

“God of The Living”

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All Saints Sunday

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5,13-17

Luke 20:27-38

[Jesus said,] “Now [the Lord] is not God of the dead, but of the living;
for all live to [God].”

Luke 20:38

Let us pray... O God,

When we are anxious and don't know the way ahead,
we trust you will guide our way.

We trust that you are not far off, but that you are a living presence
who knows our human predicament.

You know the Way for you have walked it with us...

Amen

Amidst all the great debates about religion – like pre-destination and free will:

What's the true Way? Who is right?

I believe there is one *fact* that gets consistently overlooked –

religion is not the same thing as that which is worshipped.

In other words – for us as Christians,

our beliefs and religious practices are not the same thing as God.

When religion itself becomes *that which is worshipped* – then that is idolatry.

No doubt like any other religious people with strong beliefs and a cultural identity,
we Christians quickly fall into a defensive position

when our religion is questioned by those who don't believe as we do.

We are not comfortable when our religious practices are placed under limitations,

like when Nativity scenes are denied from public display.

As seasonal greetings become a generic ‘Happy Holidays!’

for fear of offending someone, some Christians think this means

that there is a cultural ‘war against Christmas’ going on.

I get annoyed about this kind of thing, too...

but I have a different way of thinking about how to respond to it...

First of all, it is important for us to claim this truth:

Our God is God of the living – now and in the time to come.

That was something Jesus said in his conversation with the Sadducees

in our Gospel lesson this morning.

I spoke about the Sadducees in a sermon earlier this fall –

when Jesus told a parable about Lazarus the beggar and Dives the rich man.

It was kind of a political cartoon aimed at the Sadducees, who were the rich leaders

of the Jerusalem Temple including the high priest Caiaphas

who – like the rich man in the parable, had 5 brothers.

Willard, p.2

If you recall, I pointed out that... *the Sadducees did not believe in an afterlife... which-is-why-they-were sad, you-see...*

So it is with the Sadducees in mind, that Jesus tells this parable with its vision of the afterlife in vivid detail.

In today's story, when the Sadducees confront Jesus with the hypothetical problem of a woman married to 7 brothers who die consecutively without children, then asking whose wife would she be in 'the resurrection', Jesus provides another glimpse of the time to come.

Social constructs such as 'marriage' will be irrelevant because people will be 'equal to angels'.

By the way, I believe loving couples should not be anxious about this and that they will still be together, just not bound by some contract – which could also mean the woman with the 7 husbands gets her pick...

Then, Jesus said to the Sadducees,

... that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to him."

[Luke 20:37-38]

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob – and their wives, were gone, many centuries by Jesus' day, yet Jesus refers to them as 'living'.

Then he says, *'for all live to him'*

The implications of this statement remains a mystery, but it is clear that God is God of the living – now and in the time to come. This also means that God is a living God.

When Jesus was walking with his disciples in northern Galilee, he asked them, 'Who do people say that I am?'

They answered: John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets of old;

But then Jesus presses them, "So, who do you say that I am?"

In the Gospel of Matthew, it is Peter who speaks up:

"You are the Son of the Living God."

That is a powerful image, reminding us that God is intimately present – and involved in our world as a living God.

It is ironic to me that the top 2 moral issues for fundamentalist Christians have been the Right to Life and the Right to Bear Arms – which-can-take-lives. Both issues are significant and many are passionate in their opinions about them, but certainly there are more pressing concerns for all Christians.

On the eve of our national election, and decisions that will affect our environment: land, sea, & air, as well as the climate of discourse in government & society, consider that God and therefore Christ are not to be excluded from these discussions about the stuff of life on Earth.

Willard, p.3

The Apostle Paul wrote to reassure the Thessalonians in a time of uncertainty – when they were expecting the imminent return of Christ, but there were competing messages about what was true about this. Some were claiming that Christ had already come and gone, so the Thessalonians were fearful they had missed him.

So, Paul meant to calm them, saying,

When our Lord Jesus returns, we will be gathered up to meet him. [Luke 20:1]

What I believe this means is that we will know when that comes about for we will be in communion with him in a recognizable way.

In the meantime, we are always in the ‘end times’ and each of us will have our Day of Judgment and Year of Jubilee.

So rather than expecting to be swept up in some miraculous event, we must set ourselves to the ongoing task of showing forth loving-kindness – Our job as Christians, is to demonstrate the love of God through Christ.

Contemporary theologian Dominic Crossan teaches that

John the Baptist proclaimed that God would act imminently and decisively to transform the world,

while Jesus proclaimed God’s Kingdom as a social transformation that could only be accomplished with human participation – our help.

If we believe God is a living Being and that God is God of the living, then we should expect that God is involved in the practical realities of life on Planet Earth as it is, and that it makes sense that we would be co-workers with God in that social transformation.

Paul also said,

My friends, the Lord loves you...

[God] is kind and has given us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope.

We pray that our Lord Jesus Christ and God our [Creator]

will encourage you and help you always to do and say the right thing.

