

Second Sunday after Pentecost, May 25, 2008, Year A, Proper 3

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

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Scripture: Matthew 6:24-34

"Two Masters, Two Truths... Two Scoops???"

A Sunday school teacher was teaching her class about the difference between right and wrong. "All right children," she said "let's take another example," "If I were to put my hand into a man's pocket and take all his money, what would I be?" One little guy raised his hand and answered with a confident smile, "You'd be his wife!"

Two Masters:

Worrying about money is one of the biggest killers in our society today. And if it is not about money, most of us spend time worrying about something. And yet Jesus told his disciples not to worry. He said: **Matthew 6:24-25** *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?"*

First – why would Jesus be telling us to hate anyone? The Greek verb *μισέω* (*misayo*) is used meaning to “love less than” and I believe gives us deeper meaning to Jesus’ own word from Luke 14:26 *"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."* If you plug in “love less than” in place of hate – it brings you to the true meaning behind what Jesus was telling us. That makes me jump right to Jesus’ words from Matthew 10:37 *"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.* It is crystal clear - Jesus must come first – above everything – even family!

Next then, why would Jesus say that we would despise someone – isn't that the same as hating or strong dislike? Hate is a word that is thrown around far too often in today's society. Just think of the vegetable that you like least in this world – you might say that you despise it – some might say hate. OK, so does this mean that Jesus is telling us that if we love Him we will be guilty of “hate crimes” toward others? Absolutely not! The verb *καταφρονέω* (*katafronayo*) that is used here means to disregard, to think little of, to look down upon, or in today's slang – to disrespect or “dis” someone. It has nothing to do with hate.

Jesus is commanding that we put Him above everything else – that He be first of all and that everything else **MUST** come second and looked at with “less respect.”

Jesus is specifically speaking of the attitude of real discipleship. To be a disciple, a follower, a believer of Jesus Christ – means that He is first – He is Lord – and everything else is secondary – at the least! Discipleship requires undivided and absolute commitment. Pardon my pun – but there is no “*via media*” – there is no middle ground – **there is NO lukewarm!**

This is not about mammon either – which is an Aramaic word for possessions, money or property. All these things can detract or distract us from true discipleship. Where one's heart lies most certainly controls

- one's interests,
- one's energy, and
- one's commitment.

Second Sunday after Pentecost, May 25, 2008, Year A, Proper 3

What Jesus is asking for is **uncompromising commitment!** Jesus says in Luke 12:21-23 that the person who is preoccupied and all out for such things of this world "*is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*" *And He said to His disciples, for this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. For life is more than food, and the body than clothing.*"

Two masters – well, what’s the big deal? The argument could be made that we live in this world and we have to live, don’t we? If I don’t pay attention to my job and my finances, I will be in big trouble, won’t I? True – but paying attention does not mean paying **ALL** of your attention and lifting those things up to a place far above Jesus in your life.

Let me give you’re a very current example: The Episcopal Church has just released an ad campaign called “Get Closer to God – Slice Carrots.” This is admirable – but it contains nothing about serving Jesus as Lord and preaching the Gospel – but instead it talks about serving others through building shelters, feeding the poor – in essence it says (and I quote) “putting your faith to work through serving others.” I’m confused: Faith in Whom? **This is glorifying the fruit and not the vine!** This is exactly what Jesus is talking about in today’s Gospel – when we serve the Master – the Lord, then all of the other things fall into place by His mercy, grace and love.

Let’s continue our look at the Episcopal Church – the TEC. It is clear that for the current Presiding Bishop - winning is more important than anything else – even to the point of obliterating anyone who disagrees with her. We hear that dissenters are accused of walking away from the table of conversation – a table that only offers a one way conversation. You are free to sit as long as you agree, but if you disagree, you are labeled a hate monger, archaic, closed minded, literalist. Negotiation is not in her vocabulary. It is her way or the highway. The TEC prides itself in being an inclusive church – as long as you agree with it – if you have another view - if you don’t like it, leave! The Jesus of Scripture doesn’t even enter into the equation – instead we hear of “mother Jesus” or of an emasculated Jesus – who only has God consciousness but no divinity. That my brothers and sisters is putting church before God – putting property before Jesus, serving two masters. Jesus told us how to act toward one another: John 13:34-35 "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*" This love is Agape love – selfless love for one another, not philos (brotherly love) or eros (erotic love). Loving one another means caring for their well-being – not taking everything they have built out from under them.

Two Truths:

We live in a world where truth is supposedly relative – meaning that you can have your truth and I can have mine – having two masters is OK – after all it makes me feel good – and if I feel good it must be OK and therefore it must be true. Are you following me? The logic is sick and the logic is faulty. I remember when Marilyn and I were researching seminaries, at the request of our beloved Bishop of Florida, the late Stephen Jecko. We first visited Trinity in Ambridge and were given their statement of faith which we agreed with wholeheartedly. We were slated to visit Virginia Theological Seminary and I asked for their statement of faith only to be told that everything that they believe could be found in their catalogue. Well, in their catalogue was a statement – plain as day – that said “the Holy Spirit reveals new truths on a daily basis!” Whoa! It was like nails screeching on a blackboard – I could almost hear the Holy Spirit screaming NO! New truths – daily? The truth has already been revealed – the truth is Jesus Christ! Jesus said to His disciples **John 14:6-7** "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no*

Second Sunday after Pentecost, May 25, 2008, Year A, Proper 3

one comes to the Father, but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."

