

Parish Recommitment Sunday

Church of the Spirit, Kingstowne February 22, 2009

Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives.

(Reading: Galatians 5:25, The Message)

Opening Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all those who return to you: Create in us new hearts O God, that we may be filled to overflowing by your life-giving Spirit, and live by your ways, and honor you in all we do, for the sake of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Reading: Luke 13:23-27

A bystander said, "Master, will only a few be saved?" Jesus said, "Whether few or many is none of your business. Put your mind on your life with God. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires your total attention. A lot of you are going to assume that you'll sit down to God's salvation banquet just because you've been hanging around the neighborhood all your lives. Well, one day you're going to be banging on the door, wanting to get in, but you'll find the door locked and the Master saying: 'Sorry, you're not on my guest list.' You'll protest, 'But we've known you all our lives!' only to be interrupted with his abrupt, 'Your kind of knowing can hardly be called knowing. You don't know the first thing about me.' " (The Message)

Reflection: These are among the most challenging verses in all of the Bible. Jesus encounters a young man who thinks he's pretty sharp, and wants to have the insider info on salvation. He asks, "Will only a few, you know, like me, be saved?" Jesus takes this kind of uppity academic question about whether or not the masses will be let into the reserved heavenly banquet and makes the question personal for the bystander. Because being a bystander is all too simple, and sterile., You don't have to say anything or choose anything or do anything to be a bystander. So Jesus tells him it's really none of his business. He should be more worried about whether or not he's saved. As one famous fellow (Soren Kierkegaard) once said, "the only person's salvation that should ever be in doubt is your own." Jesus tells him, and you and me, to put our attention totally on God. To be a Christ Follower is a vigorous adventure.

The challenging thing here is the way Jesus says, "You know a lot of you are going along assuming that you've made it and you have a standing invitation to the heavenly banquet ... what just for being a bystander?" No. There's a difference between

being just a bystander and a follower. It requires commitment and follow through. You don't get there by loving the Lord with only some of your heart and mind and strength. God asks you to make a radical commitment to love him with all of your heart and all of your mind and all of your soul and strength. All of it.

Then Jesus finishes up by saying, "You're kind of knowing isn't knowing at all. You don't know the first thing about me." Another way to say that is there's a difference between knowing about Jesus and really knowing Jesus for yourself. The first is another academic question, a chance to discuss whether or not Jesus was real and whether or not he really did miracles or said this or that. All academic. Bystanders do that kind of thing when they're not discussing the weather or the sports scores. Now don't get me wrong, there are smart, academic Christ followers and there are Christ Followers who have no education at all. That's because even if you don't know Jack about theology, what matters is whether or not you know Jesus ... and whether you have chosen to follow him. Or to put it another way, the real test of whether or not you know Jesus is this: Can anyone else tell by your words and your deeds that you are a Christ Follower? You see, the proof of the difference between a bystander and a Christ Follower is whether or not you are ready and willing to stand up for Jesus, to take your stand for him and trust him enough to follow where he leads. My friends, will you live as a Christ Follower? I invite you to make a start on that now, whether or not you have made a final decision in your life to follow Jesus, will you at least stand and join me now? Every journey, even a spiritual journey starts with this first step.

Song: I live to know you more

*Standing in your presence, Lord my heart and life are changed
Just to love you and to live to see your beauty and your grace
Heaven and earth cry out your name,
Nations rise up and see your face
And your kingdom is established as I live to know you more
Now I will never be the same,
Spirit of God, my life you've changed
And I'll forever sing your praise ... I live to know you Lord*

*You've called me, I will follow your will for me I'm sure
Let your heart beat, be my heart's cry
Let me live to serve your call
Now I will never be the same,
Spirit of God, my life you've changed
And I'll forever sing your praise ... I live to know you Lord*

Reading: Deuteronomy 31:10-12

Moses commanded them: "Every seventh year ... when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God, you shall read this law before all the people in their hearing. Assemble them all, men, women, and children, as well as the visitors residing in your towns, so that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God and to observe diligently all the words of this law ..."

Reading: Joshua 24:1,14-17, 19-24

Narrator: So Joshua summoned all the people of Israel ... along with their elders, leaders, judges, and officers. They came and presented themselves to God. And he spoke to the people ...

Joshua: "So honor the Lord and serve him wholeheartedly. Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshiped ... Serve the Lord alone. But if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, then choose today whom you will serve ... Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served? Or will it be the gods of those in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord."

Narrator: The people replied,

People: "We would never forsake the Lord and worship other gods. For the Lord ... performed mighty miracles before our very eyes and he has preserved us."

Narrator: Then Joshua said to the people,

Joshua: "You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy and jealous God ... If you forsake the Lord and serve other gods, he will turn against you and destroy you, even though he has been so good to you."

