

Is My Soul Really Worth it?

A sermon by the Rev. Susan Bek
Lent 5, Year B ☩ John 12:20 – 33; Matthew 6:1- 33
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Ventura
March 18, 2018

Today is the fifth Sunday, the last regular Sunday, in Lent. Next week is Palm Sunday and the Sunday after that is Easter. Our time in Lent is nearly over. So, today we are going to do a spiritual checkup. We're going to check in on our lives and see if we are using the precious time that we have been given in this world, wisely. We'll also take a look at the gospel lesson for today and end by answering this important question, "You sacrificed so much for me; Lord, is my soul really worth it?"

SPIRITUAL CHECKUP

In the gospel of Matthew, at the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks to the crowds and begins to teach them. As we read these words, he begins to teach us as well. First, he offers the Beatitudes, then tells them, and by extension tells us, they we are salt and light. He says that he came not to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them and to bring new understanding. He taught about murder, adultery, and divorce. He changed the old "eye for an eye" understanding by telling them to turn the other cheek and to surprise anyone who makes unreasonable demands of you, by giving even more than they demanded. He said we need to love our enemies, give to the needy, and he taught them, and us, how to pray.

He also said this,

“Therefore I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”¹ (Matthew 6:25-33)

This is where I want to start our spiritual checkup. With these words of Jesus as background and with the directive, “seek first the kingdom of heaven, and all shall be added.”

We are not earthly beings, though we seem like it. We are spiritual beings on an earthly pilgrimage. The world is full of distractions that draw us away from our spiritual goals. The earthly things always seem more immediate, more important, and so it is tempting to focus on them first.

We have the best of intentions! We look forward to getting around to spending more time in prayer, reading more scripture, serving the world more often. But first things first, the world demands.

Jesus teaches something different. Again, Jesus tells us that the ways of the world are backwards, upside down. The search for God needs to be first not last.

So here is your spiritual checkup. It involves asking yourself 3 important questions and accepting one challenge:

Question 1. Bearing in mind this Scripture, ask yourself, “Am I seeking God first?”

Question 2. Remembering that without God we are nothing but dust, ask yourself, “Am I living my life in a way that honors the gifts God has given me?”

Question 3. considering your answers to the first 2 questions, ask yourself, “what changes do I need to make so that I can my focus will be on God first?”

It may not seem possible to make time for anything more in your life. But, with God, all things are possible!

Imagine you have in front of you a large empty jar and 2 big bowls; one filled with sand, and one filled with rocks. Let’s say the jar represents the time you have left in your life. The sand represents all the earthly things that take up so much of your time and attention, and the rocks represent all the truly important things you you’d like to accomplish in your life.

If you fill your jar first with sand, it will be very difficult to fit many rocks in. But if you begin with the rocks, start with all the most important things first, then you can pour the sand around them and let it fill in the spaces that are available so that, in the end, your most important things are accomplished and many of the less important get done as well.

I said there would be a challenge as well, and this is it: Prepare, this week, for the end of your life. We hope and pray that your final days are still a long way off, but you need to make your wishes known because it's one of the best gifts that you can leave to your friends and family. They will take great comfort in knowing, when the time comes, they are acting in accordance with what you would have wanted.

Be sure your will is in order. Make a list of where all your important documents are, and include all your passwords. We have resources to help you plan for your memorial service and write your obituary. If you've already done these things, this is a good week to review them and make any changes necessary to update your wishes.

THIS MORNING'S GOSPEL LESSON

Jesus speaks in this morning's gospel lesson with words that we are told, "Indicate what sort of death he was to die." He reveals not only how he will die, but for what purpose. He will die in order to glorify the Father. He will lay down his life in order that great fruit may be born. The ruler of the earth will be driven out,

but he will also be lifted up from the earth and, in the end, will draw all people to himself.

Jesus described all this, in response to being told by Philip and Andrew that some foreigners had come and said, “Sir we wish to see Jesus.”

Coming up next Sunday, we will begin our journey through Holy Week. You will be offered lots of opportunities to “see” Jesus and come to know the depth of his love for you.

ANSWERING AN IMPORTANT QUESTION

Throughout Lent some of us have been gathering on Friday evenings to walk the Stations of the Cross. Through various perspectives, and using various prayers, we have seen Jesus walk the path from the time when he was condemned through fourteen different stations, or experiences, on the road to his crucifixion and burial. This last week, one of the lines we spoke together, as we remembered Jesus being nailed to the cross, was this,

“My God, I look at you and think; is my soul worth this much?”

That’s an important question for us to consider in the coming weeks. As we remember all that was suffered, all that was done for us, all that was sacrificed, we need to remember that it never would’ve happened if God thought we weren’t worth it.

To the question, “Lord, is my soul really worth this much?” The creator of the universe, the Holy One who stooped down to gather the dust of the earth and

breathe life into it so that you and I could have our being, responds with a resounding, “YES!”

We are worth this much to Jesus! You are worth this much to God!

I hope you'll join us for Holy Week to learn and experience the depth of love God has for you. You're invited to bring your friends and neighbors to come celebrate with us this Easter as we sing, and pray, and give thanks, and rejoice in the fact that God loves us so much!

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