

Sermon Lent 1 2021

February 21, 2021

2 Corinthians 6:1-10

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

I don't think it's a stretch to say that in our time we view our comforts and security as essential. I was watching a show recently that exemplified this. One of the main characters was undergoing an understandably stressful situation and because she was famous, it was something that she was having to deal with very publicly. In the midst of all of that, her husband told her he wanted a divorce. She agreed because she was tired of her husband as well, and in defense of the divorce went on a monologue about how hard she had worked and how much she deserved having good things and how she deserved to be happy especially in something like love.

As I was listening to it, I couldn't help but be reminded of the book I spent a fair amount of time talking about on Wednesday. As I spoke about the book, which is called "You Are What You Love," describing these cultural liturgies we have around us, I mentioned how it described these liturgies associated with things like consumerism. What is at the heart of consumerism? It's that same mentality, isn't it? You work hard and so you deserve to have a comfortable and happy life, one that you know is happy and comfortable because of all of the things you have and even your happiness in love. As the book spoke of many examples, it even made the connection of this to marriage. It made the point that we even treat marriage in a consumerist fashion.

In fact, it referenced another writer who called our treatment of marriage an idolatry. Now, as we look at how many marriages have ended in divorce and how many young people are living together without marriage, and certainly are having sex outside of marriage, we might be inclined to think that this insight is nuts. After all, how can we say we've created an idol out of something that we demonstrated no respect for. I myself sort of thought that as I was reading. And then I read this quote: *"The real sin of marriage today is not adultery or lack of 'adjustment' or 'mental cruelty.' It is the idolization of the family itself, the refusal to understand marriage as directed toward the Kingdom of God.... It is not the lack of respect for the family, it is the idolization of the family that breaks the modern family so easily, making divorce its almost natural shadow. It is the identification of marriage with happiness and the refusal to accept the cross in it."* Isn't that an interesting perspective? The point is

that we have created an idol out of marriage and the family to the extent that we expect marriage and family to bring us all happiness. And so when things get hard with family or with marriage, what's the response? I'll find something that isn't this hard. I'll find a spouse who doesn't leave their clothes lying around all the time. I'll find a spouse who gives me attention that I want. Or I'll create a family situation that actually is perfect when I find that perfect person. And what do the spouse and family become at that point? Mere objects of consumption for me.

Now, so far, I've been speaking about marriage and families and I am abundantly aware that this is not the circumstance for everyone here. I know that not everyone is married. I know that not everyone views their family as an object for consumption. But the lesson is one that can be carried over to all aspects of our lives. Especially as we hear those last words, that the problem "*is the identification of marriage with happiness and the refusal to accept the cross in it,*" we can draw that out to our lives altogether. The problem we have—and I think this is true as Americans in many ways and true even in the American Church—the problem we have is that we think this life altogether should be identified with happiness and we refuse to accept the cross in it.

Now, let me be clear. If you are happy, I'm not telling you that's sinful. However, I am saying to make sure that you don't expect to derive your greatest happiness in the things of this world. Make sure that you don't trust in the things of this world. Make sure that your expectation isn't that this world is all about our comfort and security.

Now, as I say all that, you might be wondering where this is coming from in relation to the Lessons for today. You know, for the Gospel Lesson we had Jesus and His temptation, and for the Epistle Lesson, we have Paul.

And consider both of those. You've got Jesus fasting forty days and forty nights, then the Devil coming to him and telling Jesus to turn a rock into bread. I don't know how common fasting is among you all. I hope some of you fast periodically if you're able—and to be sure there are medical conditions that affect that. But if you fast then you might know how tempting it is to break that fast, even if it's something like fasting from sweets during Lent. You'll be going along fine and then the chocolate will be right there and you can smell it, and your mouth waters, and you can almost taste it. It's easy to just have that one—which of course once you break the fast, it's usually broken and done for the day. But imagine forty days. And then the temptation: if you just speak the word this rock will be bread you can finally satisfy your hunger with.

