



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“THE GIFT OF THE SON”

Scripture Lessons: Psalm 25:1-10; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, February 21, 2021
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Let us pray...

Almighty and Everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, and even joyful in your sight, for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

There is a story, a parable really, which was first popularized in a book back in 1954. And, sometimes the parable is set within the context of a funeral or a graduation; but, if the truth be known, the setting really doesn't matter, because the meaning of the story far transcends the medium. The story, as it was told to me, and which I shared at a Community Lenten luncheon a couple of years ago, it was about a wealthy man who, with his son, shared a passion for art collecting. Together they traversed all over the world and added the finest treasures to their collection. The older widowed man looked with great satisfaction upon this child of his, who had himself become an experienced art dealer.

One year, as winter approached, war engulfed their homeland, and the young man left to serve his country. After a few short weeks, the father received the news that he would never see his son again. The young man had died while rushing another soldier to a medic. Distraught and lonely, the father headed into the Christmas holidays with great anguish and sadness. The joy of the season – a season that he and his son had always looked so forward to – it was now lost on him.

One Christmas morning, however, there came an unexpected knock at the door. As he opened the door, he was greeted by a soldier that had a large package in his hand. He introduced himself to the older gentleman saying, "I was a friend of your son...and I know of his valor and his sacrifice. I have something for you." As the two men began to talk, the father learned of how the son had told his whole unit about his love of fine art. "I'm an artist," said the soldier, "and I want to give you this." As the older man unwrapped the package, the paper, it slowly gave way to a beautiful portrait of his son. Though the world would never consider that painting to be a work of any kind of genius, it did feature the young man's face in striking detail. Overcome with emotion, the man thanked the soldier, promised to hang the picture right above the fireplace. And a few hours later, after the soldier had departed, the old man set about his task.

True to his word, the picture hung right above the fireplace, taking the previous location of a painting worth thousands and thousands of dollars. And from that chair in the room, the man gazed at that precious gift he had been given. During the days and weeks that followed, the man realized that, even though his son would no longer be with him, the boy's life would live on, if only in an image.

The father eventually learned that his son had rescued several other wounded soldiers until a bullet had stilled his own heart. As the stories of his son's gallantry continued to reach him, fatherly pride and appreciation began to ease the grief, and that painting of his son...it became his most prized possession, far eclipsing any interest he had in those other pieces of art, works of art that museums around the world clamored for.

The following spring, the father became ill; he passed away. According to his will, all of the art in his earthly possession would be auctioned off on the next Christmas day. And with that news, much of the art world was in grand anticipation.

The day arrived, as did experienced art collectors from all over – they gathered to bid on a collection of extraordinary paintings. Surprisingly, the auction began with a painting that was not on any museum's list; it was that painting of the son. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid, but the room was silent. "Who will open the bidding with \$100?" he asked. No one said a thing. From the back of the room someone did say, "Who cares about that painting? It's just a sentimental picture of his son. Let's get on with the good stuff." Indiscriminate voices around the room seemed to echo the same refrain.

"No, we have to sell this one first," said the auctioneer. Continuing, he said, "So, who will take the portrait of the son?" Finally, a friend of the father spoke up, "Will you take ten dollars for the painting? I knew the boy; I'd like to have it."

"I have ten dollars," said the auctioneer. "Will anyone go higher?" After more silence, the auctioneer offered the customary, "Going once, going twice...sold!" And with that, the gavel fell. "Alright," someone said from the back, "let's get on with it."

The auctioneer smiled as he looked out upon the audience, and then, to everyone's surprise, he announced that the auction was over. After a moment of stunned silence, someone stood up and said, "What do you mean the auction is over? We didn't come all this way to see a picture

of a man's son to get auctioned off. There's millions of dollars of art here. We demand an explanation right now." The auctioneer smiled again and replied, "It's really very simple. According to the will of the father, whoever takes the son...gets everything else."

That story has stayed with me over the years and even now it offers a poignant and reoccurring theme as we make our way through the Season of Lent, because God, out of great love, has given us his Son - our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ - and, whoever gets the Son, gets everything they truly need! But what does it mean to say that whoever receives the Son receives everything else? I mean, can we truly say that? And what does "everything else" look like anyway? Does it resemble riches or fame or wisdom or beauty, perhaps?

No, it is far greater than any of these; indeed, the greatest gift we can receive in the whole of creation is salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ - and that gift, dear friends, it results in both life eternal as well as life abundant. In fact, for all that the Season of Lent has to say to us about our need for repentance and about the forgiveness of sins, for all that the Season of Lent has to say to us about our own mortality, it has exponentially more to say to us about life!

