

The *new* mind in Christian Life
(1Samuel 30:1-6, Colossians 3:1-11, Matthew 6:25-34)
(2nd sermon in a 3 sermon series)

Last Year wild fires raged though much of our nation's west. One of the first major towns to receive national attention was that of Malibu, CA. As many of you may remember, one of the buildings which burned to the ground was a Presbyterian Church. Recently a denominational publication did a special report on that church. I was surprised to read in the magazine that a friend of mine from seminary was their associate pastor. Last week I called him and after we caught up on how each other was doing he told me how powerful this experience had been for him and the church. None of them wanted to see their church go up in flames. Mike said, "I have to be careful about saying this too much Nathan, but I think this disaster has proven who the *real* devoted believers are....they now have to wrestle with what being the church is all about, and realize it's not about the building."

It is spring time in Kansas and we all know what that means. What would we do if our beautiful historic building was crumbled by an F-5 Tornado? How would we respond what would we focus upon, how would we gather and grieve, what would be the most important aspect to our faith; trying to rebuild a facility or maintaining right worship of God which is showing our faith in our everyday lives? In our Old Testament lesson that's the crossroads which David was forced to face. The rebel Amalekites had destroyed some of David's most loyal followers' homes and property. They spared the lives of their family members but took them into indefinite imprisonment. David and others became exhausted in their grief. Then in emotional turmoil the people turned on David, threatening to kill him!

The embers from the flames that destroyed their homes were still hot, some of the people who he spent his most cherished moments with were gone and now David's own allies had become potential enemies...what could he do? Where could he go? How shall he act in a time like...this?! A logical response may have been to run or possibly to verbally reprimand them and remind the distraught men that *he* was still in charge. A not so logical but all too man-like move would have been to take them on physically. So what did he do? Run away, shout it out, or allow for a clash? None of the above; David chose something all too foreign to us in times of conflict, he went to God.

To “Strengthen himself in the Lord his God”¹ is rich with meaning. First and foremost it shows David’s humility. Secondly it shows his spiritual maturity. Third it shows his intimate connection to God.

C.S. Lewis says, “There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves.”² This of course is pride, or self-conceit. When one deals with conflict the mind seems to naturally become defensive. When one allows this feeling to augment their brains the end result is usually something which is said or done in a manner which will clearly communicate to others, “leave me alone, or else!” When trials, conflict or danger lurks into our lives we sense it; *that* intuition is healthy. However, it is up to us to respond in a way in which will benefit and not belittle, love and not lash-out against, cherish and not crush, endure and not endanger...ourselves and others.

Humility is shown when we sense the trouble and actively look to a higher power for guidance. We can say we’ve “prayed about” something all we want but until we learn how to wait on the Lord and know God in a fuller more committed sense, then our devotion is just false flattery to the infinite one. David dealt with tragedy by not losing his mind but instead by purposely seeking out the spiritual renewal that he needed. He didn’t allow others to beat him up emotionally he bypassed their threats by bolstering his belief. How many times have you been threatened only to respond with threats of your own? It’s as simple as children not willing to take responsibility for their actions and as complex as adults feeling trapped in a cycle of abuse. Humility is hard.

In our gospel passage Jesus describes a need for less anxiety in our lives. “Do not be anxious about your life...which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his/her life?”³ It’s so easy to allow ourselves to become wrapped up in the many demands and dynamics of life that we miss the *joy of living* itself! Being a young parent I often hear others who have grown children say, “enjoy it now, it all goes too fast...before you know it they’re grown and out of the house.” Others assure me when I speak with concern about the endless dynamics of children’s development that, “this too will pass.”

