Welcome to Life. May I Take Your Order? Sunday Pentecost 21, Year B

Eccleciastes 5: 10 - 20; Hebrews 4: 1 - 16; Mark 10: 23 - 31 October 17, 2021

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Order: When we go to a restaurant, or pull through the drive through, we place our ORDER and we expect things to be done in a certain way; hold the mayo, no pickles, extra cheese, over easy, medium well...

When we place our order, we expect the order to be followed and the outcome be what we had desired and expected.

But, when the order is messed up, when something is done wrong, when things aren't the way we expect; well, don't mess with me when I'm hangry!

There is a saying among theologians, "Lex orandi, lex credendi!" Yes, it is Latin, as most good theological phrases are; Latin being the language of the three medieval doctorates; medicine, law, and the queen of disciplines, theology.

"Lex orandi, lex credendi" simply means, "The law of what is prayed, is the law of what is believed." In other words, there is an order; what you pray reflects what you believe. Or, what you believe is reflected by how you pray. This phrase has been expanded and expounded upon in many ways. Such as, "Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vevendi" "What is prayed, is what is believed, is what is lived."

It has also been carried over into our worship, "The way you worship affects how you believe. And, how you believe affects the way you worship." Which is why different belief systems, even within Christianity, seem to have their own ways of worship. Lutherans worship differently than Baptists; Baptists differently than Pentecostals;

Pentecostals differently than Presbyterians.... Because, our worship reflects how and what we believe.

There is an order to it. If you go to a Lutheran church and the worship is like a Baptist church, it just doesn't feel right. If you go to a Pentecostal church and they worshiped like Catholics, it just wouldn't feel right. You expect a certain order and when that order is disrupted, there is a disconnect.

King Solomon, who wrote our Old Testament reading, was very familiar, it seems, with a breakdown in order. In fact, the whole book of Ecclesiastes is him struggling to find meaning in the chaos and disconnects of life. "Vanity of vanities...all is vanity" (Eccl. 1:2, 12:8, et al).

Because of this, Solomon was on a quest to find meaning. And, as he said, "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9).

Solomon looks for meaning, comfort, and purpose in the same things that we have all tried. Money, power, pleasure, work.... All lead to the same place... the grave. None of them completely satisfies the soul.

In fact, none of these things can we actually possess. They are never, really, ours. Money, as we see in both the Old Testament and Gospel readings, easily goes away. The more money one has, the more friends one seems to have. The more food that is on the table, the more people show up to eat it. It doesn't last. Not only that, but there are others things that certainly affect our money. Things like inflation, theft, mismanagement, tragedy, calamity... in a moment, it can all be gone. Remember Job?

Power, can be taken away. There is always one who is more powerful, more crafty, more influential, more corrupt...

Pleasure only lasts for a moment. And, often, it, too, becomes boring and the pursuit for something greater to entertain is sought out.

Work is always before us. There is always something more to do. It is a beast with an insatiable appetite. It continues to devour and consume more and more. The more time and energy you throw at it, the more it demands.

So, what's the point? A man can work himself ragged to gain riches to do the things that he wants but is now too tired to enjoy, while, at the same time, the fool inherits great wealth without working a moment of his life. He enjoys all the things we wish we could, but don't have enough hours in the day to work enough to gain enough money to enjoy those things.

We all come into the world naked and empty handed. If only we could leave this world the same way. For many, they leave this world, not only naked and empty handed, but also with all the ravages of this harsh and broken world; ulcers, arthritis, cancer, heartache, loneliness, failure, grief...

So, Jesus says to us today, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mk 10:23).

It is not hard for us to see this. Those who trust in wealth, power, pleasure, busyness and the like have their hearts consumed with unattainable, quickly fleeting, things.

A wealthy person is often consumed with gaining more riches, safeguarding what he does have, and keeping others from taking it away. Tax shelters, loopholes, off shore accounts.... Reminds of two very famous Scrooges; Ebenezer Scrooge and Scrooge McDuck. Both, while perhaps somewhat extreme, were consumed with hoarding their wealth.

Those consumed with such things do not put their trust in God, but in being shrewd enough, miserly enough, etc.

On the other hand, the rich are not the only ones consumed with wealth, power, and the like. The poor covet what the rich have. They are consumed with envy, spite, hate, and a desire to see the rich suffer the same fate the poor man suffers. If only I could have his house, his car, his position, his luck, his life...

And, even those who are in between the extremes spend much time trying to avoid being like the poor man, while also chasing after the rich man. "Keeping up with the Joneses."

Instead, Jesus reminds us that it is impossible for a person to save themself through such pursuits, and Solomon reminds us that we cannot and will not be satisfied with those pursuits.

Jesus says, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Mk. 10:25).

The disciples exclaim in astonishment, "Then who can be saved?" It is as if they are saying, "Those who are rich are obviously favored by God, for He has given them much. If those who are favored can't make it, then who?"

And, Jesus' answer, which is quoted often, as it should be, but within the right context, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God" (Mk. 10:27).

Salvation does not belong to our works, but to God's work, alone. But, not just salvation, everything belongs to God. If you have attained wealth; praise God! If you have attained poverty; praise God! If you have perfect health; praise God! If you are fighting for your life; praise God! If you have a job; praise God!

All of these things are a test. The point being, do not put your trust in these things. Poverty can disappear as quickly as wealth. Health can disappear as quickly as sickness. But, the one thing that will not disappear, that will not fail you, that will not let you down, is your God.

"Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. Everyone, also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil – this is the gift of God. For he will not remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart" (v. 18-20).

Rich, poor, healthy, ill, powerful, downtrodden... know that you have one who loves you, has died for you, will give you much riches, has made you an heir of all creation, and suffers along with you.

Remember, that through Jesus, you are the most important thing to God. Christ laid down His life that your sins be killed. He was buried that your sins would also be

buried. And, He rose from death so that you, too, might live. No, not just live, but live forever in His kingdom which has no end.

Rarely do we get what we order. That is just how this world works. With its brokenness and the fallenness of its inhabitants, the order of things is terribly out of whack.

This world is hard. It is hard for the poor, the rich, the healthy, the sick, the powerful, the powerless... but, with God we can be content. He hears our cries, loves us, and will care for us.

And, Solomon says, "God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart."

Joy is not happiness, which is as fleeting as pleasure, wealth, health and everything else. Joy is knowing that no matter what happens in this life you are cared for and God has given to you a promise; eternal life, guaranteed, through Christ. No more tears. No hunger. No thirst. No sickness. No disease. No disaster. No calamity. No corruption. No power struggles. No theft. No sin. No death.

Enjoy what God has given to you, knowing that it comes from Him.

Now may the peace that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

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