Narrator: But the people answered Joshua, saying,

People: "No, we are determined to serve the Lord!"

Joshua: "You are accountable for this decision. You have chosen to serve the Lord."

People: "Yes, we are accountable."

Joshua: "All right then. Destroy the idols among you, and turn your hearts to the Lord, the God ..."

Narrator: The people said to Joshua,

People: "We will serve the Lord our God. We will obey him alone."

(NLT)

Reflection: Moses had decreed that the people should take a moment to gather together, once every seven years, and renew their commitment to God. So we're about three years late in doing this I suppose, for here we are in this moment, in the tenth year of this church, and I am asking you to keep the tradition that is some 3000 years old. But regardless of the date, the time is right, the time is always right, but today especially, to take a moment and stand up for what we believe in. What comes next is a chance for any and all of you to join as a community of faith in this place and renew the promises that are at the heart of what it means to be a Christ Follower. These are the same questions we ask of each person who steps forward to be baptized. They are not vows you take once in life and forget, for here is what it means to stand up for Jesus and to follow in his ways.

In a few minutes, after I have asked you to make this very public commitment to Jesus, we will give you a chance to get up and follow Jesus. Actually we'll give you four chances to follow in different ways. You can choose any one of these, or mix and match or choose to participate in all of them. But know this, God knows your heart, and will not be impressed if you choose to participate in order to impress others. This is a moment to strip away any pretenses to religion, any rituals without meaning. This is a moment in time to be yourself before God, as a seeker, a sinner and a would be saint. So:

☐ you may come forward and receive communion. In that bread and wine we not only remember what Christ has done, we experience his presence.

☐ you may come forward to the platform, one at a time, and kneel before God in prayer and offer him your life. If you choose to do that I will lay my hands on you and pray for you to be refreshed and renewed by the Holy Spirit that you may live for Jesus with all your heart and mind and soul. Only do not take this step lightly, but reverently, expectantly, knowing that God will draw close to those who draw close to him.

☐ you may return to the back of the church and ask for prayers from our trained Prayer Teams. They will pray for you to be healed of anything that may be holding you back from committing your life to Christ, or help you and comfort you if you are facing challenges in your life right now.

☐ or you may stay where you are, standing or sitting, singing or praying to yourself, or watching and waiting for God. The music and the prayers and the multimedias will give you an extended time to worship God, which means to open yourself up to God and ask to experience his presence in a new way.

My friends, how you choose to follow is up to you. Only I ask you to choose some way to get up and get going, and not be only a bystander. And know that the steps you take today in response to God's invitation bring you closer to him for this life and for the life in the world to come.

A Recommitment Liturgy

There is only One Lord, One Faith,
One Baptism
and there is only One God and Father,
who is over us all and in us all, living through us all.

Ephesians 4:5-6 (NLT)

Please note: *We baptize all those who decide they want to accept Jesus as their forgiver and follow him as their leader. If you have already been baptized, for instance as a child, you do not need to be baptized again as an adult. It's OK: God got it right the first time ... Now you can get it right for yourself by committing yourself to following God today.*

Sponsor *I present this community of the faithful, who are the children of God in this place, to stand before God and commit themselves to him in heart and mind, in soul and strength.*

Pastor *Choose this day whom you shall serve, and if you choose to serve the Lord then put away from you any other gods and turn your hearts to the Lord.*

*For those who wish to commit themselves to God today,
whether or not you wish to come forward for individual
prayers later in the service ...*

Pastor Do you desire to commit yourself to God on this day and in this place?

People I do.

Pastor Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?

Answer I renounce them.

Pastor Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?

Answer I renounce them.

Pastor Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

Answer I renounce them.

Pastor Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior?

Answer I do.

Pastor Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?

Answer I do.

Pastor Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?

Answer I do.

Pastor Do you believe in God the Father?

People I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Pastor Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?
People I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Pastor Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

People I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Pastor Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and prayers?

People I will, with God's help.

Pastor Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People I will, with God's help.

Pastor Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People I will, with God's help.

Pastor Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People I will, with God's help.

Pastor Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?

People I will, with God's help.

Pastor Then choose this day to serve the Lord your God and turn your hearts to him.

People Amen. We will serve the Lord our God, and we will obey him only.

Pastor Grant, O Lord, that all who are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ your Son may live in the power of his resurrection; who lives and reigns now and for ever.

People Amen.

Pastor And let us pray for those not yet ready to commit themselves to the Lord on this day, and for all who have wandered from God or who live guided solely by their own desires:

Pastor Merciful God, creator of all the peoples of the earth and lover of souls: Have compassion on all who do not know you as you are revealed in your Son Jesus Christ; let your Gospel be preached with grace and power to those who have not heard it, turn the hearts of those who resist it, and bring home all those who have wandered away, that there may be one family of God, united in purpose and in love by your son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.