

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: *Genesis 28:10-17*

- 10 Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran.
- 11 When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep.
- 12 He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.
- 13 There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying.
- 14 Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.
- 15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."
- 16 When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it."
- 17 He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

PSALM 73

A psalm of Asaph.

- 1 Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.
- 2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.
- 3 For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
- 4 They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.
- 5 They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.
- 6 Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence.
- 7 From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits.
- 8 They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression.
- 9 Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.
- 10 Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.
- 11 They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?"
- 12 This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth.
- 13 Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.
- 14 All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.
- 15 If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed your children.
- 16 When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me
- 17 till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.
- 18 Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin.
- 19 How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!
- 20 As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.
- 21 When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered,

- 22 I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.
23 Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.
24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.
25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
27 Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.
28 But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

EPISTLE LESSON: *Romans 5:1-11*

- 1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.
3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;
4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.
5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.
6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.
7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.
8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!
10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!
11 Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

GOSPEL LESSON: *Mark 8:31-38*

- 31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.
32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.
33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “**Get behind me, Satan!**” he said. “**You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.**”
34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “**If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.**
35 **For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.**

- 36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?
- 37 Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?
- 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

The word “Remember” is used often today. “Remember to vote.” “Remember to eat your vegetables.” “Remember to take your medication.” “Remember the Alamo.” “Remember your wife’s birthday.” “Remember to change the oil in your car.” We even have many reminders to help us remember: pill boxes to measure out medications for the week, stickers and post cards for the next oil change and doctor and dentist appointments, notebooks to organize our days, even tying string around our fingers. But why this obsession to remember? What do we want to remember and what can we do without?

We seek to remember things important to us. For good health and strong teeth, we remember doctor and dentist appointments and to take any medication prescribed for us. To keep our car running well, we remember when to change the oil. To keep peace and harmony in the home, we remember what is important to our spouse, children, or parents.

In today’s text, Jesus tells us **Remember Your Priorities**. First, Jesus explains his priority—*dying for our sins and rising again*. Then, he explains our priority—*letting Jesus take control of our life both here on earth and for all eternity*.

Our text this morning occurred, as Mark says in chapter nine, six days before the Transfiguration. It was shortly after Peter make the claim about Jesus, “**You are the Christ.**” That is, he believed that Jesus was the anointed Savior. Thus, Jesus tells about how he would serve as Savior. He **began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again**. Mark even writes that Jesus “spoke plainly”—literally, he used “plain words.” There was no denying what Jesus was saying.

But leave it to Peter to open mouth and insert foot. Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him. To which Jesus rebukes Peter: “**Out of my sight, Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of man.**” Now, do you think Peter was REALLY listening to Jesus, or just heard what he wanted to hear? For if we visit again what Mark says Jesus taught, Jesus DID say he would rise again on the third day. So, why would Peter rebuke Jesus, unless he only heard part of what Jesus had to say. Or is it possible that what Jesus had to say was shameful to his followers? Jesus was the person they viewed as a mighty Savior—not someone giving up and dying. But, as Jesus said to Peter, he also says to any who are ashamed of the Gospel message. Jesus’ purpose was to die for our sins and then to rise again to assure us of his victory and our victory over sin, death, and the Devil.

But what sins did Jesus pay for? Did he just pay for our original sin to redeem mankind but leave each of us to somehow pay for our individual sins? Or did he just pay for those little sins and somewhere, somehow there just has to be a cut-off point where God says, “No, I cannot take anyone this sinful, or worse?”

For a clue, we have to read Jesus' words in verse 38: "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes with his Father's glory with the holy angels." The two words to take notice of are "adulterous" and "sinful." The Greek reveals much with these two words. The adulterous refers to someone who is married, belongs to a spouse, but is wayward in his or her way of life. By paying for us with his blood, Jesus says we belong to him even though we often stray. The word used for "sinful" is "ἁμαρτανῶ" (hamartano)—an archery term that means "to miss the mark." If I set up a target at the back of the church, my goal would be to hit the bulls-eye every time. That's what God expects of each one of us—hit the bulls-eye every time, "be perfect even as the Lord your God is perfect."

But if I actually had a bow and some arrows and tried shooting at the target, I am sure that those sitting along the middle aisle would quickly move to the other end of the pew, if not upstairs. My aim is far from being good. And, unfortunately, our aim at keeping God's Law is also far from good. In fact, what God expects is that we hit the bulls-eye every time—100%! We all admit when confronted with a shortcoming, "well, no one's perfect!" Which is why Jesus had to die for our sins—to pay for our sins and cover us with his holiness. His priority was to suffer and die and rise again for our sakes, to give us new life.