¹ 1Samuel 30:6

² C.S. Lewis, **A Year with C.S. Lewis** *daily readings from his classic works*, Harper Pub. cop. 2003, pg 87

³ Matthew 6:25,27

Ironic how different each message is and yet what lies at the basis of each is similar, “take it all in stride, it’s worth the journey”. The reality is no matter what the dynamics of our life demand of us each of us must develop maturity to deal with life’s hurdles. An immature adolescent who worries about learning to potty train themselves is not all that different than a mature adult who refuses to take advice from anyone. Thus developing *spiritual* maturity is much akin to allowing for personal growth.

Jesus is concerned about all the time we waste worrying about...everything. He says, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.”⁴ Will it rain? When will the sun finally come out? What will we have for lunch? When will I be able to afford that new car? Will I ever get out of debt? Will that land dispute ever get settled? When will my children stop fighting? When will my aches and pains cease? What if I never find Mr. “Right”? Where will my next paycheck come from? Will I ever lose that extra weight? Can I ever find peace again?

Yes. You can. But first you must find something more worthwhile to concern yourself with, your awareness of the Divine in your life. You can’t grow in the Lord if you don’t know the Lord, you won’t find peace in the prince if you fail to open the fence that you’ve allowed to be built around your soul. Consider this scene from the play *Heartbreak House* by George Bernard Shaw,

“Ellie: A soul is a very expensive thing to keep: much more so than a motor car.

Shotover: Is it? How much does your soul eat?

Ellie: Oh, a lot. It eats music and pictures and books and mountains and lakes and beautiful things to wear and nice people to be with.”⁵

Our souls need care and constant maintenance. Without having an awareness of the things of spiritual value we are limited to obsessing about the imperfections of ourselves and others. Spiritual maturity looks beyond the self and lingers in lasting relationship to another; which is God. David could have rejected his soul and kept on pouting about his losses or worse yet made the others feel responsible for them. Instead when some of them begin to *lose* their minds he collects his and divorces himself from

⁴ Matthew 6:33

⁵ *Heartbreak House*, act 2, The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw: Collected Plays with their Prefaces, vol. 5, ed. Dan H. Laurence (1972).

their unhealthy rage. By finding strength in the Lord David admitted his human limitations and refueled his soul; thus deepening his spiritual maturity.

Our epistle lesson speaks of, “setting our minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”⁶ The laundry list of sins that follows in this passage are not meant to be exhaustive, instead they simply point out *some* of the obvious earthly distortions that we must face. The intended good of God’s design in human sexuality has been tainted, the potential for passion and praise is spoiled by angry or ugly words, the freedom of truth-telling is robbed by our abandoning of honesty and unless we put *off* these socially accepted alterations and put *on* a “new” self we will fail to truly know the intentions of our creator. “Self-control is primarily mind-control. What we sow in our minds we reap in our actions.”⁷ We limit our ability to be connected with God if we allow our mind, body and Spirit to be servants to sin.

Even though all of us are prone to mistakes and misgivings the closer we allow ourselves to be with an unchanging truth the better chance we have to respond the right way. Interestingly, a recent Harris poll of nearly 2500 randomly selected adults found that the most popular book for both men and women is overwhelmingly the Bible. The second favorite book for men was J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of The Rings*, for women Margaret Mitchell’s “*Gone With the Wind*.” But, as I said last week. I wonder how well we know this “book”? Most of us admit to its importance but, unlike fictitious fantasy or romance; which is entertainment, how are we applying its truths to our lives? David met adversity with humility, spiritual maturity and deepened his connection to God. However, as many of us know David was no saint. He had to work on this constantly, sometimes he failed miserably, and other times he found his strength in the Lord.

That is all of our challenge and the only way to find success in this broken world is by working to discern and develop a *new* mind, the mind of Christ. Then, and only then, will we be able to confidently counter the crises that come our way. Are you in a tough place? You can handle it with humility, maturity and connection to God. It won’t be easy, some have lost their minds and are threatening to blame you but with Christ you can do it!

Alleluia Amen!

⁶ Colossians 3:2

⁷ John Stott, *Your Mind Matters*, pg 58

