

Psalm 24
1 Corinthians 10:23-33

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost
Midway Presbyterian Church
July 22, 2018

Do All to the Glory of God

Introduction to the Psalm

Our psalm today would be well-suited for some liturgical occasion, perhaps one celebrating the way that David brought the Ark of God into Jerusalem. It declares that the God who created and owns everything, is the same God into whose presence the faithful worshipper enters, because of God's covenant with Israel. Such is the privilege, and such is the mission—to spread the glory of God to all people. Listen to these words from Psalm 24...

Introduction to the Epistle Lesson

It was near the end of his three-year ministry in Ephesus that Paul wrote the First Letter to the Church in Corinth. It was in the spring of A.D. 53, 54, or 55. Corinth was located at a flourishing crossroads for sea traffic between the Aegean region and the western Mediterranean. It was a Roman colony, but a mingling place of many cultures and religions.

First Corinthians is a pastoral letter written to a spiritually troubled church—a church plagued with problems of division, immorality, and social snobbery. In our lesson today, Paul deals with the matter of eating meat offered in sacrifices to idols. And he declares that every aspect of a Christian's life has the potential to honor God. Listen to these words from 1 Corinthians 10:23-33...

Sermon

Verses 1 and 2 of our psalm today identify the creator and owner of the world to be the Lord. To whom do many moderns think the world belongs? To a roster of nations with economic influence? To one great state? To corporations? But our psalm affirms that, "The earth is the Lords."

“The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof...” is part of our theological foundation. The earth is God’s because he has founded it and established it. Such a text as ours from The Psalms rebukes a certain modern temper of mind which regards man’s discoveries as solely man’s creations, and thereby unduly exalts man’s station in the grand scheme of things. While our inventions may represent creative use of these discoveries, they ultimately reveal truths already implanted in nature by the Creator. Electricity was hidden in Niagara all the time; we only “came across it” and discovered how to use it. So with chloroform and penicillin and all the rest of the benefits which were placed here long ago. Science is a sort of treasure hunt, but the creator and owner of the treasure is God.

Now it is well to note the second clause of Psalm 24:1, “the world and those who dwell therein.” *People* belong to the creator as much as material forces. They compose a great fullness of the earth; and they have a fullness of their own in their various endowments and capacities. Addressing prejudice may begin with this phrase from the 24th Psalm, for it declares that we all belong to God. And God’s secrets and talents are hidden in people of every culture and color, just waiting to be discovered.

Yes, God has hidden wonderful latent powers in those who dwell in India, Africa, Brazil, and elsewhere. In that spirit spoke Pope Paul VI in addressing the Vatican Council in December of 1975:

Let the world know this—the Church looks at the world with profound understanding, with sincere admiration, with an earnest intention not of conquering it but of serving it, not of destroying it but of appreciating it, not of condemning it but of strengthening it.

And scripture reminds us that God works through the commonplace to do uncommon things. When we read the Bible, we discover that men and women would look for God in stupendous acts of war, earthquake, wind, fire, and visions. Sometimes they found God there.

But more often those ancient people were surprised to find God working consistently and speaking quietly in the mystery of the human heart—in a still small voice as Elijah reported.

There's a story entitled, "The Heavenly City," adapted from a Jewish folktale. It reminds us that the kingdom of God may be found right in our midst.

There was once a poor man who grew weary of the corruption and hatred that he experienced every day. He was tired of the constant injustice that his people experienced. His family and friends listened as he spoke passionately of his desire for a city where justice was honored and peace experienced. Night after night he dreamed of a land free from discord, a city where heaven touched earth.

Well, one day he announced that he could wait no longer. So he packed a meager meal, kissed his family goodbye, and set out in search of the magical city of his dreams. He walked all day, and just before the sun set, he found a place to sleep, just off the road in a forest. He ate his sandwich, said his prayers, and smoothed the earth where he would lie. Just before he went to sleep, he placed his shoes in the center of the path, pointing them in the direction he would continue the next day.

But that night as he slept, a sly fellow walked that very same path and discovered the traveler's shoes. Unable to resist a practical joke, he turned the shoes around, pointing them in the direction from which the man had come.

