

Sermon Lent 2 2018

February 25, 2018

Mark 8:27-38

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate upon the Gospel Lesson previously read. Especially these words, **“you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”**

I was given an article last week about the school shooting in Parkland, and I thought it rightly provocative. It made the point that as we look at all that has gone on with shootings this should give us pause. It made the point that we should pause to think about how we should handle the topic of guns in terms of our legislation. But it also made the point that guns have been legal in our country since the beginning and we didn't have the problems that we're having now. To be clear here, I'm not making a political statement here about guns, this isn't the place to make political statements like that—in either direction. Rather the point of the article was that we have to understand that there has been a shift in the air we breathe in our culture. We have created a culture of death. We don't value life, we don't value it when it's in the womb—something we can see in that we just refused to pass legislation forbidding abortion after 20 weeks, which wouldn't have been perfect, but a step in the right direction. And we don't value life. We value worth shown when we can do or make something productive. That's why we see shootings like this. And at the root of that, we also don't value the structures God has given to support life. Most importantly the view of the family and of the Church are both in a downward trend. And as all of this is happening it's creating an environment that engenders individuals who would be willing to enter a school and start shooting people.

But what do we see in this as Christians? Well, what we see, in part at least, is just what our Lord Jesus said to Peter, **“you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”** We as people are not setting our minds on the things of God, but on the things of man. Now, it would be very easy for us to give instruction on how to go about showing this mindset of God. By that I mean it would be very easy for me to stand up here and tell you that you need to get out there and you need to find ways to love people because, in short, that's what the things of God include: commands like loving your neighbor as yourself. And that's something you should be wanting to do. That's good.

But I think it's helpful for us to dig deeper than the outward level of external action, and go into the heart. By that I mean that I think it's good for us to dig into this such that we see how our own hearts are drawn away from setting our minds on the things of God.

In light of that I want to point out three ways that we often set our minds on the things of man rather than God.

The first is this: we set our minds on the things of man in how we view the world. How so? Well, when we look at the world it's often depressing isn't it? When you turn on the news and you hear of another school shooting, or another gang shooting, or when you hear of how politics in Washington aren't going the way that they should, or even when you hear about the earthquakes and the hurricanes, what's your response? What do you think when you hear those things? If you're like me, it's depressing. And why is it depressing? Well, of course it's depressing because it's sad. That's a big part of it. But as it depresses us, how much does it make you want to despair? Again, if you're like me it's a fair amount. But why are we drawn to despair in the midst of this? Well, a big part of it is because we don't really expect that the world will be this way. We don't really expect that this world is going to be a valley of sorrows. We have built up in our heads the false assumption that when we turn on the news we're going to hear only stories about how wealthy people are eliminating poverty in our country, about how drug companies are curing cancer, and how the weather is going to be just the right balance between sunny and rainy, with just a bit of snow in there so the kids can enjoy some good sledding.

Now of course I'm exaggerating that a bit, but have you realized that? Have you realized that all of us set an expectation for this world that always sets us up for disappointment? Now I'm not telling us to be overly cynical, or to be artificial in our surprise that things aren't worse, but to realize that what is happening in our world reflects its fallen-ness. To realize that this world is condemned under sin and that means that people are going to suffer, the poor will always be among us, weather is going to wreak havoc, and people are going to kill each other. I don't say that so that we would be satisfied with this, just to make the point that we need to look at the world not as man, but as God does and realize that it is broken in sin, and there will not be a utopia this side of the Parousia, this side of our Lord's return. So, how we view the world is the first way we set our minds on the things of man and not God.

The second is how we view ourselves and our standing before God. In his letter to the Romans that we read this morning Paul said, **“if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”** I know I've mentioned this before, but it's good to be reminded of it. Our sin makes us God's enemies. Think about that. By your sinful nature you were an enemy to God. By our sinful nature every one of us is born as an enemy of God. Those

of you who have served in war know most of all what this means. Thinking about enemies, we can get an idea of what our sin, our sinfulness means in relational terms before God.

