

November 18, 2012

Pentecost 25

Text: Mark 13:1-13

Theme: "What's It All Mean?"

Sometimes the sin in my life scares me. Maybe you laugh at that because you think, "he's a pastor. How bad can it be?" Fair enough, but none of us sees into the heart of another and finally none of us knows what evil lies just under the surface of another human being. Most of you do not know that I have spent a lifetime learning to curb my anger and hold my temper beneath the surface of a calm exterior. The evil I have done in thought, word and deed; and, the hardships and hurts I have caused are substantial. My mother used to say to me, "you have a mean streak in you boy." And she was right. Our mother's tend to know us better than we would like.

But I have learned to use that part of me that I keep pressed down beneath the surface to understand human beings and the plight of being human. People don't always like it when I preach the Law and point out the many ways we offend God. I've been accused of being too specific because my examples hit too close to home. I get all my sinful examples right out of my own life. Sometimes I wonder how a holy God can love me. Why a holy God saved me?

Now strangely, this quandary is not first and foremost in the mind of the average man on the street. It is as though sin is a minor

issue for them and yet they are always seeking answers for the unanswerable. We live in a time when people are seeking some deeper meaning for every event. It seems like this comes and goes throughout the ages. My parents, part of the World War II generation, just did their jobs and got through life and didn't worry a great deal about what all the events on earth meant. But a couple of generations before them, people were sitting in prayer meetings and waiting for the end of the world with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society and a generation after them was wearing love beads, getting high and dropping out of society. In the 1980's an earthy, practical, WWII generation president helped form a no non-sense, capitalist generation who went back to doing their job and not worrying too much about what anything meant. Now it seems the pendulum is swinging again.

A couple of hurricanes hit and people want to know what it means. Is it the end of the world? Is this a sign? Should we begin building dykes around our city to protect ourselves from global warming? Evil strikes our lives and people want to understand a deeper reality from it. They want to know how the stars aligned to cause this or what signs they missed along the way. How is it possible for such a good person to do something so evil? There is no meaning in this life. These are no signs except in the sense that

everything that happens in a sin-fallen, rotten world is a sign that this ball of garbage is circling closer and closer to the drain. We are sinful people. This is a sick and dying world. Stop looking for leprechauns and unicorns and accept the reality that this just may be as good as it gets. Stop asking God, "why me" and start considering the question, "why not you?" Are you not just as vulnerable to sin and sin's fallout as anyone else? People hurt us because of sin. We get diseases because of sin. Storms brew and destroy because of sin.

The disciples were walking through Jerusalem marveling at the beauty of the temple. They were so impressed. It was such a beautiful building and surely this magnificent building had meaning. Surely this building was a sign that Rome would not overcome God's people and that their Messiah would rise up now, take residence in his temple and conquer the invading hordes! And Jesus said,

"Don't get all warm and fuzzy on me. Don't try to make more of what you see than is really there. It's all just stones and mortar and, in the end, all this stuff is meaningless because I'm going to knock it all down so that one stone won't remain on another, and I'll stack it all back up again in a whole new pattern." They didn't get it. That's okay because we usually don't either. Just like the disciples, we put too much confidence in stones and mortar and not enough in

less tangible things like grace and faith. The bottom line is pretty simple though. We said it in the Introit. "The one who endures to the end will be saved." That's it. Not very poetic, but the truth. Until then we simply immerse ourselves in God's Word and his Holy Sacraments to protect us from the sin that is so rampant in us. We bring much of it upon ourselves but nevertheless we look to God to deliver us from even what we have done to ourselves.

There is no deeper meaning in this life beyond growing in our relationship to Christ in preparation for our eternal life with him. Without Christ, you have to find your meaning in whatever way you can. Maybe you have to be rich and that will be your meaning in life. Maybe you have to be famous and that will be your meaning. Or maybe you drink or use drugs to dull the pain and frustration of finding no real meaning. Maybe life just becomes a plodding, monotonous cycle as you just try to get through the day. You have learned that nothing buys happiness and there is no real security in this life because eventually every "thing" you love rots and every "one" you love dies.

With Christ, however, everything changes. Every single thing in this life is different because when Christ is at the center of your life, suddenly there is real meaning. And the reason there is real meaning is because the goal is changed. The end of things is moved.

No, the end is abolished. At the moment of your Baptism you became immortal. Your body will die but everything that makes you “you” exists forever. Knowing that you exist forever changes the way you look at life.

There are times in life that are bad. All of us have had bad times. Maybe it was an illness. Maybe it was the breakdown of a relationship. Maybe it was 9th grade. It was 9th grade for me. I was fat. I had acne. I had glasses that slipped down my nose, greasy hair and few social skills with the opposite sex. It seemed as though 9th grade would never end. It was just one debacle after another and just when I thought I could take it no more, one of my teachers who saw that I was struggling told me something that made all the difference. It turns out, according to Mrs. Harvey, that 9th grade ends. And then 9th graders make an amazing transformation and turn into Sophomores and everything is better. It happened just as Mrs. Harvey said it would and 10th grade was a whole new and substantially better world.

Whatever difficulties we endure in life, and for that matter no matter how amazing our earthly temples might seem, it all comes to an end...but not us. We continue on in holiness and righteousness. We are delivered from the sin that plagues us. So the goal is not to fix everything in life and avoid all the potholes while climbing all the

mountains. The goal is just to hang on and learn and grow in whatever way you can until the end, he who endures to the end will be saved. That's what it all means. In the end...whatever trials we have endured...we win.