[Thess. 2:13^a, 16^b-17]

As we seek to be part of Christianity’s mission

of individual and social transformation to become that Beloved Community of God’s Kingdom that is possible on Earth as it is in Heaven, we have to make room for God’s Holy Spirit to work through us.

The second part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is instructive for this about the nature of God’s presence and how we are to make room for God in practical ways.

There is some good advice here for us – especially in these anxious times, essentially, not to pray, donate, or serve – just for show,

but to do these things believing God really is with us wherever we go...

Willard, p.4

Hear now my interpretation of Matthew Chapter 6,
the second part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount...

NOW, BE CAREFUL THAT YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS
IS NOT FOR SHOW TO WIN FAVOR FROM OTHERS.
OTHERWISE, YOU WILL HAVE NO REWARD
FROM YOUR HEAVENLY GUARDIAN.
THEREFORE, WHENEVER YOU GIVE YOUR OFFERING
DON'T TOOT YOUR OWN HORN
AS THE HYPOCRITES DO TO GET ATTENTION
IN THE SYNAGOGUES AND PUBLIC PLACES.
I TELL YOU THEY HAVE THEIR REWARD.
INSTEAD, YOU SHOULD MAKE YOUR DONATIONS
SO THAT YOUR LEFT SIDE DOESN'T INTERFERE
WITH WHAT YOUR RIGHT SIDE IS DOING.
THOUGH YOU MAKE YOUR DONATION ANONYMOUSLY,
YOUR HEAVENLY GUARDIAN WILL KNOW
AND REWARD YOU.

AND WHENEVER YOU PRAY,
DON'T BE LIKE THOSE HYPOCRITES WHO LOVE
TO MAKE A BIG SHOW OF THEIR PRAYERS
IN THE SYNAGOGUES AND PUBLIC PLACES
FOR THE ATTENTION.
I TELL YOU THE TRUTH,
THEY HAVE ALL THE REWARD THEY WILL GET.
BUT YOU CAN PRAY EVEN WHEN YOU ENTER AN EMPTY ROOM
AND SHUT THE DOOR.
SO, PRAY IN SOLITUDE
FOR YOUR HEAVENLY GUARDIAN WILL SEE
AND REWARD YOU.

NOW IN YOUR PRAYERS,
DON'T BABBLE ON AND ON LIKE EXTREMISTS DO.
FOR THEY THINK THAT THEIR ELABORATE REQUESTS
WILL BE HEARD.
DON'T BE LIKE THEM,
BECAUSE YOUR HEAVENLY GUARDIAN
ALREADY KNOWS WHAT YOU NEED
EVEN BEFORE YOU ASK.
SO, PRAY LIKE THIS...
GUARDIAN OF US ALL, WHO IS IN HEAVEN,
LET YOUR NAME BE RESPECTED.
LET YOUR BELOVED COMMUNITY COME TO BE.
LET YOUR DESIGN UNFOLD ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN.
GIVE US TODAY THE BREAD WE NEED AND
FORGIVE US OUR FAILURES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO FAIL US.
AND DO NOT ABANDON US TO DISASTER,
BUT RESCUE US FROM THE EVIL-DOER.

Willard, p.5

SO NOW, IF YOU FORGIVE OTHERS' TRANSGRESSIONS,
SHOULDN'T YOUR HEAVENLY GUARDIAN
ALSO FORGIVE YOU?

IT FOLLOWS THAT IF YOU DO NOT FORGIVE OTHERS,
NEITHER SHOULD YOUR HEAVENLY GUARDIAN
FORGIVE YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS.

AND WHENEVER YOU FAST,
DON'T BE LIKE GLOOMY HYPOCRITES WHO GRIMACE
TO MAKE A BIG SHOW OF THEIR PIETY.

I AM TELLING YOU THE TRUTH,
THEY HAVE ALL THE REWARD THEY ARE GOING TO GET.

BUT WHEN YOU ARE FASTING,
ANOINT YOUR HAIR AND WASH YOUR FACE
SO NO ONE CAN TELL YOU ARE FASTING
EXCEPT YOUR HEAVENLY GUARDIAN
WHO KNOWS IN SECRET.

AND YOUR BELOVED GUARDIAN
WHO CAN SEE YOU EVEN IN YOUR HIDING PLACE
WILL REWARD YOU.

DO NOT PRESUME YOU CAN HIDE YOUR TREASURES
ON EARTH WHERE MOTHS AND RUST DESTROY AND
THIEVES CAN BREAK IN AND STEAL.

BUT STORE YOUR TREASURES IN HEAVEN
WHERE MOTH AND RUST AND THIEF CANNOT TOUCH THEM.
FOR WHERE YOUR HEART IS,
THAT IS WHERE YOUR TREASURE WILL BE.

THE EYE ILLUMINATES ONE'S PHYSICAL SELF;
SO, IF YOUR EYE IS HEALTHY YOUR APPEARANCE WILL SHINE.
BUT IF YOUR EYE IS FOCUSED ON EVIL, YOUR OUTLOOK WILL BE GRIM.

