

Sermon AMC- Life is not a Broken Motorcycle

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:13-25

Sunday, April 30, 2017

Theme: Being Holy and set-apart as preparation for life to come

There is a question I like to ask people, when I have to get to know them and there is not much time. And the question is this. What is your metaphor for life? You see for Shakespeare, life was like a play where each person is an individual actor, who comes in, plays their role and then exits the scene when their life is over. Beautifully put isn't it? Now you don't have to be Shakespeare or a big philosopher to have a metaphor for life. I believe whether we articulate it or not we all live our lives based on the metaphor we carry in our heads. If we have a good metaphor our lives will have meaning, if we carry a faulty metaphor we waste our lives. So I believe it is very important to get our metaphor right.

In 1974, a fellow by the name of Robert Pirsig, published a book by a strange title, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. This was in the news this past week because Robert Pirsig passed away last Monday. I don't know if any of you are familiar with this book, but it was on my radar for a long time. Now in this book Pirsig takes a 17 day motorcycle journey from Minnesota to Northern California with his son. For a part of this journey he is also accompanied by his friend John Sutherland. Now in this book, Pirsig has an interesting metaphor for life. To him life is like a motorcycle journey. And there are two ways you can approach this journey. One is the Zen way. The Zen way is purely about enjoying and being in the moment. And being in the moment is about allowing yourself to become fully aware of what that moment holds, your feelings, emotions and the effect the environment is having on you. So for example as you ride your bike, you are fully focused on how the wind feels on your cheek and the pleasure that the roar of the engine gives you and the freedom of being on the road. Now, there is another way of taking a bike journey. Pirsig calls this the classical approach, but for

our purposes I will call it the practical approach. In the practical approach you are thinking in your mind about how much fuel you have and how long till you have to pull in to a gas station, you are checking to see if the sound your engine is making is indicating some sort of malfunction and if so trying to figure out what the problem is. So you rack your brain and dirty your hands till you find a solution to keep your bike running again. This is great because it keeps the bike running. But the problem is with this approach your mind was somewhere else and you missed the many experiences along the way. On the other hand if you are so much into the Zen, you may not notice when something goes wrong and have no idea how to fix the problem. In that way your journey becomes difficult to complete. So the Zen approach is great for the moment but may not enable you to complete the journey. The practical approach will let you complete the journey efficiently, but you might miss the joy of the road which is the whole point of taking the bike ride in the first place. This is the dilemma if you view, life as a bike ride. Now, you may be asking how to you solve this dilemma? Is there a way out? Is the metaphor Persig is using itself the problem? That is what I think it is.

To figure this out, I want to put this question to you. What is the metaphor for life that we are being presented by the Apostle Peter in the passage we read today?

Now when you examine this passage, the first thing that strikes you is that Apostle Peter is painting a picture here about two worlds. There is the present world and then there is an eternal world. The present world he says is a world where everything is temporary. In verse 24 he says, in this present world, "People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades." And in this temporary world Peter says, people lead and pass on empty meaningless lives. Of course King Solomon completely attests to this meaningless of life, no matter which aspect of life you are looking at.

The next thing that jumps at you in our passage is that there are these people who are “born again”. They are “temporary residents” in this “temporary world”. And is these born again people don’t simply inherit the meaningless life from your parents but have quite a different sort of life. This was made possible because God in his mercy reached down and saved these people from this life of meaninglessness by paying an incredible ransom. The precious blood of Christ. As a result, these “born again” folks will not be temporary like grass but eternal. Verse 23 is very clear to these people. It says “your new life will last forever”. But having an eternal life comes with some requirements. Apostle Peter says, because you guys now have an eternal life, you have to now live a Holy life. There is no way around it as God who gave you this eternal life is Holy and you have to be Holy like your God.

So what does it mean to be Holy. So our passage I think points to four things

Being Holy means living in reverent fear of Him. What is reverent fear? Well, fear is one of the most basic emotions that drive us as human beings. It is because of fear that we live in houses with doors and locks. It is because of fear that most of us don’t mess with cops or go into bad neighborhoods in the dark. It is because of fear that nations build armies and fear has resulted in 300 million guns placed in individual homes in the US. Now part of being Holy is completely rewiring the brain so as to rewire our fears. So a Holy person does not fear other people because we see basic limits on what another human being can do to harm us since we are eternal. Ps 118:6 says, “the Lord is for me, I will not fear. What can man do to me?”. So for someone who is born again, their basic fear of other human beings is minimized. Instead born again people have a kind of fear that others don’t have, it is a reverent fear of God. God’s children know that their heavenly Father is the most awesome being in the universe. Now verse 17 says that you have to be aware that this awesome heavenly Father of ours does not play partiality games. He will judge and reward his children according to the actions they have carried

out as temporary residents in this present world. So when you have a reverent fear you want to do things that please our heavenly Father and you want to avoid at all costs the things that would displease our Heavenly father. Very closely tied to reverent fear are two other traits, obedience and self-control. You see when you see yourself as a servant, you realize that it is not your will but your masters will that is important and it has to be that way no matter how you feel about it.

