### “That I Should Lose Nothing,” by S. Finlan, August 19, 2018

**Psalm 34:12–14**

12 Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good?

13 Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.

14 Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

**Ephesians 5:17–20**

17So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, 19as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, 20giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**John 6:37–40**

37Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; 38for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. 39And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.’

We continue our examination of Ephesians. This passage tells us what *not* to do—don’t be foolish . . . or drunk!—and also *what* to do: in the Spirit, to be worshipful, joyous, and musical. I find all three to be present here at First Church. We “sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs . . . giving thanks to God . . . for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:19–20).

What does that expression, “the name of Jesus Christ,” really mean? It refers to recognizing Jesus as the Messiah. “Christ” is a title. It is the New Testament Greek word that translates the Hebrew word “Messiah,” or “anointed one.” This was a word that expressed Jewish hopes and anticipations for a new leader. Leaders were often anointed at the beginning of their service, so “anointed one” is a way of saying “new leader.” But it does not refer to a Son of God. *Messiah* is a different concept than Son of God. Let’s dig into this a little deeper.

The Jewish hope for a Messiah pointed either to a new king, a new prophet, or a new priest. Those were the three *kinds* of anointed ones in Jewish society. So a Messiah concept, in Judaism and early Christianity, would come from one of these ideas, or from a blending of two or all three of them. The dominant Christian idea is a blending of two of them: Messiah as *king* and Messiah as *prophet*. Only one book in the New Testament, the Epistle to the Hebrews, speaks of Jesus as a *priest*.

So the Ephesians passage is speaking of the joy that Christians have when they recognize Jesus as Messiah. Ephesians doesn’t say exactly *which* Messiah idea it means, nor does it say that we all have to have the exact *same* idea. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews had a different concept from Ephesians and the rest of the New Testament. For most of the New Testament, Jesus as Messiah identifies him as the new spiritual ruler, teacher, and liberator promised by the prophets. Exactly what that means has *always* been understood differently by different Christians, and this is still true today. But God seems to like variety. Jesus certainly appreciated variety among his disciples.

What does Jesus say, in today’s gospel passage? He is not exploring *belief* or concepts at all. He is focusing on personal attitudes, specifically on personal openness to him.

He says “Anyone who comes to me I will never drive away” (John 6:37). Why would he go out of his way to say this? I think Jesus is anticipating the judgmentalism that is going to take place, where some of his followers will, indeed, seek to drive away *other* followers, and that is certainly what happened. Many Christians have considered themselves qualified to pronounce upon who is a *true* follower of Jesus, and who is not.

*Churches* have certainly turned people away, have even persecuted Christians whom they deemed unworthy or unorthodox. But Jesus is saying that anyone who honestly follows him will not be turned away. Jesus foresees and resists the judgmentalism that is going to characterize the movement that has taken on his *name,* but has not always taken on his *spirit*, his *attitude*. Jesus himself was characterized by graciousness, not judgmentalism.

Jesus will not turn away anyone who wants to follow him. He came down from heaven to do the will of his Father, which is that he “should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day” (6:38–39). He is not going to let *one* honest disciple be forgotten. He is going to raise *all* who believe, and give them an eternal life with purpose and love.

He says “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father” (John 6:44). There is something deeply spiritual that goes on inside anyone who decides to follow him. God operates within us, seeking to draw us to himself, and to the Son who reveals the Father. It is in verse 40 that we get the first reference to the Son.

It is “the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day” (6:40).

But seeing the Son means somewhat different things to different Christians. To one Christian, it means recognizing him as the divine Son of God, sent to reveal God’s nature to humankind. To another Christian, it may mean recognizing Jesus as the one anticipated by the prophets, a healer, teacher, and proclaimer of justice (Isa 35:5; 61:1–2; 11:3–9). For another, he is the “prince of peace” who, as Isaiah said, will establish a kingdom “with justice and with righteousness” (Isa 9:6–7); or who, as Zechariah said, will “cut off the chariot . . . and the battle-bow” and “command peace . . . from sea to sea” (Zech 9:9–10). These last few prophecies have not been fulfilled . . . *yet*.

Jesus embodies and uplifts the values of the prophets. In fact, when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, he was *deliberately* fulfilling Zechariah 9:9, the prophecy of a peace-king. Back in Nazareth, he quoted Isaiah 61 about healing, releasing captives, and bringing good news to the poor, and then said “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:16–21; Isa 61:1–2).

So, whether you put the emphasis upon Jesus’ teaching peace and compassion, or on his embodying and revealing the character of God, if you seek to follow Jesus you can be confident about his promises, and you can stop worrying about whether you live up to some *other* Christian’s theological judgments.

Does that mean that actions don’t matter, that you can act any way you like? Not at all. The Psalmist’s advice still applies, that you should “Depart from evil, do good; seek peace, and pursue it” (34:14). This tells us we should *actively* do good.

But it *does* mean that you should not be afraid of other people’s judgmental attitudes. You *can* trust that Jesus will raise you up on the last day. Remember that the real meaning of *faith* is *trust*. Faith is not about believing a creed or a certain interpretation; faith means actively trusting God. So, trust God and trust Jesus. Then it is *living* faith, rooted in your values and your will, and not just beliefs that you hold in your mind.

Seek God’s will in your life, and trust that you can *live* into it. Trust the love and the spiritual renewal that is promised for you. Let this day give you new hope. *See* yourself as appointed to live in the family of God, to serve others, and to grow in love and life and learning!