FOR WHEN GLOOM INFORMS YOU INSTEAD OF LIGHT,
HOW SINISTER WILL THAT GLOOM BE.
NO ONE IS ABLE TO SERVE TWO BOSSES;
FOR YOU WILL HATE ONE AND LOVE THE OTHER,
OR STAND BEHIND ONE YET DESPISE THE OTHER.
YOU ARE NOT ABLE TO SERVE BOTH GOD AND GREED.

THEREFORE I SAY TO YOU, DON'T BE ANXIOUS ABOUT LIFE –
WHETHER OR NOT YOU SHALL EAT AND DRINK OR HAVE CLOTHES TO WEAR.
ISN'T LIFE MORE THAN CONCERNS ABOUT FOOD AND CLOTHING?

DO YOU SEE HOW THE BIRDS OF THE SKY
NEITHER SOW NOR REAP NOR GATHER FOOD INTO BARNES.
YET YOUR HEAVENLY GUARDIAN FEEDS THEM;
AREN'T YOU MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN LITTLE BIRDS?
AND CAN ANY OF YOU EXTEND YOUR LIFE A DAY LONGER
BY WORRYING ABOUT IT?

Willard, p.6

NOW, WHY WOULD YOU FRET ABOUT CLOTHES?
THINK HOW FLOWERS GROWING IN A FIELD
DON'T HAVE TO SPIN AND WEAVE.
YET NOT EVEN SOLOMON WAS ARRAYED
AS MAGNIFICENTLY AS THEY ARE.
THOUGH GOD HAS ADORNED SUCH WILDFLOWERS,
WHICH ARE GROWING IN A FIELD TODAY
YET TOMORROW ARE THROWN INTO AN OVEN,
WON'T GOD MORE GRANDLY ADORN YOU, O YE OF LITTLE FAITH?

THEREFORE, DON'T BE ANXIOUS, SAYING,
'WHAT SHALL WE EAT? OR 'WHAT SHALL WE DRINK?'
OR 'WHAT SHALL WE WEAR?'
AREN'T THESE THE THINGS
THAT MATERIALISTS STRIVE FOR?
DON'T YOU THINK YOUR HEAVENLY GUARDIAN
KNOWS THAT YOU NEED THESE THINGS?

BUT FIRST, SEARCH FOR THE KINGDOM OF THE BELOVED COMMUNITY
AND THE RIGHTEOUS WAYS OF GOD, AND ALL THESE THINGS...
WILL TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES.
SO, DON'T WORRY ABOUT TOMORROW –
FOR TOMORROW WILL HAVE ITS OWN CONCERNS.
TODAY HAS CHALLENGES ENOUGH.

So, don't pray, donate, serve just for show,
but do these things believing that God is with you wherever you go.
Then, we will have restored a shared confidence in the sanctity
of religious expression that welcomes the love of God
even in the expression of different religions
by other people of goodwill.
As Jesus said, 'for all live to [God]' – all people 'live' to God, whatever that means
in some ultimate sense, that is not about our differences,
but about a living God who is God of the living...

Amen

Our lesson today comes from 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5,13-17 in which the Apostle Paul exhorts the congregation of Thessalonica to maintain their faith and courage even in the midst of rumors and divisiveness...

- ¹When our Lord Jesus returns,
we will be gathered up to meet him.
So I ask you, my friends,
² not to be easily upset or disturbed by people who claim
that the Lord has already come.
They may say that they heard this directly from the Holy Spirit,
or from someone else, or even that they read it in one of our letters.
- ³ But don't be fooled! People will rebel against God.
Then before the Lord returns, the wicked one
who is doomed to be destroyed will appear.
- ⁴ He will brag and oppose everything that is holy or sacred.
He will even sit in God's temple and claim to be God.
- ⁵ Don't you remember that I told you this while I was still with you?
- ¹³ My friends, the Lord loves you, and it is only natural for us to thank God for you.
God chose you to be the first ones to be saved.
His Spirit made you holy, and you put your faith in the truth.
- ¹⁴ God used our preaching as his way of inviting you
to share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- ¹⁵ My friends, that's why you must remain faithful
and follow closely what we taught you in person and by our letters.
- ¹⁶ God our Father loves us.
He is kind and has given us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope.
We pray that our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father
¹⁷ will encourage you and help you always to do and say the right thing.

Let us be challenged and guided by these words...

Luke 20:27-38

- ²⁷ There came to [Jesus] some Sad'ducees,
those who say that there is no resurrection,
²⁸ and they asked him a question, saying,
"Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies,
having a wife but no children, the man must take the wife
and raise up children for his brother.
- ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and died without children;
³⁰ and the second ³¹ and the third took her,
and likewise all seven left no children and died.
³² Afterward the woman also died.
- ³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be?
For the seven had her as wife."
- ³⁴ And Jesus said to them,
"The sons [& daughters] of this age marry and are given in marriage;
³⁵ but those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age
and to the resurrection from the dead
neither marry nor are given in marriage,
³⁶ for they cannot die any more,
because they are equal to angels and are sons [& daughters] of God,
being sons [& daughters] of the resurrection.
- ³⁷ But that the dead are raised,
even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush,
where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham
and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.
- ³⁸ Now [God] is not God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to [God]."