

The Collect.

O LORD, from whom all good things do come; Grant to us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that are good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

O Lord our Heavenly Father, we give you special thanks this day for our mothers. Those who are still with us and those who have died. We remember them all to you today for the children that they have unselfishly born, for the families that they have tirelessly upholden and for their work and service to the Church of God and to this great nation. We pray that you would bless the mothers of this congregation and all the mother's of this good country with joy and peace and every blessing for their work of labor and love and obedience, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Epistle: James 1:22-27

BE ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

The Gospel: John 16: 23-33

VERILY, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour comes, yea, is now come, that you shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

In Him

As I have thought about the conversion of St. John, it has seemed to me to one of the most dramatic conversions ever recorded. In the New Testament we see a young man, a proud Jew, willing to call down fire upon a Samaritan village in Jesus' name, humanistically clinging to the Lord's *physical* presence – then we see him, somehow transformed into a very powerful witness to an all encompassing theology and spirituality that the world is, even now, just beginning to understand its full implication.

I believe that John, like Matthew, had undergone a dramatic conversion to the theology of St. Paul. You may remember that I believe that John's Gospel is written in Ephesus while Paul is in prison and I believe that it is written primarily to the Church of Corinth, which is in the process of disintegration at the time of John's writing. I think that God has purposely orchestrated a cast of characters that the OT has already foreshadowed. Paul is like Moses, leading an exodus; Timothy is like Joshua, leading the people into the Sabbath Rest of the promised land. One day during my research I wondered – where is Caleb? And then I realized suddenly one day – John must be Caleb.

We have already said that Matthew has written a Gospel that can find no logical resolution except in the theology of Paul. But John's Gospel too very broadly follows the structure of Matthew's Gospel, as we have mentioned elsewhere in our sermons, John's Gospel is everywhere filled with words and phrases – and the priorities - of Paul.

Matthew places particular emphasis upon a kind of super-righteousness that surpasses anything that we have heard about under the Mosaic law. And the full explanation of this righteousness and how to achieve it is found only in Pauline theology. But John has written a Gospel which speaks about a *relationship* with the risen Christ that can also only be understood within the framework of Pauline spirituality.

For Paul, to be a Christian does not mean merely agreeing to a list of propositions *about* God, nor does it mean to follow a new set of religious rules that will reconcile us to God, nor does it mean to exhibit a list of certain religious *behaviors* or have certain mystical experiences. The first is deism, the second is legalism and the third and fourth will inevitably end in hypocrisy or heresy. For Paul, to be a Christian is to first die to the elemental principles of this world – and then to begin a new life – all over again – *in Christ*.

This is why John's Last Supper table talk that we have been looking at for the last two weeks is so far ahead of its time. Because John is remembering all the things that Jesus had said about what will happen after his resurrection. Last Sunday we spoke about how he will come to us and manifest himself directly to us and not to the world, and how the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost will *dwell* in us. And this is precisely what Paul is saying. It is about a new kind of conscious relationship with the living God, through the indwelling of his Son, Jesus Christ, through and by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus tried to tell the Apostles all this while he was with them, but they didn't understand. Because this whole project of spirituality sounded as strange to the Apostles' ears as the Christology of John's Gospel has sounded to modern ears.

Most scholars dismiss the Gospel of John for precisely this reason. They claim that John is putting into the mouth of Jesus his own made-up cosmic theology. But John is not making this up. His close relationship to Matthew and Paul proves this. And this is why Jesus says: *These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time comes, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father.* The truth is that the Apostles – by their own admission, hadn't heard a spiritual word that Jesus had said. And modern scholarship is simply repeating this pattern. And when I think of all the sermons that I have heard over the years as a layman, I don't remember a single one of them which dwelt on the Christology or the spiritual formation that is presented in John's Gospel. Or his epistle for that matter.

I believe that one of the main ideas that John is trying to present in his Gospel is that Christ's three year historical ministry is just the beginning. I believe that John is saying that the second stage of divine revelation will begin immediately *after* the ascension. And we should expect it. We should look for it. It will not happen by accident. It will not happen humanistically, as modern scholars suppose. It will happen by divine design. Scripture is of divine origin.

