

Trinity 11 2015 St Timothy

The Collect: O GOD, who declarest thy almighty power chiefly* in showing mercy and pity; Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Epistle 1 Cor. 15: 1-11: BRETHREN, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.

The Gospel. St. Luke 18:9-14

JESUS spoke this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Towards a New Soteriology- Part 1

I want to warn you from the beginning that this will be a two-part sermon. We see by our Gospel lesson this morning that the religious establishment had completely misinterpreted the essence of spirituality and idea of justification. The parable that Jesus told about the publican being justified and the Pharisee remaining unjustified - in his pride and arrogance must have rocked the religious establishment. Just as when Jesus stood in front of them all and said: 'you don't know the Scriptures. And you don't know the power of God.'

I would assert that our Church has also come to that place too. I know that these are strong words, but it is true. It is true that we need renewal, reformation and renaissance. We have talked about the abysmal state of the Church often enough. But why is the Church in such an abysmal state? I believe that we stand in the same place as the Sanhedrin of Christ's time. And that we don't understand the Scriptures. And we don't understand the power of God.

And we are in good company. Because the Apostles didn't know either. This is why Jesus has to *physically* open the Scriptures to the disciples on the road to Emmaus and explain to them why it was necessary that Christ must die. Because it wasn't obvious. And there is plenty of evidence in the New Testament that this incomprehension about the person and work of Christ was just the beginning.

And that because of the nature of the beast (pardon the pun) this problem of incomprehension about the person and work of Christ will continue until he returns again. And why is this? The short answer is that Satan is constantly trying to obfuscate the central idea of the New Testament. For that matter, he is trying to obfuscate the central idea of all the Holy Scriptures that were ever written since the foundation of the world. Because the central idea of all these Scriptures; the central idea of all history; the central idea of all knowledge; the central idea of our own being - is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you a demonstration of how this works. In our epistle passage this morning, Paul repeats some fairly well-known creedal elements that we often confess: *that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.* But why do we confess these things? Imagine that you are an incoming theology student to St. Andrews. Even better, imagine that you are a professor at any Bible college in the land and you were asked one question: 'where, in the scriptures, does it say that Christ died for our sins.' 'Where in the Scriptures does it say that Christ must be buried and rise again the third day?' Do you know?

I would assert that the Church, generally speaking, cannot well articulate and answer here. And I find this profoundly disturbing. Because the person and work of Christ is absolutely central to our Gospel. It is absolutely central to our Salvation. Indeed the study of salvation - and how Christ achieves this salvation is called soteriology. Which means: the science of salvation.

The fact that the Church cannot easily answer this question is the main reason that I believe that we need a new soteriology. We need a new soteriology not only because of the nagging ambiguities and

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inconsistencies of our present soteriology, but because our present soteriology is very inconsistent with the actual *language* of the New Testament. And this comes very close to what Jesus says to the religious establishment of his day. He actually said two things 1) you don't know the Scriptures and 2) you have generated a paradosis that actually substitutes your man-made theories for the revelation of God. Strong words.

For example, our Church often speaks of Christ's "atonement" and "substitutionary sacrifice." And yet the words "atonement" and "sacrifice" are not used in the NT. "Atonement" is once used in the AV but this is a clear mistranslation of St. Paul.¹ Also, when the word "sacrifice" (θυσια) is used in the NT, it is never used in the sense of substitution (like a sacrifice fly in baseball). It is only in Hebrews, which is very late in the community conversation of the apostles, that we get anything even remotely close to a bloody substitutionary sacrifice: *For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.* (Heb 9:26) But here again, we must not bring our own preconceived ideas to this sentence. We are like Pavlov's dog; when we hear "sacrifice" we think "substitute." "Sacrifice" in the ancient world did not mean substitute. Not in Greece, not in Rome, not in Persia and not even in Judaism.

So where are we getting this idea of substitutionary sacrifice? There is Moses. Moses offers himself as a substitute for the people: *And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.* (EX 32:31-32) But God rejects this offer and says: *Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.*(v33). If this principle was true then, why isn't true now concerning the person and work of Christ? Have the rules changed? How is it that the rules have changed and now the just substitutes himself for the unjust? This seems not in accordance with the Scriptures.

We can also think of the example of a very clear sacrifice in the Hellenic world as Socrates willingly offers his life (and work) for the redemption of his fellow Athenians. But here we have a general, Christian theological principle that runs throughout the human experience - in which the just *suffers* for the unjust. We do it to make marriages work, we do it to make political freedom work (the honorable soldier dying for the dishonorable, ungrateful citizen) and we do it to make our communities work.

