

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity (2022)

To Whom are You a Slave?

Rev. Toby Byrd

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money . . . But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”
(Matthew 6:24, 33, ESV)

In today’s Gospel our Lord Jesus reminds us that all too often we put things between ourselves and God, literally clinging to these more than we do God, making them the idol we would rather serve than God Himself, thereby poking our finger in the eye of God and becoming guilty of violating the First Commandment: ***“You shall have no other gods before me.”*** (Exodus 20:3, ESV) This is why Jesus says, ***“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”*** (Matthew 6:24, ESV)

In this example Jesus uses money as the idol some men put before God. But the idols we create aren’t always money. No, idols could be works or merit, self-righteousness, pride, stubbornness, etc. An idol is anything that draws the heart away from God and towards another thing. But true worship of God cannot tolerate the worship of any other object, God wants us completely for Himself. Indeed, He says, ***“for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”*** (Exodus 34:14, ESV)

Now usually when this Gospel Reading is the focus of a sermon, the pastor will preach on money, that is making money one’s god. Indeed, Jesus says serving riches is nothing other than one’s heart being devoted to mammon and as a result one neglects God and neighbor. But many times when a pastor preaches on this subject, some will hear it as Jesus condemning wealth, which is not what He is saying. Yes, money sometimes leads one to greed, to the misuse of wealth and thus to make it an idol, but Christ’s meaning is not that money or possessions should be avoided or thrown away, because He can certainly tolerate wealth, what He cannot tolerate is the one whose heart is devoted to wealth and not to God. So, the question asked by our Lord in His Sermon on the Mount is who is your master? ***“To Whom are You a Slave”?***

I put the question in those words because of what St. Paul said to the Romans. In his letter to them he said, ***“For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.”*** (Romans 6:19, ESV) A slave has a master; therefore, Jesus asks, who is your master, is He God or is he mammon? Is He God, or is he yourself? Furthermore, a slave cannot split his allegiance, he is duty bound to serve only one, he can have only one master, serving him with all his time, strength, and ability. So the question is, what master do you serve?

The words of our Lord strike like a hammer on the conscience and heart of every believer, reminding us to examine our priorities as He instruct us to discern whether we have fallen short of our Lord’s calling to worship God and no other. He is issuing a divine revelation that when faced with choices and priorities, you cannot be a slave to God and a slave to another. If you try

you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve two masters.

As I said earlier, the idol we worship doesn't have to be money, indeed, it is anything that we place before God. Now this is not always transparent in a person's life. It is not uncommon for one to believe that God is first in their life, that He is the One whom they worship and no other. Yet their actions and words deny their self-proclaimed witness. The Jews thought that if they performed their worship in the temple, offering bulls and calves, God would be satisfied, even if they, at the same time, lived in greed, hatred, envy, and other sins. They tried to serve two masters, God, and their self-righteousness. But our Lord Jesus speaks against such living in the Gospel reading for today.

Jesus warns us against clinging to the idols we create to justify ourselves before God. Oh, I love God and I want to hear the Word proclaimed, I want to receive holy communion, and I want God to forgive me, but when challenged with forgiving others, my pride says, no, I am right, I am the one who was offended, and even if they should seek my forgiveness, I will not reconcile. I am devoted to my idol even if it is in opposition to what God has said.

An idol is a despicable god, a true master thief that steals the greatest thing a man has: his heart. There is nothing on earth that moves and attracts man's heart more than the idols he creates for himself; riches, property, power, pride, self-righteousness, and the list goes on, these things become his treasure so great that he forgets the one true God and worships the idol instead.

Satan, the prince of this world, loves idol worshippers, preventing and hindering them as he does from following God's Commandments. It matters not if it is an idol of wealth or an idol of pride, Satan leads men to put their idols before God, to cling to their idols, to be devoted to their idols and thereby, whether willingly or unwillingly, to disobey God. Satan leads them to ask themselves, "should I live by faith, or should I live for my selfish satisfaction? Maybe I can find a happy medium between the two? Will these two masters allow me to please them both? Or will trying to serve two masters make me a poor servant?" This thought process leads to conflict and confusion. But ***"God is not a God of confusion but of peace."*** (1 Corinthians 14:33, ESV) In all His churches He would have peace reign. However, Satan does all he can to create confusion, disorder, and turmoil, and no better way than to create idols for God's people to worship. But God has a remedy for this confusion, He gives us His peace ***"which surpasses all understanding, [to] guard [our] hearts and [our] minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 4:7, ESV)

Trying to serve two masters is certain failure for peace. However, St. Paul reminds us that God is the remedy, he writes, ***"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility."*** (Ephesians 2:13-16, ESV)

Our Lord Jesus Christ by His atoning sacrifice on the Altar of the Cross collapsed the dividing wall of hostility, of division, of lovelessness, He abolished the need to try and serve two masters by reconciling us with God. No longer do we need to be torn between our self-made idols and God. Christ has shown us how to turn to God from idols, how to serve the living and one true God, how to wait for Him from heaven, and how He delivers us from the wrath to come. (1

Thess. 1:9-10) But if we continue to chase after idols, we will not be delivered from God's wrath but rather we will be on the receiving end of His wrath.

So Jesus asks in today's Gospel Reading, *To Whom are You a Slave?* Are you a slave to a personal idol which keeps you from worshipping and obeying God as a child of His? Or are you a slave to Christ and His righteousness? This is a very important question for you to answer. In fact, the answer you give may well determine your eternal life! If it is anything other than a slave to Christ and His righteousness, you are in grave danger. Again, recalling St. Paul, who wrote, ***“Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.” (Romans 6:16–18, ESV)*** Thus, we implore you, if you are a slave to righteousness, then serve the God of righteousness and not a self-created idol.

Jesus tells you, you are a child of God who has been called away from serving idols, therefore, you have only one Master, your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who came into this world to save you from your idol worship. Therefore, rather than seek your idol(s) He tells you to ***“seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33, ESV)*** He tells you to seek Him, to seek what He is doing and what He is bringing into this world, for where He is, there you will find the kingdom of God. There you will find the one who is your true Master. However, not a Master to serve, but One who comes to serve you. Jesus tells you to seek Him, but, you ask, where can you find such a beloved Master?

You find Jesus where He says He can be found, in His Father's house. Therefore, your Lord's admonition is for you to go to the place where He reigns with His gracious presence. He says, go to the place where He desire to serve you with His precious gifts of forgiveness and righteousness. Go to the place where He teaches you His truth, where He shows you how to respond to His holy invitation. He says seek Him where the reign of God is proclaimed in His holy Word and Sacraments. It is there in the Gospel where you will find your true Master who shows you how to sustain the community of fellow disciples, recognizing your fellow slaves, your brothers, and sisters in Christ. It is there where He joins you to Him in Holy Baptism, gathers you to hear God's Word, and feeds you His blessed body and blood in Holy Communion for the forgiveness of your sins. It is there where you will find God's saving righteousness, as He forgives your sin and makes all things right. In God's house there is but one Master, Jesus Christ, wooing you and inviting you to be a disciple/slave of His so you will never again have to worry or be confused as to whom you should serve, for in Him you were chosen before time to be holy and blameless, to be a child of God. In Him you are promised the forgiveness of sins and life eternal in heaven. In Him you have the perfect Master, One who serves you. Being brought to faith to realize who your true Master is, why would you ever desire to serve another? No, your true desire should be to be a slave to Christ who is a Master unlike all others, for He is the Master of all things. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.