

Trinity XXIV (19 November 2023)

“And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, he said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.”

+In the Name...

When I was in Sunday School, this passage bothered me: people laughing at Jesus. I did not like people laughing at me, so I did not think Jesus would either. But of course, I liked laughing at the expense of other people, so I had a bit of a double-standard going on there. Maybe I thought I was better than them... When I read this passage this week, I thought to myself, “No, I don’t want to preach on pride this Sunday”, and began to move on. But then the irony of my conclusion hit me: Was I too proud to preach about pride...? At that point it seemed imperative that I tackle this passage. So perhaps I am preaching to myself only this morning, but of course, you all are invited along for the ride.

As a child, I loved old episodes of “Perry Mason”. Raymond Burr could always solve the most compelling of cases in a mere 60 minutes, with no loose ends, and no one wondering if the wrong person had been sent to prison. If there were any questions that were not obvious to us armchair detectives, at the end of the episode we could be certain of finding Perry, Della Street, Paul Drake and sometimes even Hamilton Burger seated around a table in a classy lounge discussing the fine details of the recently-solved case over a martini. Because the case had been solved publicly when the poor witness, who was never Mr. Mason’s client, broke down on the stand under cross-examination and confessed to committing the entire crime, it left room for some questions. Often asked by the wide-eyed and inquisitive Della Street, “But Perry, what was his motive?”

Motive. Why we do what we do. It’s hard enough to be judged by our actions, but then to throw in this added component just might not seem fair. We know how the Jews were not judged

for just thinking about something evil, but only doing it. This is why it was so profound when Jesus said that someone who murdered his brother in his heart was just as guilty of the sin as if he actually committed the act.

So why were the people in this morning's Gospel laughing? Pride. They thought they knew better. And the word "proud" gets us into all kinds of trouble. As children, we all wanted our parents to be proud of us. We came home from school and announced, "Look Mom! Look what I did!" and showed her the coveted art project. As parents we hope our children will make decisions that will make us proud of them. This morning's definition of "proud" goes past that. This is "pride", as in one of the Seven Deadly (or Cardinal) sins. As Anglicans we don't always make much of this classification system, but the Church has long included "pride" on its short list of serious sins. Pride ceases being a good thing, as when we take pleasure in having accomplished a great task, and turns into a bad thing when we decide to take all of the credit for

that accomplishment. St. Augustine defines pride as “the love of one’s own excellence”. So going back to the example of the small child coming home from school with an art project, what’s the next line after, “Look, Mom”? “I did it ALL BY MYSELF”, right? There’s nothing harmful with that thinking at a young age, but there can be if we continue it into adult years. All our talents come from God, but if we take all the credit of what we accomplish for ourselves and do not give thanks to God, then we are committing the sin of pride.

So why do we choose to serve the Lord? *Why should we* choose to serve the Lord? Maybe the second question is easier to answer: We should serve the Lord because we love Him with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and we want not only Him to see that but also others as well. (To be clear - we want others to see not so that they’ll think highly of us, but so that they will want to have a relationship with God too.)

Which brings us back to our first question: why do we choose to serve the Lord? Do we do it for profit? This may seem like a silly notion given a couple of realities of the Continuing Church in 2023. First off, most of our parishes are small. They do not seem like a good place to begin if one's goal is to get ahead monetarily. Second, in the business world it may appear like more of a hindrance than a help to be a Christian. Look at the challenges faced by an owner who wants to be closed on Sundays. But even closer, have you ever said to God, "If you do this, I promise that I'll do such-and-such." That's still a way of hoping to enrich our lives. I won't ask for a show of hands as to whether or not we keep up our end of the bargain after God delivers. The question then becomes whether we serve God because we love Him or because we expect some form of compensation. What is our motive?

Or do we serve Him for show? This might seem like a funny question too, as it is not impressive to most of society if we go to church. Gone are the days of people being expected to go to

church, and even the days of “anybody who is anybody” going to a specific church. You locals know to what congregations I am referring. We do something out of the ordinary, such as fasting, although it does not have to be that, to bring attention to ourselves. It doesn’t matter if it’s only the attention of our closest friends, co-workers, spouse or even God. What is our motive for fasting? Is it because we love God and want to sacrifice for Him as He has for us? Or are we hoping to gain something more from God? Or are we hoping for sympathy or some other goodwill if the right people know what we are doing?

These are personal questions, and I don’t expect audible answers. But do please think about them. As St. Paul says in his letter to the Colossians, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” If we follow St. Paul’s admonition, we will keep our pride in check. Otherwise, our pride will keep us from serving God. Pride answers the question “What motivates you?” with, “I

serve God for my own purposes.” Humility answers the question,  
“I serve God for His purposes.”

+In the Name...