Consider again what awaits us on the far side of Lent, on the far side of Holy Week, if you will. After Jesus is crucified, it will appear as though the final chapter has been written about his life. It will look like Jesus' life is finished and gone; because, there, in that stone cold tomb are going to be the eyes that had once radiated with such conviction - they are going to be closed. And the hands that had placed mud on the blind man's eyes, and had gathered the children unto himself, and broken and multiplied the loaves and fishes - they will be folded over his chest. And those feet that had walked to a many of the bedside of a person and had been washed with the woman's tears, those feet that had walked on water - they will be dead and lifeless. And so it will be that death will have its 15 minutes of fame, but no more than that, because we know that the dawn comes...and the Son, he rises.

But more than just a new day, the resurrection is the dawn of a new and eternal life for all of us and to all those the Lord our God shall call. The Bible says that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son so that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life." And so, you see, for us to get everything, well it means, first and foremost, that we are given the gift of eternal life; that we, by God's grace, have the opportunity to live with God forever in heaven.

But what of life abundant? What about life in the here and now? What does that life look like? Well, to be certain, if we have lived at all, then we know that life does not always feel so fresh and new, does it? It certainly doesn't feel, at times, like the past is finished and gone. Because lingering for years upon years can be those hurtful things that have been spoken about us, or maybe the things that we may have spoken or done ourselves - which is to say nothing of those things that we have not said...the things that we have left undone.

Our bad choices and our worst decisions, they may have happened 30 years ago, but they can feel like a very present reality, and they can sometimes feel like they have had the last word and definitive word; but, know this - they don't! For none other than God has the final word, and God manages to take our past, our present and our future - manages to take everything there is

to know about us – and gives us new direction, new purpose, new meaning, new hope, new joy...new life! And when we doubt that this can happen, we need look no further than the disciples to know that it can.

We would do well to recall that by this time in Jesus' life – just a few weeks before his triumphant entry into that holy city of Jerusalem – Jesus is prepared to talk to his disciples about what is to come. He is going to talk to them about his death and resurrection; but they will never seem to have a grasp of the breadth and scope of what is about to happen. At one point, upon hearing Jesus talk about going to Jerusalem and undergoing great suffering, the disciple Peter, he pulls Jesus aside as if to talk some sense into him. "God forbid it, Lord!" he says, "This must never happen to you." And even when some of them do begin to understand what's on the horizon, they still have a difficult time understanding the nature of Jesus' messianic mission, especially that part about being the servant of all. I can't help but to think of James and John who ask Jesus for prestigious seats in the kingdom when He comes in his glory. But God's kingdom was never going to be like other earthly kingdoms – and the disciples would soon realize this well enough...and when they did, imagine how lost they felt – those who wagered their life on this one who taught with authority and not as the Scribes. I can hear them now: "Oh, if we ever had a winner, we have it in the Nazarene!"

"Halleluiah" the people, all the people, would shout as Jesus would ride into that Holy City...but, oh, how things would change! In just a span of a week's time, the chants of "Halleluiah" would give way to the crowd's discontent and that awful demand: "Give us Barabbas!" "Crucify Him!" And we know the story – Jesus will be arrested...and the cock will crow. Newness of life? It doesn't seem to be any newness of life at all! And so our disciples, we're going to see them run for cover...utterly defeated, acting like cowards, hiding behind closed doors. Oh, if there was ever a group of people who knew well what it meant to feel lost and hopeless, we have it in the disciples.

But, praise be to God, on that Easter morning, the women came to those so-called disciples -- those women...those blessed souls who arrived at the tomb early in order to anoint Jesus' body with the spices that they had prepared -- and they shared with the disciples the glorious news that their post-mortem rituals, they had been interrupted by the grandeur of the risen Christ. And that news – that risen life – it changed everything!

Some have said, and I'm inclined to agree, that the profound change that occurred in the disciples' life is the most compelling evidence for the resurrection...because nothing, save the risen Christ, was going to get those brokenhearted and disillusioned disciples out of hiding. Only the resurrection gave them the Son...which then allowed them to boldly proclaim the truth of God's love as never before. And so it is for you and me as well. For when it comes to life eternal, it is not that we will not all die; but rather, that even in death, we will share in Christ's victory in that we, too, will one day be raised with him in glory. And when it comes to life abundant, through Jesus' death and resurrection, we are given a taste of that newness of life right now, right this very minute; for ours is a golden opportunity, and with God's help, to live into our calling...to denounce the fear and the worry that plagues us on this side of heaven, and to become the men and women that God would have us to be...men and women who are governed in our hearts by faith and hope and love!

In Romans chapter 8 we read this: “He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?” You see, when we get the Son, we really do get everything!

Let us pray...

Almighty and Everlasting God, we give you thanks and praise for the life of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ! Because he lives, we too can now look for eternal life, believing in our hearts that nothing past, present or yet to come can separate us from your great love.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.