

SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

October 22, 2006 – Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Mark 10:35-45

Pr. Robert M. Goldstein

“God’s Home”

There’s a new book out by an evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins, that says that belief in God is not only a delusion, but a pernicious one. This is good in that quite conflicting ideas can be discussed freely –even in the start of a sermon! The New York Times review of Mr. Dawkins is surprisingly disenchanted by the author’s claims –and for the right reasons, I think, which we cannot go into here.

My transition to today’s Gospel is this: Mr. Dawkins puts the issue of God as abstractly isolated “out there” as an object that does or doesn’t exist (He’s a 6 out of 7 in certitude that God doesn’t). But we never begin worship by first taking such a poll, do we? Perhaps Mr. Dawkins might just ponder that fact, not as some un-Enlightened ignorant habit on our part, but as an opening for him to discover something about himself, and at the same time for him to understand the extraordinary meaning of the word “God,” a meaning you already know.

For the word “God” has a home for its use and it’s not as Mr. Dawkins uses it. God is not at home in abstractions. If invited God will go there, but she’s not very comfortable. God’s home is in worship and sermons, which, in turn, are expositions of our sacred writings, which we call the Bible, and other rich sources of tradition. God’s home, as Jesus reminds us, is in how we treat our neighbor, our parents, and our God. Luther says God is discovered living in the Word, in the sacred literature, in our faith community, on the cross.

So our task with Mr. Dawkins is to engage him modestly with the parables of Jesus. God’s very much at home there. But will Mr. Dawkins, being at Oxford, (where, in matters philosophical, there often seems more heat than light) be too proud to accept this commonsense invitation of the Christian community? But this brings us to the Gospel for this morning.

Are we too proud to hear what God says in the Gospel reading this morning? Charity begins at home, you know, Goldstein.

The Gospel reading is about James and John wanting to get on in life by seeking the left and right hands of authority to Jesus. Now two concepts of glory hover here. One is the ordinary concept that escalates the ambitious in us all. The other has a different grammar, a different meaning, a different way of living as its home, a difference that turns the ordinary meaning upside down into the extraordinary.

We’re well acquainted with the ordinary, the received sense of “glory”. It is an instinct and even a passion: to succeed and to precede others. To reach the top. For there is praise from parents and peers awaiting us. There is self-satisfaction. There are the rewards of power and money too. Wealth woos us. Fame beckons. We are acquainted with that human kind of glory.

And so were the other ten disciples when they hear of James and John's impertinence in asking for the top tier of leadership under Jesus. Caught up in the same game of glory, with the same passions, the same self-aggrandizing commonsense way of life, the ten are angry. I really doubt it was righteous indignation –more like resentment in not getting to Jesus first!

But with truly remarkable patience and love, Jesus calls them all together and introduces a new concept of glory unlike that of commonsense. No longer a glory that comes from domination or tyranny, ruthlessness or cunning. But the glory of service to others, even to the point that the more ambitious you are the more serving you become in caring for the needs of others.

This is a new grammar, a new meaning to the word "glory." And when the two meanings of the word "glory" are compared we see paradox indeed. "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all." These are not abstractions. They are about how to live life, a way of life, how to exist, a way of living.

The early Christians came to see that this new meaning to the ordinary word "glory" comes at a terrible price: "For the Human One came not to be served but to serve, and to give up life as a ransom for many." Jesus lived out that extraordinary glory –to the point of accepting death. And this obedience brought forth even a more paradoxical resurrection.

James and John asked for ordinary glory, but accepted Jesus' promise of a different kind of glory, and we know James was martyred into that paradoxical glory and he now awaits resurrection.

So where does the tire hit the road for us? How does this "God text" speak to us this morning?

What kind of glory are you seeking in your life? What kind of glory is your life going to show, to reflect –perhaps when someone gives your eulogy? That's the thrust of this Christian text this morning.

How are you going to steward your life? That is, how are you going to value and organize the elements of your life –your personal relationships, your faith life, your talents you have learned from others and the gifts, the knacks you have in doing some things so extraordinarily well and so happily? How are you going to steward them, use them?

Christian stewardship is not about money or checking off duties from a list. Christian stewardship is your whole intimate and active response to God's call to you. Christian stewardship has to do with the state of our hearts.

Has not God blessed each one of us? Has not God offered a glory –not a glamour glory, but that extraordinary glory that comes to us in managing our whole estate of life with an eye to the common good, to Christ? This is what stewardship means. It touches deeply down to what we truly treasure in our heart of hearts.

When you make your pledge of your time, talent and money today and in the coming weeks think about how you have and how you want to steward your life in Christ. The text for this life moment is:

Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Human One came not to be served but to serve, and to give up life a ransom for many.

May God's spirit give you the courage, the sacrificial courage, you need to make the leap of being Christ's good and faithful steward. In this moment in your life God is real and God is present. Amen

St. Francis Lutheran Church
152 Church Street, SF, CA 94114-1111
Phone: (415) 621-2635; Fax: (415) 621-8819
E-mail: StFrancisSF@sbcglobal.net
www.st-francis-lutheran.org