

“Contempt for God’s Ways”

Fourth Sunday After Lent

March 2, 2008

Texts: Psalm 23 / 1 Samuel 16:1-13 / Ephesians 5:1-14 / John 9:1-38

1 Samuel 16:1-13

The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” **2** And Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.” And the LORD said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’” **3** And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you.” **4** Samuel did what the LORD commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, “Do you come peaceably?” **5** And he said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is before him.” **7** But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” **8** Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” **9** Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” **10** And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen these.” **11** Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.” **12** And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the LORD said, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he.” **13** Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

Ephesians 5:1-14

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. **4** Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. **5** For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. **6** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. **7** Therefore do not become partners with them; **8** for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light **9** (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), **10** and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. **11** Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. **12** For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. **13** But when anything is

exposed by the light, it becomes visible, **14** for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,
“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

John 9:1-38

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. **2** And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” **3** Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. **4** We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. **5** As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” **6** Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud **7** and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” **9** Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” **10** So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” **11** He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.” **12** They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. **14** Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. **15** So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” **16** Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them. **17** So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight **19** and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” **20** His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. **21** But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” **22** (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) **23** Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” **25** He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” **26** They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” **27** He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” **28** And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. **29** We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” **30** The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. **31** We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. **32** Never since the world began has it been heard that

anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. **33** If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” **34** They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” **36** He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” **37** Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” **38** He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. **39** Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” **40** Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” **41** Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; [\[3\]](#) but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.

After Fr. Joe's last two sermons on Nicodemus coming to faith in Christ and then the Samaritan woman's coming to faith in Christ, we again this week have quite a different story of folks coming to faith. We could call this sermon "Believing in Jesus, Part III." But, it could also be more ominously subtitled "Contempt for God's Ways."

Our reading from 1 Samuel is clear that we have to be careful when looking at God's mighty works. The prophet Isaiah (55:8-9) stated boldly,

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

In our age, we often think that we are so smart, so advanced, that we can evaluate God's works with our puny brains. Again, 1 Samuel states clearly,

"For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." (1 Sam 16:1-13)

I love this story from 1st Samuel, the story of the calling of David. Because we first see a host of Jesse's sons passing in review and all are rejected by God. But, the one who is actually tending the sheep, actually active in ministry, is the one who is called. And, although Eliab is tall, dark, and handsome, he is not the chosen one. But, the great ending to this story is that God may not choose the one we would, he still chooses the best. He chooses a caring shepherd, a hard worker, who also just happens to be "ruddy" with "beautiful eyes and was handsome" (1 Sam 16:12). The lesson here is that what seems the best, even by our own reckoning, may not be, in the end. God always has something or someone better for us!

Our passage from John's Gospel continues this theme of God's ways, by giving us a lesson in various responses to the Lord acting in our lives. When God acts in our lives there are several different and possible stages that we can go through in evaluating that action. I would like to look at that today...how we come to faith...or how we don't come to faith. And, then, I would like each one of us to honestly evaluate where we are in our faith in Christ.

When God acts there is often first **astonishment and thankfulness**. We see that clearly in our Gospel story. The neighbors at first agree that this was a blind man, blind from birth, and now he can see! Praise be to God! We see this also in Matthew's Gospel when Jesus reads from the Book of Isaiah in the synagogue, and the text says that they were "astonished."

I was a member of a small accountability group in Knoxville – I believe it was a group from Alpha that I was the leader of. One week I had to miss our meeting time, and it was during that particular week that a member of the group, a young woman who was new to the faith, had poured out her heart about a tumor, about the size of a grapefruit as I recall, that had been found in her stomach. It was a large tumor and it was inoperable. The group got up and laid hands on her and prayed for her.

She said later that she felt an intense warmth, welling up from within her, centered on that tumor...a warmth, a heat that she had never felt before. Immediately she said that she felt she had been healed, that the tumor had been removed through prayer, through the healing power of the Holy Spirit. The next week she went to the surgeon, and with fear and trembling said that she felt the tumor was no longer there. The surgeon, at first, tended to ignore her entreaties. But, he being a Christian, he allowed another series of images to be made of the tumor. When those results returned – you guessed it – there was no tumor to be found. The healing was confirmed.

Meanwhile, I returned to the group to head it up and was struck with a dilemma. I wish I could say that I immediately believed the woman's witness of healing. I did not. Furthermore, I was just a bit "put-out" that this healing could have gone on without me, the leader, being there. What was the Holy Spirit thinking, anyway?

