

**A Sermon Preached by
Mr. Aran Walter for Proper 28, The Season After Pentecost, Year B
November 15th, 2009 at St. Thomas, Menasha**

Hebrews 10 verse 24

Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds . . .

Allow me, if you will, to provoke you.

This parable is called, 'No conviction',

In a world where following Christ is decreed to be a subversive and illegal activity you have been accused of being a believer, arrested and dragged before a court.

You have been under clandestine surveillance for some time now and so the prosecution has been able to build up quite a case against you. They begin the trial by offering the judge dozens of photographs which show you attending church meetings, speaking at religious events, and participating in various prayer and worship services.

After this they present a selection of items that have been confiscated from your home: religious books that you own, worship CDs and other Christian artifacts. Then they step up the pace by displaying many of the poems, pieces of prose, and journal entries that you had lovingly written concerning your faith. Finally, in closing, the prosecution offers your Bible to the judge. This is a well-worn book with scribbles, notes, drawings, and underlings throughout, evidence, if it were needed, that you had read and re-read this sacred text many times.

Throughout the case you have been sitting silently in fear and trembling. You know deep in your heart that with the large body of evidence that has been amassed by the prosecution you face the possibility of a long imprisonment or even execution. At various times throughout the proceedings you have lost all confidence and have been on the verge of standing up and denying Christ.

But while this thought has plagued your mind throughout the trial, you resist the temptation and remain focused.

Once the prosecution has finished presenting their case the judge proceeds to ask if you have anything to add, but you remain silent and resolute, terrified that if you open your mouth, even for a moment, you might deny the charges made against you. Like Christ, you remain silent before your accusers. In response you are led outside to wait as the judge ponders your case.

The hours pass slowly as you sit under guard in the foyer waiting to be summoned back. Eventually a young man in uniform appears and leads you into the courtroom so that you may hear the verdict and receive word of your punishment. Once seated in the dock the judge, a harsh and unyielding man, enters the room, stands before you, looks deep into your eyes and begins to speak,

“Of the charges that have been brought forward I find the accused not guilty.”

“Not guilty?” your heart freezes. Then, in a split second, the fear and terror that had moments before threatened to strip your resolve are swallowed up by confusion and rage.

Despite the surroundings, you stand defiantly before the judge and demand that he give an account concerning why you are innocent of the charges in light of the evidence.

“What evidence?” he replies in shock.

“What about the poems and prose that I wrote?” you reply.

“They simply show that you think of yourself as a poet, nothing more.”

“But what about the services I spoke at, the times I wept in church and the long, sleepless nights of prayer?”

“Evidence that you are a good speaker and actor, nothing more.” replied the judge, “It is obvious that you deluded those around you, and perhaps at times you even deluded yourself, but this foolishness is not enough to convict you in a court of law.”

“But this is madness!” you shout. “It would seem that no evidence would convince you!”

“Not so,” replies the judge as if informing you of a great, long forgotten secret.

“The court is indifferent toward your Bible reading and church attendance; it has no concern for worship with words and a pen. Continue to develop your theology, and use it to paint pictures of love. We have no interest in such armchair artists who spend their time creating images of a better world. We exist only for those who would lay down that brush, and their life, in a Christ-like endeavor to create a better world.

So, until you live as Christ and his followers, until you challenge this system and become a thorn in our side, until you die to yourself and offer your body to the flames, until then my friend, you are no enemy of ours.”

(end of parable)

These things we do . . . this Bible we read . . . the church services we attend . . . the songs we sing . . . the things we believe . . . they’re all important . . . but they are not the point.

All those things . . . the Bible, the songs, the liturgy, the rituals, the doctrines . . . they all point to something ELSE!!!

A HOLISTIC, FULLY INTEGRATED LIFE . . .

A LIFE LIVED IN THE WORLD . . .

A LIFE LIVED AND ARRANGED AROUND THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS . . .

A LIFE THAT DISPLAYS THE GRACE, PEACE, JUSTICE, SHALOM OF GOD . . .

A LIFE THAT SEEKS TO PARTNER WITH GOD'S DREAMS OF RESTORING THIS WORLD . . . NOT TRYING TO ESCAPE IT . . .

A LIFE THAT RECOGNIZES THAT BECAUSE WE ARE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD, WE MUST THEREFORE IMAGE GOD IN THE WORLD . . .

THE WAY WE LIVE OUR LIVES, DISPLAYS TO THE WORLD WHO GOD IS AND WHAT GOD CARES ABOUT . . .

All the things we do, read, believe, etc . . . they are tools that help us live the kind of life that Jesus lived.

In that sense, perhaps following the teachings of Jesus is more about life BEFORE death, rather than just after it.

I'd like to close with one more parable

The Miracle

PART ONE

There was once a poor and compassionate woman who lived in one of the world's largest cities

She was a kind and tender lady who labored tirelessly with the unloved and unwanted

She was also a skilled painter and would subsidize her work by sketching portraits of wealthy tourists in their fine robes

At night she would chat with strangers in the local tavern or relax with friends in her modest home at the edge of the city

Her life continued in this way for many years, however, on her thirtieth birthday she made an incredible discovery

She found that she had been miraculously bestowed with an astonishing gift

For no apparent reason she could now perform supernatural feats of the sort she had only heard of in the fables of old

PART TWO

One word from her lips could generate breathtaking wealth and a mere thought could turn her dwelling into a golden palace

People would travel thousands of miles just to sit in her presence, watch what she could do and learn from her

Soon even those in power began to take note of this miracle worker, and were awed by her immense power

Her divine gift captivated everyone she met and caused many to revere her as a god

Yet, throughout her entire life, not one person ever learned of her supernatural powers; for never once did she use them

PART THREE

She could have taken herself out of poverty in an instant or gained any possession in the blink of an eye

Yet she had no desire to do so for she already loved her life and saw it as already infused with overwhelming beauty

People were in awe of her because she was able to love without limit, forgive without reserve and live without fear

The rich were so poor that they longed to be in the presence of one who could live meaningfully in a world that seemed devoid of meaning

To them she was nothing less than a living testimony that life before death was possible

This woman's very existence was her miracle and her example was her divine gift to humanity

The End

(music accompaniment was the song Carol Ann by Michael W. Smith on his album entitled "Freedom")