What we are faced with today is a church that has seamlessly integrated falsehoods to live alongside fact – and have called it all “true.” Let me give you an example from this past weekend in Toronto. There was a youth synod, held by the Anglican Church of Canada, at which they wrote a new creed. This was described as a “stunning prayer.” You be the judge:

- “We believe in the God of Life, who creates and loves people, who acts in history and who promises never to leave us alone.
- We believe in Jesus of Nazareth, who is our brother, who wants not to be idolized but to be followed.
- We believe that we dwell in the presence of the Holy Spirit; without her we are nothing; filled with her we are able to become creative, lively, and free.
- We believe in the Church of Jesus Christ, a community where we find companions and courage for the struggles of life, where we grow in our understanding of the faith, through worship, prayer, nurture, and service.
- We believe that God has a use for us in this time and place, that though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we are called to be instruments of God’s presence.
- We believe in living, hoping, laughing, and enjoying the good of the earth:
- We believe that people can change, and God keeps pulling us to life and to a new world of joy and peace. Amen.

Did you hear what I heard? Or for that matter – didn’t hear?

- I didn’t hear a word about Jesus being Lord or Master.
- I didn’t hear a word about sin or about the need for Jesus as Savior and Redeemer.
- There is not one word about salvation or eternal life!
- Jesus DOES want and deserves to be worshipped – with all glory, honor, and praise – and followed as well.
- What about the emasculation of the Holy Spirit? Give me a break!

What we have here is a perfect example of falsehood and fact – united together in what they boldly call a “creed.” May God have mercy on these youth – and even more so, may He have mercy on the people who taught them this. Our Lord Jesus told us of the consequences of teaching such drivel to the young: *"It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble."* (Luke 17:2) But once again – if you don’t believe in sin – then you don’t believe in consequences. If there are no consequences, then you don’t need redemption. If you don’t need redemption, then you don’t need a savior – and everything that Jesus did is worthless in their eyes. That my friends is the point of view of people with two truths.

Two Scoops:

It is as some people want to have the comfort of whatever they believe is OK – and to have the flexibility to lead and dictate it to others as well. We live in an era of the consumer. The consumer is “shopping” for the things that not only make them feel good – but that fit in best with their lifestyle. There is no transformation – no discussion – no submission to Jesus’ Lordship - simply “I like this, it makes me feel good and important, and that is the way it will be.” Sort of like shopping for cereal! Are you comfortable with two scoops of raisin bran – or

Second Sunday after Pentecost, May 25, 2008, Year A, Proper 3

are you into Fruit Loops? Whatever works for you is “your choice” and the rest of the world is told to “go get your own bowl.”

The Episcopal Church today is mired in what might be described as its own game of “Let’s Make a Deal.” Do you remember Monty Hall and the three doors – door number 1, door number 2, and door number 3? Well, the Presiding Bishop has three doors and if you agree with her and buy all of the multiple truths that she and her agenda has to offer – then all three doors are yours – after all according to her – there is more than “one way!” However, if you disagree with the multiplicity of “new truths” and a new emasculated Jesus who doesn’t transform anyone – then discussion is one way only – and it is clearly pointed out to you that there are no doors for you – except the one under the exit sign. Oh, and by the way – in her game show there are no parting gifts. Just don’t let the door hit you on the way out!

Jesus tells His disciples not to worry about the stuff, not to worry about what you will eat or drink – whether it is two scoops, fruit loops, or shredded wheat. Those that are faithful to His Word, those who are true disciples and accept His Great Commission (remember Fr. Ward’s sermon last week?) – “**going** into the world, **making** disciples, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching** them to **obey** everything that He has commanded” will indeed be cared for, provided for by Almighty God. Remember Jesus’ words from today’s Gospel “*seek first His kingdom and His righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33) and not our own – and the cares of this world will be provided for. We are called to not be anxious about what tomorrow will bring – instead we are called to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I have some questions for you – and would like you to listen carefully to each one and then respond out loud:

- Do you trust in God and His plan for you?
- Do you believe in many masters, many truths, the absence of sin and no need for a savior?
- Do you believe that there is more than one way to the Father?
- Or – do you believe in a loving God who sent His Son so that those who truly believe in Him and truly repent of their sins, – believing in Him as Lord and Master of their lives, will have eternal life?
- Do believe that Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life – and that no one comes to the Father except through Him?”

Then my brothers and sisters in Christ – based on your affirmative responses today -

- you have chosen to follow Jesus – and
- you have chosen to be His disciples – and
- you have chosen the path that the Father will provide for all of your tomorrows.

To all of the other false masters, and false so called truths - there can only be one answer – NO DEAL!