

3-29-20

The Gods we Make

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Scripture reference: Isaiah 43: 2, 5A, 10B-11 and Matthew 6:19-24

We continue this week to look at the dark side of humanity and what living on the dark side can do to us. One of our biggest hurdles as human beings is not being able to see beyond what is right in front of us - not being able to see beyond what is tangible, what we can touch with our hands. One of the hazards of not being able to clear that particular hurdle is that sometimes we allow things in our lives to become more important to us than God. We let things distract us from God, and often we allow these things to come between us and God. When I titled today's sermon, "The Gods We Make", this is what I was talking about. These things that get between us and God, the tangible things that we allow - consciously or not - to take priority over God our father; these are the Gods we make.

If we were to compare ourselves to animals that live in the wild - and I do this because we are animals. According to the classifications that we have made, we are part of the Animal Kingdom. There is no special "human kingdom" classification. We are the only surviving species within the Homo Genus and Homo Sapiens Species, so we do have that going for us, but still, we are Animals... Okay, enough science for today - oh, maybe some of you parents want to use that little lesson for science this week... Anyway... If we were to compare ourselves to animals that live in the wild, they survive on instinct; but WE live by value systems. We use these systems to set goals and create hopes and dreams for ourselves and our loved ones. In these systems we have established, we identify people, objects, locations, and ideas as important, and then we live in pursuit of those treasures, of fulfilling hopes and dreams based on those tangible things. And that can be a problem...

1 John 2:15 says: "Do not love the world or anything in the world." And people do this all the time. They reject God's love to pursue the world; and the world will only use them up and toss them out when it is done with them. Don't do that - don't love the world. The verse in John continues with: "If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them." You have to be careful here because this could be a bit disheartening, but it's not that God stops loving you if you love the world, on the contrary, God wants more than ever for you to feel his love at

times like this. So it's not God that stops loving you, it's that when you love the world, you stop loving God. Remember, you cannot love both at the same time...

We read in James that "Friendship with the world is hatred towards God" (James 4:4), and we heard in our Gospel reading today that Jesus himself said "No one can be a slave to two masters. He will hate one master and love the other. Or he will follow one master and refuse to follow the other. So you cannot serve God and money at the same time."

John Piper, in his book "A Hunger for God", said it much better than I can. This is how Piper explains the hazard of succumbing to the value systems we create based on the tangible things in our world: "The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison, but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world... For all the ill that Satan can do, when God describes what keeps us from the banquet table of his love, it is a piece of land, a yoke of oxen, and a wife (Luke 14:19-22) THE GREATEST ADVERSARY OF LOVE TO GOD IS NOT HIS ENEMIES BUT HIS GIFTS. And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth..."

Pure evil, although something we certainly want to avoid, is not the darkness that will swallow most of us whole. The darkness we have to watch out for is a more subtle evil; it is the hunger we feel for the simple pleasures of this earth.

So, there you have it, we simply need to be cautious of focusing too much on the simple pleasures of this earthly life, and focus on the love of our God. And I would be lying if I did not agree with those of you who are brave enough to say out loud: "that's easier said than done"... Our scripture today said "You cannot love God and money at the same time". Loving money creates a kind of force in us that makes us try to become as rich as possible and believe that this is the most important thing in life. Honestly, it's pretty easy to see why money is something that is sought after - money means power in our world - in our earthly world... Amassing great wealth is very enticing - oh, what we could do if only we had... however many dollars it is that we think we need to make us happy at any given time... But it's not just great wealth, even basic material comfort can become a god to anyone who makes that a number one priority, anyone who treasures the materialistic.

You see, the things we treasure actually dictate our behavior. The things we treasure capture our minds, and ultimately govern our lives. What we value - regardless of what that is - occupies our minds and takes control of our thoughts, our dreams, our emotions regarding, well, everything! What we treasure, what we value, steals all of our time and consumes us completely. It is VERY easy to lose focus, to allow earthly desires to distract us from our God and steal our hearts: "Your heart will be where your treasure is."

The thing or things or person or persons that we identify as "treasure" will absolutely control our hearts and whatever treasure controls our hearts will also control our words and our behaviors.

I think we should look at this verse in our Gospel today a little differently. I want you to consider that "money" is not just the coins jingling in your pocket or that green stuff that is folded so nicely in your wallet... in this context, "money" could be any number of things, "money" is whatever it is that you treasure most; whatever it is that consumes your thoughts, your dreams, your goals in this life - that is your "money", your treasure, that thing that you think about all the time, that thing that you worship - that's what worship is right? When we worship, we are showing reverence and adoration for something. So we have to ask ourselves some very important questions... what is it that we treasure? Where is it that we find our treasure? What are we worshipping? In asking these questions we will be answering the question: Where is our heart? Remember, where our treasure is, there our heart will also be... And then we have to ask ourselves "Where is our focus?" What is it that we are focusing on? Where are we looking? Wherever we focus, whatever we focus on, it will dominate our lives.

Men and women today have lives that are extremely full - maybe too full. And these lives have filled up very quickly. And when lives fill up fast, there is little room for reflection, for self-evaluation. And when more gets added to our lives, when hardships come, one of two things will happen. 1) We will get lost even further in our earthly lives thinking that we can "buy" our way out of our troubles somehow, or 2) we will take the time to reflect, time to "feel", time to think and ask ourselves "Where do I go from here? What is the thing that is truly important in my life?"

This is where many of us are right now. We are at a crossroads of sorts. This international health crisis is causing most everybody to fall into one of those two categories: Lost or questioning. The lost are finding treasures in things - they find value in their possessions and they focusing on acquiring earthly things - tangible items - like sanitizer and toilet paper - and even people, getting more people to read their stories on facebook or follow them on twitter...these are the things that have come to hold the most value to them - things they are focusing on - things that are their treasures, the gods they have made... And the questioning are slowing down, really seeing what it looks like to be a person who finds their treasure in earthly things, and shifting their focus, rediscovering - or perhaps discovering for the first time - the gift, the grace, the treasure that is our one true God.

Whoever you are, and whatever it is that you do, know that your life will either be enhanced by, or will be victimized by what you treasure. By grace we have been given the power to pursue the treasure of the Kingdom of God. The Spirit of God resides in each one of us, is in our souls, and this Spirit gives us not only the desire - if we will only recognize it - but also the ability to pursue that heavenly treasure, to worship our one true God. All we need to do is admit to our pursuits of selfish treasure, our creation of earthly gods; and then make that shift, change our focus, and then just watch what God can do! AMEN.