

## The Sermon

*May the True Word  
Move Swiftly from the Ear to the Heart  
And the Heart to the World around us all.  
Amen*

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Today, I want to speak to you about Priests and Parishioners; about Professors and Plumbers; about Bishops and Donkeys. I want to draw upon the New Testament and Gospel readings for today, and how they *resonate* with the same message; that life will deal all of us life's challenges in abundance – difficult situations and difficult people - and that our deliverance from these challenges will not be found in our own gifts and abilities, our admiration for wealth, our social status nor through any ability to judge the individuals involved. Rather, deliverance will be realized if we avoid the rash judgment, and to walk with God as the one and only judge and redeemer.

Have you ever been confronted by a situation that, on first glance appeared to be either horrifying, or perhaps the opposite – delightful – only later to realize that you had profoundly mis-read the event for what it truly was? Similarly, have you ever found yourself making those 'best laid plans of mice and men' – only to see the solution play itself out in a way that was entirely unanticipated? Sometimes it seems that our stumble through life is comprised of a steady stream of misapprehensions where, what we anticipate to be the course and outcome, turns out to be quite wrong.

### **[Story of the Wise Farmer and the Donkey]**

The moral of this story is perhaps, don't pre-judge the situation; trust in the providence of God, shake the dirt of your back, and take the next step up toward the light and liberation that beckons you.

In the Gospel for today, Matthew Ch 6 gives witness to Jesus' teaching on several themes. Here we find how to pray to the Father (the Lord's Prayer), how to fast in a way that pays genuine homage to God. Here too we find that the treasures of this

life will not be measured in material things, but rather will be found in the love of God – cradled, and in turn projected by a faithful heart. Central to today’s lesson, Jesus teaches that we are to refrain from the practice of the Pharisees, who were quick to judge others among the Jews in a way that considered themselves above all judgment. Jesus teaches that this not the path for us; it is not the path that God would have us tread.

On this theme of judgment, Paul writes in the Epistle for today how, even when he’s content that he has committed no outstanding wrong to others, he refrains from the associated judgment, stating:

*“...I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.”* [1Cor 4:4].

It seems to me that, as the body of the Church and servants of the Lord, we sometimes engage in evaluating ourselves and our understanding of the Church with different criteria than Paul would have used, as outlined in his epistle here. Servants of God are often evaluated according to such measures as career success, those who are most influential, perhaps those who are most gifted and those who are most effective in their Gospel ministry. Perhaps their ministry is weighed, and either found wanting or found valued by the fact of the membership of the church - how many people there are in the pews, the attendance at worship meetings. Perhaps they are weighed on the academic ability that they have, the honorary degrees that they have, the degrees that they've earned ... or the degrees that they've bought. Whether they’ve written a book, written an essay, or an article, or a pamphlet, or a tract; whether they’ve been invited along to any of the great conventions and conferences Christendom.

Too often this is the way that the service of God within the ministers of God are weighed and evaluated. But when I ponder today’s readings – these five short verses that we have witnessed together this morning – it seems to me that to evaluate God's servants in this way would likely be dishonourable and not at all pleasing to God Almighty. I am convinced that God is calling us to recognize New Testament gifts within a New Testament people and its ministers – in each and every one of us as the body of the Church - as the Royal Priesthood of God.

**[Story of Rev. Charles Parsons & Louis Schuyler; *The Martyrs of Memphis*;  
August 1878]**

We are to recognize the gifts that men and women have been given and in turn bring to the Church in the name of Jesus Christ, whatever that spiritual gift may be. We are asked to recognize them - but we are to never to fall into the error of exalting the man or woman who brings them.

In today's Epistle, Paul is asking us to tread the middle ground of biblical balance; he asks us not to exalt men & women, nor to belittle those who speak from the gifts of God! We are not to judge one another. His refrain for us would include not to worship preachers, or theologians, or evangelists or even Bishops; but on the other side of the coin we are not to go home on a Sunday evening and enjoy roast preacher for dinner! The sharing of gifts and to be accountable as one who follows Christ is not akin to some kind of performance, some television-like activity where we're all watching and holding up our marks out of 10.

Pauls tells us that to be the ministers of Christ we are to honour the responsibilities that God has given to us. There are three paths by which each of us can honour those responsibilities; the first is to be directed by the hand of God; the second is to declare the mysteries of God; and the third is to discharge faithful service to God. In doing so we'll find that we're not only to be refraining from judging the servants of God within the church, but that the servants of God – you and me – are to refrain from judging ourselves or the content of a faithful heart among us. So, we are asked not to exalt the person, but do regard in every one of us the gifts of God!

What God seeks in this age are those servants whom the Lord will find *doing* rather than *watching* the work of His Church. We're to be open and receptive to the hand of God, to declare the mysteries of Scripture, and discharge faithful service to His Church. We're to have a right attitude toward ourselves. And in doing this we have no jurisdiction to judge the things that are unseen - that is, the motivation and the service of the servants of Christ. In all that we do, if offered in the service of God from the gifts he has given us, it is good in His sight – and none other than God will be the judge that it is so.

What commendation will each of us have before God, on our final day and at our final breath? I pray that, on that day, none of us will be ashamed at having stood up for God. I pray that it will be said of everyone gathered here today, that every person will have given his or her due praise of the Triune God.

Be certain of this; what each of us does in life today, has the potential to echo for all eternity.

Amen.

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