

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
Our Saviour Lutheran Church
October 10, 2021
Pentecost 20

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

When there is less of “you” there is more of “God” and his rule.

When there is less of “you” there is more of “God” and his rule.

That is a quote from Eugene Peterson’s Bible translation called *The Message*.

We are no doubt familiar with the various translations of the Bible.

There is the King James Version of the Bible, the KJV.

There is the New International Version of the Bible, the NIV.

There is the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, the RSV.

And there is the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, the NRSV.

The NRSV is the translation of the Bible from which our readings in the *Celebrate* insert derive.

There are all these translations of the Bible, because different groups have sought to use a particular language like Old English for the King James Version, or have wanted to emphasize certain aspects of the text like the New Jerusalem Bible which wanted to emphasize the Jewishness of the Bible.

Whatever a group’s particular emphasis might be, results in a particular translation of the Bible.

And in addition to those Bible translations we have mentioned, there is also the translation of the Bible, called *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson, who wanted to provide a translation of the Bible that used contemporary language and idioms.

So for instance, the first few Beatitudes in Matthew 5 read in the NRSV as follows:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Pretty familiar, right?

The translation by Eugene Peterson, however, reads as follows:

You're blessed when you are at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

We get the picture.

So this quote with which I began this sermon comes from Eugene Peterson's translation of the Bible called *The Message*.

When there is less of "you" there is more of "God" and his rule.

And I share this quote because it is most apropos for today's gospel reading.

For in that reading we hear about a man who is so excited to see Jesus that he runs up to him and kneels before him, and the man asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

And already we can see that this is the wrong question.

Why? Because the question is focused on himself.

It is all about "me."

What must I do to inherit eternal life?

The question is all about what he must do.

The question is all about his concern for his own salvation.

It is all about "me."

And so, how does Jesus respond?

Jesus reminds the man of the commandments.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness.

You shall not defraud.

Honor your mother and father.

PAUSE

Now, my guess is that we are very much like this man.

We want to know what we need to do to inherit eternal life.

Perhaps, that is our paramount question when we come to worship.

We want to know what we need to do to be saved.

We want to know what we need to do to obtain salvation.

What must we do to be in God's good graces.

And, like this man, we probably figure that if we keep the commandments...

If we keep our noses clean...

If we refrain from hurting our neighbors...

If we don't physically harm our neighbor, or steal from our neighbor, or lie and cheat our neighbor...

We probably figure that if we follow the commandments, we will be in good standing with God.

PAUSE

But then, but then, Jesus looks at this man, and the text says Jesus loved this man...

Did Jesus love him because the man was devoted to God's commandments?

Did Jesus love him because the man was truly and deeply interested in his salvation?

Or, did Jesus love this man and have compassion for this man, and so wanted to provide this man with further instruction?

We don't know. The text doesn't say.

What we do know is that Jesus then tells the man, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, give the money to the poor, and come, and follow me."

Go, sell what you own, give the money to the poor, and come and follow me.

In short, Jesus would appear to be saying to the man, "When there is less of 'you' there is more of God and his rule."

The story began with the man asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

It is all about "me."

Jesus though is saying to the man, "When there is less of 'you'..."

"When there is less of your possessions burdening you..."

"When there is less of your baggage..."

"When there is less of your agenda..."

"When there is less of your self-importance..."

"When there is less of 'you,' there is more of 'God' and his rule."

And then our Lord Jesus gives us this powerful image, stating that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.

PAUSE

It is kind of like this piece of paper.

If I told you to cut this 8 1/2" x 11" paper so that you could walk through it, you might look at me funny, thinking it can't be done.

We might cut a circle out of the paper and hold it up, and be at a quandary about how in the world we are going to go through that hole.

But, if we cut the same piece of paper in a different way, and when we held it up, we might find that indeed we could very easily walk through it.

It is the same piece of paper, but how we envision the solution, how we approach cutting the paper, makes all the difference.

It is the difference between the question the man asks Jesus the Lord, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

And the question I think God is asking us, “What will you do now that you have eternal life through Jesus Christ?”

It is all about how we envision our existence—whether we see life as the question “what do I need to do in to inherit eternal life” OR as a response, “what I do now, now that eternal life is mine because of Christ?”

How do envision the piece of paper? How do we view life?

For indeed, Jesus asks us, “What will you do now knowing that you are saved?”

“What will you do now knowing that your salvation is a done deal?”

You see, Friends, eternal life is not a problem we need to solve.

Eternal life is not a goal we need to achieve.

Eternal life is not something we do.

Eternal life is what God has already done in Jesus Christ.

Eternal life is what God has already accomplished on the cross.

So the point is, we have already passed through the eye of the needle with Christ in our baptism.

Salvation for mortals, by our own effort, is impossible, but with God in the gift of baptism, all things are possible.

In other words, there is already less of “me,” there is already less of “you,” because there is more of God in the person of Son Jesus Christ, who died and rose again.

There is more of God in Christ.

In this way, Jesus Christ is the paramount example of one who embodied the quote by Eugene Peterson.

With less of you, there is more of God and his rule.

With less of the human agenda, and more of God's will, resurrection and new life came to be through Christ.

To look at it another way...

Jesus said in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Not my will, by yours be done."

And I have never thought of this before but when Jesus utters those words in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of his betrayal, on the eve of his crucifixion...

When Jesus, as the new Adam, utters those words, "Not my will, by yours be done," Jesus is undoing the action of the old Adam in the Garden of Eden.

From one Garden to another Garden.

In the Garden of Eden, the old Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The old Adam was all about "himself."

The old Adam was all about his own will.

Yes, the old Adam was less about "God," and all about "himself."

And then...then there is Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, who says, "Not my will, but yours be done."

In effect Jesus was saying, "When there is less 'me,' there is more of 'God' and his rule."

PAUSE

So, again, the question from the man in our gospel reading is the wrong question we need to be asking.

The question is not "what must we do to inherit eternal life?"

The question is "now that we have the assurance of eternal life, how will we live our life now?"

How will we live life differently?

How will we treat people differently knowing that we have been given eternal life through Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross?

How will we use our time differently, knowing that God has blessed us with eternity as a result of the the cross?

How will we use our possessions differently, knowing that God gave us his own son, his dearest possession...

How will we make faithful use of our possessions, knowing that God gave us his own son to die on the cross?

How will we live our lives differently?

Will we live life such that there is less of us, whereby then there can be more of God and his rule?

Again, that is such an interesting quote from Eugene Peterson.

In short, the quote recognizes that God's rule in the world is all the more evident when we simply get out of the way and allow God to do God's thing in the world.

God's rule in the world is all the more evident when we surrender to God's will for our lives, as oppose to always clinging to our will.

That is tough to do, because we like to be in control.

We like to have the power to dictate how things will proceed in our lives and even the lives of others.

PAUSE

Let me conclude then with Luther's interpretation of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done."

In his interpretation of the Lord's Prayer, Luther said, "God's kingdom comes, and God's will is done even without us praying for it. But in those petitions we pray that God's kingdom might come through us, and that God's will would be done through us."

In short, where there is less of you and less of me, where these is less of us, there is more of God and his rule. Thanks be to God. Amen.