The first stage of the Gospel, which has unfolded in what had been called 'the last generation', is that Christ is rejected and is crucified. He is spat upon. He is beaten. He is scourged. He is humiliated. Towards the end of the Gospel narratives, the disciples stumble ignorantly into what they think is the conclusion of a tragedy. But they are wrong. The story of Christ is not a tragedy. The Gospels come to an abrupt conclusion, just as the second stage begins - the resurrection and the exaltation of Christ. If the longer ending of Mark is discarded, he hasn't any resurrection appearances at all. Just surprise and fear. The end. The writers of the Gospels are doing this on purpose.

And this is yet another reason why I have so much confidence in the New Testament authors. If it had been *me* writing the story of Christ, I would have been tempted to portray myself as having known all along that the resurrection would be the final outcome – that Jesus would win the argument in the end. That the story would have a surprise ending of complete vindication. But the authors of our Gospels do not do this. They allow the full weight of their unbelief to come down upon their own heads. They make no attempt to evade the certain ridicule of their readers. Paul does this same thing in telling his story. After he tells his story to the crowd after he is arrested, the people say – this man is not fit to live!

Of course, the Gospels are not a tragedy - at all. The world had played right into the hands of God himself. The Jewish establishment had played right into the hands of God. And the authors of the Gospels know this. Judas had played right into the hands of God. And so does the ignorant unbelief of the Apostles themselves. The Gospels are just the beginning, these authors are saying. Christ still has much to say. He told John that he did. *I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.* (Joh 16:12) He spoke to Paul, he spoke to Peter and John and Stephen and Matthew and Timothy and Jude. All *after* the Ascension. At the ascension, the second stage surely begins in earnest.

Because shortly after the ascension, St. Paul is called to preach a Gospel that was not very well understood by even the original 12 Apostles. And the writings of St. Paul have thence formed the foundational basis of nearly 2000 years of Christendom. Paul's Gospel has persuaded the brightest of minds and converted the most corrupted souls of this world. And this was the same man that had previously persecuted and lay waste to the very same Church of God. And what is the Pauline Gospel about? It is about being crucified with Christ. It is about being resurrected with Christ. It is about living a new life – from now to Judgment – in Christ. Let me repeat that. We live in Christ.

This is a radical idea. It's no wonder that Jesus used parabolic talk to describe it. Jesus says in John: *Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.* Paul says: *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* (2Co 5:17) And this doesn't just apply to our individual relationship with Christ – but also in our fellowship together as believers: *So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.* (Ro 12:5) This is one of the things that makes St. Timothy so unique. We are preaching this spirituality and we are trying to practice it.

This is a spirituality that goes far, far beyond mere intellectualism or legalism or behaviorism – or even mysticism. This is not a religion just of the mind. Or even just of the heart. It is a religion of the entire man. And this is why, I think, so late in John's last supper we hear Jesus say: *I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.* (Joh 16:12) The Apostles set the stage for the ongoing revelation of Christ throughout the apostolic age. In the Gospels we have Christ speaking in parables and proverbs, because that's all the Apostles can bear when they first hear the Gospel. That's all anyone can bear. Even today, many in the Church turn away from this spirituality the moment they hear about it. And they preach about systematic theology or the Old Testament or the Social Gospel. Anything but this spirituality.

Because once we allow ourselves to be indwelt by Jesus Christ he will begin the process of overcoming the world in us. And we are like Augustine: *Lord, Give me chastity and continence, but not yet.* Jesus is not only overcoming the world in us; he is overcoming the worldliness in us. We all know that it is there. And it is very hard to part with it. But we can take none of our worldliness into heaven. As we have mentioned before: because he is in us, we have become the temples of the living God. And for the rest of our lives, he will be cleansing his temple.

This is how we are going to overcome the world. In Him. Just as Christ has overcome the world. We will overcome the world by the faith that is in us. By the hope that is in us. By the love that is in us. Because our faith and our hope and our love is Jesus Christ our Lord. We are in him and he is in us. And through him we will overcome the world. – *Amen*.