

Sermon: Soul is King
Scripture: Luke 13:1-9
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
Date: March 7, 2010

Jesus here in this passage roundly rejects any suggestion that the bad things that happen to us are a punishment from God. And this is not the only place in the gospel where he makes that clear. When he and his disciples are confronted with a blind man, they ask Jesus who was at fault for his condition. Did he sin or his parents? Jesus says neither. It's not how it works. And again he says the father makes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on the good and bad alike, the righteous and unrighteous. Of course these unequivocal passages don't seem to discourage certain Christians from positing that God punishes us for badness and rewards us for good. The whole prosperity gospel that has millions of adherents across this country is based upon that notion that God wants to reward us with the good things of life. And then there is the most wide-spread and common of Christian beliefs that the faithful in Jesus will be rewarded with heaven and those who have rejected him punished in hell. We just can't seem to get our heads around anything beyond this level of justice keeping with rewards and punishments, despite what Jesus says about it.

And one reason for that is because on the material level of reality the whole cause and effect dynamic is very real. There are consequences for what we do. In terms of natural laws, if we misuse and overuse the resources around us we and other species are going to suffer for it and if we conserve we will reap the reward of it. Or in terms of society's laws, if we obey the fundamental laws of our society we will be rewarded with privileges that come along with that and if we don't we will probably be punished. So it only makes sense that then when we consider our relationship with God we would apply those same cause and effect, reward and punishment principles. It might make SENSE on one level, but our Lord and teacher, Jesus Christ, tried to teach us that on the spiritual level, when we see with a clear and single eye, the eye of the heart, we will realize that it is not how it works. We've heard it maybe with our heads but not with our hearts.

We tend to want to figure all things out with our head both the laws and dynamics of the physical world AND the laws and reality of the spiritual world as well. The only

catch is that the spiritual world, which is not separate but shot through the physical world, can be perceived and understood correctly only through the heart. Our *minds* will mostly separate us from spiritual reality by dividing things up. It's the important and brilliant work of the mind, to slice and dice, divide and categorize and put back together, which works if you want to find a medical cure for some disease or to build a bomb, but if you are looking to approach God, to understand Spirit, to follow Christ, that's got to be an effort or a process that is initiated, situated and directed by the heart or we could say by the soul. For one thing, as our Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam hold as their central revelation to the world – if God is anything, God is one, not many, not divided, not split, not a part of something else, but ONE. And so necessarily once our dice it up, splice it up minds get involved we immediately take a step away from God. We can only get so close to God if we try and think our way there and often we think ourselves further. But to love is to find ourselves experiencing the very heart of the reality of God

And yet here I am with words trying to explain this so that we can understand. I have to confess that I struggle with the Protestant emphasis in worship upon preaching the word of God, because it's so much an activity of the mind and I wonder if we don't at times do more damage to our relationship with God with all our words than if we were to just be quiet and have communion together every Sunday and sing. Sing, eat, and keep quiet. As practices for approaching the God of our lives, we could do much worse. Eating tends to bypass the mind and engages the body and song and music too helps us get beyond mental images and silence brings us into the seat of the heart, that single-eye reality of the soul where God is.

But this is what Jesus is up against when the people come to him and say

“is this brutal killing by Pilate's men or the tragic falling of the tower that killed all those people a punishment or what?”

“How can such bad things happen to people if they are not in some way deserving of it?”

“How can we make sense of life at all if bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people. They must on some level be at fault for what has befallen them, right?”

The American cultural equivalent of that type thinking is that the wealthy have worked hard and are rewarded by what they have and where they are and the poor are being punished for laziness. Has God blessed America or in our current economic and political situation maybe God is cursing us now. Jesus, to the people surrounding him on that day, said, that's not how it works. Still, though, he adds, you better change your ways if you don't want to be destroyed yourselves. God's not doing this to our country but by God we had better look closely at changing our consumption and business patterns if we don't want to suffer the consequences of certain current practices.

Yes, it's critical that we figure this out with our minds, how we are living, what it's doing to our planet, and how we can change, but that's only one level of reality that we would be addressing and there is this whole other level of reality that we might call the spiritual that also needs our focus and attention but not the attention of our slicing and dicing minds but the attention of hearts. Ideally this is the work of the church, to point people toward this deeper reality of Spirit and help people to do the work of tuning in and understanding beyond the understanding of the head and into the understanding of the heart. It's a different type of knowing that we seek here in the church and when we come to the communion table – it's a knowing that is beyond all knowledge, thoughts beyond thought, an understanding beyond that which we could possibly understand.

We here in the church are in the business of the soul and the heart and our minds must be in service to that. In most other places in our lives it's our body, soul, heart, that is put in service of the mind. Here, the soul is king...