

Holiness

Seventh Sunday After Trinity
(From the Epistle: *Romans vi. 19.*)

[19] I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

[20] For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.

[21] What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

[22] But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

[23] For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. 20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. 21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (New International Version Bible, Zondervan, 1995)

Holiness has got to be about one of the most maligned words in the English language! When we say it, we think of “Holy Rollers”, and people in Pentecostal churches whom we imagine (incorrectly, by the way, at least in my experience!!) rolling around on the floor like contented pigs rolling in the cool mud, in some sort of an ecstatic “high”. Or we think of rich church-going folks, walking proudly through the church door, Bible in hand, too proud to look at anyone, and imagining themselves to be the PUREST, the NICEST, the BEST, the CLEANEST and the HOLIEST people on earth! Ugh, what a thought! People so full of themselves that they can’t see how proud and detestable and repulsive they really are!

But then..., we think of a lovely church building with windows of stained glass; a sense of great peace, wonder, and majesty; of people in the pews on their knees or just sitting there, heads bowed in prayer, in the presence of God Almighty. “Now THAT’S real holiness,” we say to ourselves! We can all see it, recognize it, and really embrace it.

And that’s just it. True holiness is the best thing in the whole Universe, because it is the character of God Himself. He is pure, without blame, innocent, but also unbelievably majestic, high, and lifted up, exalted above everyone and everything else, and always will be! He is HOLY! He is supremely great beyond words.

And He is also minus all of the things that WE are: unholy, unkind, ungracious, sinful to the extreme. At least, that’s the way I *am*. I don’t know about you, but I can make a good guess that you’re exactly the same, if you would but allow yourself to take a real good look at yourself!

Check out the following offerings from Scripture that are used in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer (BCP). As you read them, you will well understand why the BCP includes them:

THE LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him. Hab. ii. 20.

Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. Isaiah lvii. 15.

When any pious Anglican (and “pious” is a good word, in spite of how it has gotten a bad name!) begins his service of “Morning Prayer” or “Evening Prayer” from the BCP (starting on BCP p. 3), he chooses one or more of a number of Scriptures to recite out loud, which include the two above.

Think about it! *Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit...* God is saying that He lives in two places at the same time (only God can do that, right?!): in Heaven, where He is enthroned on a great and wonderful throne, displayed in splendor and light for all the Universe to behold, and guess where else...? On Earth..., this ruined Dirt Ball we all live on, with its pollution, its wars, its contamination from atomic explosions, its murder, rape, sin, and misery... but, but, but... *only* with the *contrite and humble!* Good Heavens! You mean to say that God actually dwells in our midst? Yes, absolutely. But, once again, only with *the contrite* (“feeling or expressing remorse or penitence; affected by guilt”) and *humble spirit* (at least we should all know what *humble* means!).

Now let’s go back to today’s text, from the BCP, shown at the beginning of this sermon. The great Apostle Paul is telling us how to be holy..., in other words, to be just like God:

Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.

We are to offer our bodies (really, meaning our *whole selves*) as *slaves* --literally, yes, *slaves*, those who just take orders from their Master and do them without question or argument-- *slaves* to *righteousness*. *Righteous* is also a much misunderstood and hated term, because it’s been given such a bad name by people who are really examples of “self-righteousness”, which is about one of the worst attitudes of heart anyone can exhibit. But real *righteousness* means being RIGHT in every good sense of the word: doing things the way GOD does them, which is right! *Righteousness*, in my opinion, is one of the most beautiful words in the English language.

Would you like to be *holy*? I would. Would you like to be *righteous*? I would. And look at what the Scripture says is the promised result of being holy and righteous: *eternal life!* Life

forever, and ever, and ever, with God... long after the last war has ended, the last auto has belched its miserable pollutants into the air, the last unborn child slaughtered, the last innocent girl raped, and on and on and on it goes. Long after all of those dreadful, awful things, and a thousand more!! *Eternal Life!* Hallelujah to God.

Let me close with the very last verse of today's Epistle: *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Sin pays a wage at the end of the day, and guess what it is... *DEATH*. Sin will give you a paycheck at the end of your life lived apart from God, and it won't be permanent unconsciousness, or "six feet under", or becoming part of a tree, or just disappearing into nothingness, or being reincarnated as your own grandmother, or anything else. It will be *DEATH*: separation from God, and all that is good, for a long, long, long, long time... *Ages of ages, eons of eons*, as the Holy Book Says.

So join me... Let's get holy. and Let's get righteous!!!!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.