

“You Are Not Your Own?”

Salado UMC—21 January 2018

2nd Sunday after the Epiphany

Preaching Text: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20—Year B

Salado, Texas 76571

“The idea that men are created free and equal is both true and misleading: men are created different; they lose their social freedom and their individual autonomy in seeking to become like each other”

(David Riesman).

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Perhaps you remember the most famous of all the Pogo cartoon quotations? Its caption reads: “We have met the enemy and he is us.” We all know people about whom we say “he or she is his/her own worst enemy.” What this means is that the person can stir malevolent feelings in others without even meaning to. It is often a sad situation. Perhaps it is a case of a person trying too hard to befriend us. We have each encountered people who tried to be our friends to such a great degree that they drove us away. This is what we mean by people being their own worst enemy.

We might say that in a deeper sense this issue of people being their own enemy is part of Paul’s intent in today’s lesson. We see his purpose, and with a much more theological intent, when he writes to any of his churches. It is doubly true when he writes to the church at Corinth. The folks in Corinth lived a very colorful, if not so moral life. The Bible takes a quite realistic look at human life. It shares a vision of the human family’s most admirable characteristics (see Psalm 8). At the same time, the Bible is also fully realistic with regard to our human family’s foibles, failings, faults, and frailties. Nowhere are the human family’s foibles, failings, faults, and frailties so plainly encountered as in the writing of Paul. Generally, the Apostle pulls no punches. Instead he writes in a forthright and sometimes seemingly brutal manner. Apparently, the Corinthians did not “get” subtlety.

In contrast to Luke, Paul is direct and blunt when addressing human sin. Luke’s tendency is to attribute human sin to “the times of ignorance” (Acts 3:17; 17:30). Paul, on the contrary, has nothing to do with this namby-pamby posture. He calls, as we sometimes say, a spade a spade. Paul thinks that sin is a violation of God and others by our own choice, free-will, or volition. Sin is estrangement/alienation from God and/or other people. One of Paul’s stoutest statements about the pernicious and isolating effect of sin comes in Romans:

For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. [19] For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. [20] Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me (Romans 7:18-20).

Because people cannot or will not control their appetites, although these appetites are ultimately self-defeating, Paul points to the need of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. Paul wants the Corinthians to remember that they are free, but also that their freedom can become slavery. Freedom becomes slavery when our freely chosen desires and wants take control of us. We do not control our appetites, but

rather our appetites control us. Moderation, according to Aristotle, “is the virtue that deals similarly with human appetites.”

You may ask: “What does that mean?” So, in response I ask you: Have you ever been at home alone for a day and watched television? Have you ever, during the commercials, gone into the kitchen and peeked into the refrigerator? Have you done it more than once? Twice? Three times? More? The number of times a person goes back to an already inspected refrigerator to see if something magically appears, even though no one has opened it since the last time you did, demonstrates the degree that your appetites have control over you. This is Paul’s issue for those who claimed to be Jesus’ disciples in Corinth. Listen to Paul as he writes to the Corinthians and us:

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. [13] “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. [14] And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. [15] Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! [16] Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh.” [17] But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. [18] Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. [19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? [20] For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body (1Corinthians 6:12-20).

I would like to say two things about this text and what it may mean for our lives today. The first thing is that the Christian life is not just slogans against doing this or that, but rather a network of mutual relationships where Christ and his love focus. Martin Luther once wrote “The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that he sunk himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding” (Martin Luther, *Table Talk: Our Greatest Need*). Yet, although the incarnation may have been beyond our understanding, the incarnation met our deepest need. As someone once wrote:

**If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator.
If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist.
If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist.
If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer.
But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior (Author unknown, *Progress Magazine*,
December 25, 1992).**

In God’s plan, once God forgives us, we don’t simply speak about forgiveness; we forgive. We do not simply talk about love; we love. When Paul said “ ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are beneficial” he meant that we are free in Christ, but Christ’s law means we also respect our power to act on the behalf of others.

Second, our body is our little part of God’s creation, according to Paul. Here is an example of how we as individuals cannot do everything, but we can do something. A certain man was constantly irritated by the trash that people threw on the ground outside his office building. He decided to take a certain

portion of his office building's grounds and pick up the trash there daily. He was responsible only for his designated area. Others in the office building saw him do this and soon followed his lead. Before long, these workers cleared the grounds of the trash. No one person had to do everything, but all took their part in doing what was necessary in the area over which they assumed responsibility. The same is true in our lives. We cannot assume responsibility for everyone but we can assume responsibility for our own part. As we have heard before: "We are either part of the problem or part of the solution."

In 1980 a Boston court acquitted Michael Tindall of flying illegal drugs into the United States. Tindall's attorneys argued that he was a victim of "action addict syndrome," an emotional disorder that makes a person crave dangerous, thrilling situations. Tindall was not a drug dealer, merely a thrill seeker. In another case, an Oregon man who tried to murder his ex-wife was acquitted on the grounds that he suffered from "depression-suicide syndrome," whose victims deliberately commit poorly planned crimes with the unconscious goal of being caught or killed. He didn't really want to shoot his wife; he wanted the police to shoot him.

If you are old enough, you may remember the famous "Twinkie syndrome." Attorneys for Dan White, who murdered San Francisco mayor George Moscone, blamed the crime on emotional stress linked to White's junk food binges. A jury acquitted White of murder and convicted him on the lesser charge of manslaughter. Today, nobody's at fault for anything. We are a nation of victims (Louis Lotz, Sioux City, Iowa, Leadership, Winter Quarter, 1992, p. 57).

Paul wants the Corinthians to know that they are not their own. Rather they have been bought with a price. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are free now to be the people God created us to be. We only do this when God's grace works in us and through us.

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