Well, early the next morning the traveler rose, said his prayers, ate what remained of the food he had brought, and started his journey by walking in the direction his shoes pointed. He walked all day long, and just before sunset, saw the heavenly city off in the distance. It wasn't as large as he expected, and it looked strangely familiar. He entered a street that looked much like his own, knocked on a familiar door, greeted the family he found there, and lived happily ever after in the heavenly city of his dreams.

In his First Letter to the Church in Corinth, Paul said that we should do all things to the glory of God—whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do. What would happen if we could know the integrating force of God’s action in all of life? We would stop trying to compartmentalize religion. We could see art, science, music, education, business...as good in themselves. We would get rid of the false division between sacred and secular, religion and reality. We would see that what affects the body can affect the spirit, and what affects the spirit can affect the body. We would open up the windows to see the Spirit of Jesus Christ shining in the daily life we live.

There is a lovely legend which centers about the building of a great cathedral. When the project began, heaven’s Director of Church Construction announced a grand contest. Upon completion of the cathedral, the Lord would award a rare prize to the person who had made the most significant contribution to the finished edifice.

Considerable speculation followed the initial announcement. Who would be the winner? Was not the architect a prime possibility? Or the contractor? Might it be one of the craftsmen who did rare work in glass, gold, iron, or brass? Maybe it would be the carpenter assigned to the intricate grill above the altar. Throughout the development, each one did his best, and the result was such a masterpiece as had never been seen throughout the land.

But at the moment of high anticipation when the winner was announced, imagine the surprise when the recipient turned out to be an old peasant woman who daily carried fodder to the oxen that pulled the marble for the masons.

The Bible reminds us that all of life is meant to be holy. The Incarnation declares that the eternal God and creator of all, became a flesh and blood person in Jesus Christ. That he lived the life we live, with its joys and sorrows. Our psalm proclaims that our Heavenly Father fashioned the world and everything in it. Thus does the Apostle Paul teach in a letter to the church in

Corinth. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.” This is God’s word through his servant Paul to all Christian believers. Christianity is the whole of life, cleansed, illumined, anointed by the indwelling Spirit of Christ.

So that Christian witness can take place in the midst of everyday activities. In the home, or school, or place of business, or sporting event. And this is where our Christian witness is needed as much as it is in church, or in mission to the local food bank, or the mission field far away.

Thus are we invited to cultivate the art of regarding things from a divine perspective. Only our outlook makes something commonplace. Seeing things God’s way can turn prose into poetry, work into worship. Through the eyes of Christ, we can see the whole world and every person as so loved by God that he sent Jesus to save us.

Robertson of Irvine, a Scottish minister of a bygone generation, was once asked by a visitor to his church, “Who is that man who has just offered prayer?” The answer given: “He is an elder of mine who lives in communion with God and makes shoes.” Well, every workshop can be just such a sanctuary. A place that glorifies God.

There were once two brothers who farmed together. They shared equally in all of the work and split the profits evenly. Each had his own granary. One of the brothers was married and had a large family; the other brother was single.

Well, one day the single brother thought to himself, “It is not fair that we divide the grain evenly. My brother has many mouths to feed, while I have but one. I know what I’ll do, I will take a sack of grain from my granary each evening and put it in my brother’s granary.” So, each night when it was dark, he carefully carried a sack of grain, placing it in his brother’s barn.

Now the married brother thought to himself, “It is not fair that we divide the grain evenly. I have many children to care for me in my old age, and my brother has none. I know what I’ll

do, I will take a sack of grain from my granary each evening and put it in my brother's granary.”

And he did. Each morning the two brothers were amazed to discover that though they had removed a sack of grain the night before, they had just as many.

Then one night the two brothers met each other halfway between their barns, each carrying a sack of grain. At that they understood the mystery. And they embraced, and loved each other deeply. It is said that God looked down from heaven, saw the two brothers embracing and said, “I declare this to be a holy place, for I have witnessed extraordinary love here.” It is also said that it was on that spot that Solomon built the first temple.

Paul himself was a tentmaker. This one who had taken it as his mission to proclaim the Gospel of Christ throughout the world, that we might even eat and drink to the glory of God. Surely he must have made his tents to the same end—to the Glory of God.

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it. (Ps 24:1)

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,
do everything for the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31)

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.