But our default isn't to think about it this way. Our default is to think that our sin isn't that bad. Our default is to say, "No one's perfect, so I think God understands." To say, "I know it's bad, but not bad enough that I would be God's enemy." In other words we think of it like God would just be like someone that is maybe frustrated with us, or annoyed. Sure the Stalins and the Hitlers and the Maos might be enemies of God, but all of us? That seems a bit overstated. But that's not what Paul says here, is it? He makes it clear, even talking to the Christians in Rome. "**While we were enemies...**" And so that is the second way we set our mind on the things of man and not God. So we don't look at the world properly, we don't think our sin is as serious as it is.

Last, we don't set our minds on the things of God just like Peter didn't. As I say that, I think we can relate to Peter, can't we? I mean, here's Peter a Jew expecting the Messiah. And he thinks the Messiah is going to bring an earthly Kingdom. He thinks they're going to crown Jesus and it's going to be a coronation which will bring about a new David, that Jesus is going to rule in Jerusalem. And Peter thinks this rule will be their freedom from the oppression of the Romans. He's expecting the Kingdom on earth.

And we do the same thing, don't we? We do the same thing when we set our expectation toward earthly things, toward the assumption that these good things will be ours now; when we expect God to always bring good things; to bring utopias and to bring about our healing; when we expect for Him to give us the salvation He gives now rather than later when He promises to give it. And we can see this in the way we are so disappointed in the way things happen in this life, that's because we don't expect God to work like He has promised to work.

But you see, how God thinks is clarified, is revealed, is manifest in Jesus. When Mark tells them that Jesus "**began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again,**" this repulsed Peter, and it repulses us because it's unimaginable that our immense and all-powerful God would suffer and die. It's horrendous to consider that the most Noble King of Kings would be crowned with thorns and scourged; scourged at the hands of sinners who are wrong and unjust in their actions, scourged *for* sinners are wrong and unjust in their actions. That's incomprehensible. But that's how God works. That's setting the mind on the things of God, because that is what love does.

Love gives up its own power, gives up its majesty, gives up all perception of glory, for the glory of the other. Love comes under the tyranny and bondage of sin and death for

you, to save you, to rescue you, to bear the wrath that you deserve. Yes the things of God say that God comes to you when you were still God's enemy. The things of God say that when you were still His enemy He wanted to step in front of the bullet for you in the war. The things of God tell you that this conflict between man and God is our fault, but that He has desired to reconcile, and has reconciled with us by stepping under the curse for us.

So what does that mean for us? It means first of all that on the cross your sin is truly forgiven. It means that God still works in ways that seem inappropriate for what we assume for His glory. That as much as we expect something grand and noble, we get preachers of the Gospel who stutter and speak unclearly. We get regular looking water that is not the washing of dirt from the flesh but actually the cleansing of the conscience before God, just as Owen experienced this morning. We get bread and wine that gives the very body and blood of Jesus for your forgiveness.

It also means that you don't have to worry that you're giving something up by claiming to have been God's enemies, because that's exactly who Jesus came for. You don't have to claim to have been His friend because you weren't that bad. Even still you don't have to claim to be His friend because you're so good to Him. Jesus tells us "**Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends,**" and He has laid down His life for you.

Finally, it means that when you see the suffering of this world, when you see that it's not the utopia you'd like to see, you can understand that this is what sin does. It brings all of this as havoc upon the world. It brings with it the reality of brokenness, which means that we should temper our expectations for this world. To be clear, we still work to bring the goodness of God's Kingdom around us, but even then, we don't lose heart when that falls short, because it will. And so our hope isn't in the good that will happen here, but in the good our Lord promises us eternally. So you don't have to wring your hands in fear of what is to come. You can prepare yourself for the worst, knowing that the best will be in the eternal Kingdom of our God. The best will be for us in the resurrection on the last day, something we know to be true because Jesus Himself, the head of His body the Church, has risen from the dead. Christians, this resurrection is the air we breathe. The air of life, the air of our Lord Jesus, given for us to give us life. These are the things of God, the things on His mind for us. Amen.