Imagine you went to a restaurant and ordered some chicken soup. Now the waiter takes the order and when the soup is ready, it looks really good and is overcome by a sudden urge to have some. Do you think it is ok for the waiter to keep you waiting while he or she takes the soup to another table and has their fill first? Now that kind of behavior would never be acceptable in a restaurant and would get the waiter fired immediately. You know why? Because in that situation the customer is the master and the waiter is the servant. When the soup arrives it does not matter what the waiter feels like eating, it only matters that the soup is delivered to the customer. It takes both obedience and self-control to do the job faithfully. If we apply this to our relationship with God, it becomes very clear where we stand. We, the group of “born again” believers are God’s servants. Now before we became God’s servants apostle Peter says, “In the old days, you did not know any better”, But now you know, so out of reverent fear, seek to obey, exercising great self-control. When you obey God and exercise self-control, that is the mark of “holiness”.

There is another aspect of Holiness that our passage talks about.

Holy people also have a mind prepared for action. What does this mean? Well, lets move it back to our world for a second. If you have a customer seated at the table, but the waitress is taking a nap and the customer is unattended to, it just does not work right? So if you are God’s servant, you have to be prepared at all times for what God might be expecting you to do. Let me give you an example. This week a colleague of

mine was meeting a Muslim faculty member who had recently moved into town. Now, they had a very rich conversation and their discussions went to spiritual things and even to Jesus Christ. Now while they were taking a walk around the restaurant, my colleague was approached by a homeless woman who was asking him for some money. Now my colleague offered to take her to the grocery store and buy her some food. After she left, the Iranian professor told my colleague that he was wondering how is respond to the homeless woman. He got to see God's love in action and that was God's purpose at that moment which his servant accomplished well. This only worked because my colleague had a mind prepared for action. A Holy person is servant of God who has their mind always prepared to act.

Finally, a Holy person is one who shows sincere love to fellow siblings in Christ. This is not as easy as it sounds. There are 26 passages in the New testament exhorting you to love one another. You may be surprised to know that most of these passages including verse 22 from our 1 Peter section are referring specifically to loving fellow believers. Now you may say that sounds very narrow and communal. Well, just to clarify there are plenty of passages that make clear that we have to love everybody including your enemies. But the thing is, if you want to love someone, they have to have some proximity to you. And believers have an access to your emotional world that nonbelievers don't have because they function on a different wavelength. On the other hand there is a flip side to proximity. The closer someone is to you the more they have the capacity to hurt you. It is to people around us that we have petty jealousies and rivalries. We are seldom jealous of people at a distance from us even if they have much more than us. This is why, it is a far bigger challenge to love those around. Jesus Christ himself was very specific about this. In John 13:35 he said, 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another." A mark of Holiness is how we love our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Four characteristics of holiness in our passage, a reverent fear of God, a desire to obey even if it takes a lot of self-control, a mind ready to serve God at all times and a sincere love for other disciples.

So let me ask you this. What is the life metaphor you see portrayed in our passage today. Here is what I believe is Apostle Peter's implied metaphor for life. Because we live a two part life, a first temporary part and then an eternal part in the physical presence of a Holy God, the life we lead now can be seen as a sort of rehearsal for the life to come. We rehearse living holy lives today in anticipation of the big day when Christ returns and the new eternal portion of our life begins. At that point there will only be holy people in the presence of a Holy God. So this is our one and only chance to practice Holiness for that big day. And you know what else, with Apostle Peter's life metaphor there is no practical versus beauty dilemma. When you are living a Holy life every practical aspect of life, whether it is cleaning the floors or shopping at the grocery store is something that is wrapped in purpose. It is also wrapped in worship. You have heard the phrase work is worship. Now I say, all work is not worship, but work that is filled with purpose and has kingdom implications is worship. That kind of work is both practical and beautiful. When you are working for God, you are moving the needle forward on God's agenda and you are also free to live in the moment fully aware of God's presence around you. You don't have to make a choice between the practical and the beautiful when you let Jesus Christ take the steering wheel or even your motorcycle handle bars. Because in the life to come in the full presence of God, there is no distinction. Holiness is both practical and beautiful at the same time. So get all the practice you can. You are going to need it one day. Let us pray.