So, initially I was **suspicious**. If our mind does not continually praise the Lord for His acting in our lives and hold fast to the truth of His action, we can become **suspicious**. In our story of the blind man from John's Gospel, it is first the neighbors who knew the blind man who start to question...Is he really the man who

is our neighbor, or is he just some man who kind of looks like him. Even though the man himself insists, “I am the man!”

Soon, as I became more and more exercised over not being part of this healing, I became **incredulous**. We want proof for what has happened. We may have even witnessed this mighty act of God, but now we want to see tangible proof that he acted. So, the people ask, “Where is He?” In other words, where is this guy Jesus who did these things.

Fourthly, it is not enough for ourselves to be unbelievers, we want others to confirm our unbelief. So we seek testimony from those who are supposedly “in the know” in this case the Pharisees, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. As Anglican Bishop J.C. Ryle has said,

Knowledge undoubtedly is a very great blessing...But when knowledge only sticks in a man’s head, and has no influence over his heart and life, it becomes a perilous possession. And when, in addition to this, its possessor is self-conceited and self-satisfied, and fancies he knows everything, the result is one of the worst states of soul into which a man can fall (Ryle, *John*, Vol. 2, p. 182)

They question first whether the blind man was really blind. Then, they, and we in our own way, question the character of those who are involved in the mighty acts of God, in this case, Jesus Himself. The Pharisees say (vs. 16), “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?”” Because some believed and others didn’t believe, and still those who disbelieve have different reasons for not believing, the end result is seen in the last sentence in verse 16, “And there was division among them.” This is the fruit of unbelief -- division.

Fifthly, we see that when there is division, then there is **fear**. Some are afraid to speak out lest they be branded in this camp or that camp. We see this in our Gospel passage in the blind man’s parents’ inability to make a statement about Jesus’ character (even though He had healed their son!). Instead, they “pass the buck” to their son. “Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself,” it says in verse 21. And verse 22 gives the reason why they refuse to speak of Jesus, “**22** (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if

anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.)

23 Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

Sixthly, if we continue down this path of unbelief, we arrive at **contempt**. The Pharisees questioning the blind man say, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?”

Finally, painfully and sadly, contempt leads to a hardening, not a softening of the heart. Anglican evangelist and theologian John Stott has said that his prayer, each time before he preaches is that his words would not harden but soften hearts. I have adopted that also as my prayer. But, in the end, the truth is that each time the Gospel is preached hearts **are** hardened...the hope is that many more are softened.

In Luke’s Gospel, chapter 16 (verse 31) Jesus says at the end of His parable of the rich man and Lazarus, ““If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.””” This may seem unfathomable to us, but we human beings are capable of amazing self-deception. Witness the rise in Germany of groups who claim the Holocaust never happened, or the rise in current-day Russia of a new cult of Joseph Stalin. “Neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.” Jesus Himself says in John’s Gospel (9:27), ““I have told you already, and you would not listen.”

Where are you in your walk with Christ? Do you fully put your trust in Him and His word for all that you do? Do you daily seek guidance through prayer, Bible reading, and fellowship with the saints to seek to walk in the way that Christ has called you? Or do you believe only that He is your Savior, your deliverer, but have still not gotten to the point of fully trusting in Him as the Lord of your life. Or do you find all of this talk about Lord and Savior a bit too much, a bit overblown, a bit too religious? Now is the appointed time. The Lord is calling you this day to walk with Him, believe in Him more deeply, and seek to follow Him with all of your might. The fields are ripe for the harvest and the Lord needs laborers in the field.

So, we learn over the last three weeks that believing in Christ, and on the flip-side unbelieving in Christ, comes in many different forms, at many different times. There

is no set way to come to belief in Christ, no norm of understanding. But, there is the warning that we always be open to fresh awakenings of the Spirit, fresh understandings of who Christ is and thus, what is the nature of God. And that these opportunities for belief be informed not only by the Holy Spirit, but by Scripture. And, further, in our age of suspicion and incredulity, that, when God acts and shows Himself in the Church, in the world, and in His people, that we not back down from our belief. That unbelief is a very slippery slope that begins in questioning and suspicion and can very easily end in contempt for the mighty works of God and a hardened heart. I pray that your heart not be hardened. Let us all then heed the words of Jesus to the apostle Thomas in John's Gospel (20:27), "Stop becoming unbelieving...and believe!" *Amen.*

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