No one questions whether or not this is fair. This kind of sacrifice is simply the *essence* of service and love. We sacrifice our lives for the good of our marriages, the good of our children, the good of our communities and the good of our church. "Substitution" does not describe what we are doing. It doesn't describe what Socrates was doing. Nor does this describe what Christ is doing.

But there is an even larger problem that requires a new soteriology. The larger problem is that the idea of "penal substitution" a very popular idea since the Reformation, derives from a "mythical" idea of Creation. And this mythical idea of creation stands in stark contrast to the Scriptural theology of creation. This mythical view assumes that God created the universe in seven 24 hour periods, for example. God then put a naïve man and naïve woman in a paradisaal garden upon earth and then

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began to have sweet fellowship with them. Adam and Eve were happy, God was happy and the whole universe was in moral equilibrium and equanimity, free from pain, dissolution, or death.

But then God swings open the gate into the garden and allows a deeply disturbed, dysfunctional and diabolical morally perverted serpent to begin a very sophisticated argument that beguiles Eve to indulge in some serious rationalization about the very intent and meaning of God's commandments. She is deceived.

And as a result, the entire creation begins to implode. Plants and animals began to die, parasites begin to emerge – it was a mess. More importantly, God became extremely angry. Having discovered this emergent moral imperfection in Eve and her husband, that appears only under the duress of a very sophisticated serpentine sophistry, God would have stormed into his workshop and smashed the entire shop to pieces and destroyed every pot that had been made there.

But then, before this could happen, God's only begotten son stays his terrible swift wrecking ball and utters his fateful proposition. 'Do not destroy your creation; take your anger out on me. Destroy me in death and humiliation. Would that make things right for you?' Now I'm not going to say where this theology is coming from. I'm just going to continue stating it in the ordinary terms in which a child would understand it in Sunday School.

So God answers – 'why yes, yes it would.' 'And now' [says the Son] now that I have paid for your workshop and its contents with my life and honor, and you no longer need to destroy it in anger, [that would be double jeopardy and Indian giving] you can now call the cessation of your hostility, "mercy." And you can take credit for having mercy – and you can call that "love."

I just want to say that this is a myth of enormous, unbiblical proportions. The problem is not that it is a myth, because we must have one, not knowing all the scientific details. The problem is that it is a gnostic, *heretical* myth. Wait – I wasn't supposed to tell you where this theology is coming from. I wasn't supposed to hint that it might have been a warmed over heresy straight out of Marcion's mouth or straight out of the Manichean playbook. But I'm not too worried about letting this slip because most people in the Church do not know what the Gnostics and the Marcionites and the Manicheans tried to teach concerning the person and work of Christ.

While I have a few remaining moments this morning, let me back up and say a few things about the use of myth. I say that we must have one. But it must conform to the facts of Scripture and of Science. Myth was never intended to *give* meaning to that which is intrinsically meaningless. Myth was developed as a conceptual placeholder for *pre-existing meaning and theological truth* when you only had partial data. That was all that was available to Moses. And that's all that's available to us now, really, when you think about it.

All cultures had myths. Because there were vast gaps in the scientific data. The Greeks had myths too. Greek myths illustrated and preserved the personhood and plurality and righteousness of the Godhead. But these myths did not know many things about how these ideas fit together. So yes, around the edges, they sound a little silly.

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So we see that many of the mythical particulars could be altered or disbelieved, by the myth-makers themselves. But if the entire mythical system were rejected, then a serious charge of atheism was forthcoming - punishable by death. That's why Socrates was brought up on charges of atheism - for creating a general *atmosphere* of disbelief in the State gods even though the particulars of the myth were aggressively manipulated by other poets with impunity.

Now many Christians are afraid to go any further here. And I'm afraid to go further here too. But not for the reason that you think. I am not going any further, because I'm completely out of time. And I am not going to violate that allotment. But next week, Lord willing and I am standing in this pulpit, I will go further. And I will not stop until I have at least suggested the basis of a new soteriology. So - until then - *Amen*.

¹ Ro 5:11 And not only *so*, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. The word is *καταλλαγή*, which clearly means "reconciliation" in the Pauline, a word that he has borrowed from the "secular" lexicon, which means an offenseless reconciliation.