That resistance came from the knowledge that this world isn't about the comfort and security we think it is.

And Paul. Look at what he says about his work in Christ's ministry: **"We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise."** As servants of God, we commend ourselves by great endurance in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beating, imprisonment, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger. When's the last time you endured affliction, hardship, calamity, beating, imprisonment, riots, labors, sleepless nights, or hunger for the faith? We are pretty soft in our Christianity, aren't we? Don't get me wrong, I appreciate it, but look at our cush lives in the faith compared to that. And look at how the Church keeps giving inch by inch to our culture. And why? Because the assumption is that we should be respected by people, and if we just say things the right way and massage the message the right way, people will like it. And some of that is well intentioned. We love Jesus and we want other people to love Jesus. But some it is because we don't know the reality that the faith won't be comfortable for us.

But I love how Paul acknowledges this. Look at where he goes from there: **We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.** Do you see what he's doing there? He's saying that people treat him and his fellow pastors and evangelists as imposters. They treat them as unknown, as dying, as poor and punished, as sorrowful. This is what the world thinks of Paul. And what's that? Not much, right?

I think we can even get a taste of this ourselves. There are a lot of ways where the Church has been respected so we don't get it, but there's one way I think we can. As it described that sorrowful aspect, I couldn't help but think of how people I've talked about the Gospel with have responded to our view of sin. They find out that the Scripture teaches that we're all born dead in trespasses and sin, that we all deserve hell, and they say, "and you like that?" Or maybe they say, "and you believe

that?” Or maybe they see the confession at the beginning of the service and they say, “that’s a lot about sin, there, doesn’t that make you sad?” They see this as sorrowful. And of course sin itself is sad. The doctrine of original sin and the effects of sin on the world, that’s depressing. But we aren’t sorrowful. Why? Because there is joy. Christ has taken that sin and buried it in His tomb. The world thinks that talking about sin is sorrowful, but every time I confess how sinful I am, what a blessing! Why? Because I’m reminded of the One who didn’t come for the healthy but the sick, who didn’t come for the righteous but the unrighteous. I’m reminded of Christ in whom I have joy.

It’s in that joy, Christians, that we see where our true comfort and security are. They’re in the resurrection of Jesus. Because He has born our temptation faithfully, because He has died on the cross faithfully, because He has borne the curse of our sin faithfully, in His resurrection we have the promise of eternal life. That’s why Paul can say all of the things he says. Yes, the world sees us as imposters, unknown, dying, punished, sorrowful, and poor. But what are we really? In Christ, we, you, are true. You have the truest and most authentic identity in Him. In Christ, you are known to the very hairs on your head. In Christ, yes, your body is fading away, but it’s doing so in the knowledge that it will be redeemed, and you will no longer be clothed in mortality, but in the immortality promised you in your baptism, your resurrection with Jesus. You aren’t punished or sorrowful, instead you are beloved and have the truest of joy. And you certainly are not poor. You could die hungry and penniless with no place to lay your head, and yet you have the possession of the eternal Kingdom of Christ.

Again, Christians, that’s our true comfort and security. In Him we are secure to eternity. In Him we have eternal comfort. In Him we have the riches of a Kingdom that will never perish. We have it such a way that it gives us perspective now. It gives us freedom now. It gives us the strength to endure cross and dissatisfaction now. You see, our lives aren’t about the things of this world, the things that we can consume, even the spouses and families that we have. Those certainly aren’t bad things in themselves. Many of them are even gifts from God Himself. But they aren’t the source of our happiness. Christ is and Him alone. And in Him we have something greater than temporary happiness, we have eternal joy. In this Lenten season then, fix your eyes upon Him and the Joy that is yours in Him. Do that, and the draw of this world will be less and less appealing. Why? Because He is the One who has loved and cared for you and He has done so in a way that will be lasting forever. Amen.