with its head turned backwards taking an egg off its back. It symbolizes taking from the past what is good and bringing it into the present in order to make positive progress. In Todd's words – let's move with confidence into the future, while cherishing the treasures of our spiritual mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers. We have the keys now; let's humbly do something with them.