Which is where Jesus begins to work on our priorities. He comes to take over our lives. As we all too readily admit, we are not perfect. We make mistakes. But there are mistakes we make that we aren't even aware of! And, God does want us to be perfect—to hit that bulls-eye 100% of the time! We have made a mess of our lives. Whether our addiction is drugs, alcohol, cursing, gossip, short tempers, impatience, or intolerance, we embrace a lifestyle that is apart from God. It is this lifestyle that we need to deny and lose if we are to have a life with God.

Our first priority is to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus. What does it mean to deny ourselves and take up a cross? Does that mean we need to be crucified? Does that mean we literally have to die? In fact, that's what that means. St. Paul explains this further when he writes to the Romans: "If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin" (Romans 6:5-7). Jesus' death and resurrection—and our death and resurrection—are impressed on us at our baptism and we remember them each time we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Our next priority is to lose our life for Jesus and for the gospel. The Greek word used here is not "βίος" (bios) or "ζοε," (zoe) but "ψυχη" (psyche) a word that illustrates not just our breathing activity or our life history, but every aspect of our life, our very spirit and soul. In fact, "ψυχη" is used later when Jesus asks, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but lose his 'ψυχη,' his soul?" Our word "psychology" comes from that Greek word. The original practice of psychology was to treat behavior and thought, the whole person.

What Jesus tells us in verses 35 through 37, using two opposite pictures, is that we cannot serve two masters. We cannot hang on to the old and have the new. We cannot have our sin and salvation, too. What we once considered our gain should now be considered loss—even if what we considered gain was our self-righteousness! St. Paul related to the Philippians how he considered his self-righteousness as a loss once Christ came into his life:

“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless” (Philippians 3:4-6). Sounds like a model Christian, right? Well, Paul goes on to say, “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of the Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things” (Philippians 3:7-8).

Yet, we find that we cannot change all that easily. We cannot completely turn over that new leaf. After moments of euphoria, we fall back into our old habits, our pet sins, and our favorite addictions. We aren’t patient with our spouse or children. We don’t listen to our parents. We ignore others in need, especially those in need of the Gospel message. Yet, with Paul, we can say “Thanks be to Christ Jesus our Lord.” For it is Jesus that not only knocks on the door of our hearts, but comes into our lives and slowly but surely works faith, repentance, and regeneration in our hearts. For Paul goes on to write to the Philippians:

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11).

It is this power, the power of the Gospel, that re-creates us as new images in God. It is the power of Christ’s death and resurrection, and the message of that death and resurrection, that makes us new people and holy in God’s sight. While it seems “foolish” to the world, this gospel is the power of God for salvation to all who believe. Many are ashamed that Scripture starkly points out sin. Today the charge is that the Bible is not “politically correct.” Others claim that the Scriptural teaching that we are saved by faith through grace alone is foolish. They are ashamed that God has done all and paid the full price for their sins. Sadly, to those who deny the power of Christ and his death and resurrection will feel the shame of Christ when they present their self-righteousness before him, for it will be as filthy rags, as Isaiah calls all our “righteous acts” apart from God.

We need to remember our priorities. Jesus remembered his priority as living a perfect life in our place and substituting for us in the death we so rightly deserved. Our priorities in Jesus are to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and lose our life to save it. Don’t be ashamed in the death and resurrection of Christ, but rejoice in the fact that God loved us so much, he came down to earth, he lived among us, he suffered and was tempted as we

suffer and face temptation. He loved us so much that to show us how much he loved us he stretched out his arms and died.

And Jesus gives us reminders to remember our priorities. No, he doesn't tie a string around our finger, or send us a reminder post card or put a sticker on the inside of our windshield. Instead, he gave us his word, the Bible. He gave us the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Through these means of grace the Holy Spirit strengthens us in our faith, brings us closer to our Lord, and renews our lives—our thinking as well as our behavior. He invites us to pray and bring our concerns, our hopes, our fears, and our weaknesses to him. He gives us each other to strengthen each other in our faiths. Use these means our Lord has given us to remind us that we are forgiven, we are redeemed, we are children of God. Remember that in Christ's death and resurrection we, too, have died and rose again. We have new life now and have it to the full. We have life eternal with our Father in Heaven. Amen.