

BLACKSBURG PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 2009
REV. WILLIAM L. LOVE

WORK FOR THE FOOD WHICH ENDURES

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

Ephesians 4:1-16

John 6:24-35

The Law of Parsimony is a principle of logic that, according to the **Oxford English Dictionary**, says that *no more causes or forces should be assumed than are necessary to account for the facts*. In another context, I have heard that the practical application of the Law of Parsimony means that the simpler of two equally acceptable solutions is better.

* * *

A crowd followed Jesus when they saw him heal those with diseases. The time came for them to eat. Jesus fed 5,000 people. And their hunger was satisfied.

They ate and said, *This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!* And they would have made Jesus king, but Jesus withdrew from them. His kingship was not by popular demand nor by human acclamation. It was not established by the feeding of the 5,000.

And the next day, the people went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. When they found him, Jesus said to them, *You seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.*

The crowd thought the feeding of the 5,000 was reason enough to follow Jesus. They were hungry, and he had fed them. Their solution to seek Jesus was simple enough, but it was not equally acceptable with another choice.

There was more. The feeding of the 5,000—their eating their fill of the loaves—did not account for the truth about Jesus, or the truth about them, or the truth about human life, or the truth about the meeting of the life of God in Christ and human life.

There was more than their eating their fill of the loaves.

* * *

Do not work, Jesus told them, *for the food which perishes but for the food which endures to eternal life.*

One preacher offered good advice when he said: *Think thoughts that are as clear as possible, but no clearer; say things as simply as possible, but no simpler.* [William Sloane Coffin, ***The Courage to Love***, 49]

It was Origen, a leader of the church in the third century, who thought of Original Sin as being laziness.

And laziness leads us to ignore the truth (or some part of it) to think thoughts too clearly, to ignore the truth (or some part of it) to say things too simply. As if all the truth needed is accounted for, and it is not. As if the solutions are equally acceptable, and they are not.

Adam and Eve were presented with the temptation to gain the knowledge of good and evil and to be like God. And, rather than having to go through the long, laborious process of growing and maturing, all they had to do (they were told) was to eat the fruit. And, if eating the fruit would get them the same result and was simpler,

wasn't it the better solution? Laziness says Yes.

And they gained the knowledge that they were naked and they were ashamed. And, in exchange for what they gained, they forfeited the experience of living in the presence of God.

For David, the easier solution for him seemed to be to cover up his liaison with Bathsheba rather than face it. So he covered it up with Uriah's murder. And, through Nathan's parable, pronounced judgment on himself and watched his and Bathsheba's child die.

The Pharisees took the law of Moses. They examined it. And then presented complex cases to determine the principles of the Law. They came up with hundreds of laws (several hundred for the Sabbath alone) that, if perfectly obeyed, would mean a right relationship with God.

The Pharisees had a complex ethical system—laboriously arrived at and laboriously followed. It too was the lazy choice, because it failed to do the one thing they needed. It did not give them an experience of God, of living in the presence of God, of their lives' being connected with the life of God. And, when God came into their presence, they did not recognize God in Christ.

Laziness leads people to make the apparently easier choice, to find the easy way out. And it quits before accounting for all the facts, before it accounts for all the truth.

* * *

Jesus talked about it as food which perishes and food which endures to eternal life.

When we are physically hungry, it is easy to raid the refrigerator. When we feel an emptiness—just a case of the *blahs*—an unnamed hunger in our spirits, it is easy to eat as if that will fill the emptiness.

The food which perishes is easier to come by. Laziness would make us turn there first. And with our bodies filled, maybe our spirits will feel full as well. But eating does not begin to fill our real emptiness. Eating does not begin to satisfy our real hunger.

The food which endures to eternal life is the only food that fills our souls.

Jesus said, *Do not work for the food which perishes but for the food which endures to eternal life.*

* * *

The food which perishes looks easier. And looking easier, it seems more acceptable. The other way seems so hard, so painful.

The easy way quits calculating before it accounts for all the truth.

I remember hearing about a woman whose father was critically ill in a hospital. She noticed that, from day to day shift to shift, there did not seem to be any consistency in the nursing staff and which nurse attended to her father.

She asked the hospital administrator about it. He told her that it was cheaper for the hospital to hire nurses part-time as needed than to staff with full-time nurses.

She asked about the value of consistent care which would recognize changes in the patient's condition, perhaps saving lives. She was told they did not know how to place a value on human life in their financial calculations.

* * *

It is easier to have an ethical system, a *status quo*, than it is to have an experience of God. It is easier for the Church to have an organization than it is for the

WORK FOR THE FOOD WHICH ENDURES – 3

Church to be the organism that is the body of Christ.

The food that perishes is easier to come by and to settle for. It is easier than facing our spiritual hunger and working for the food which endures to eternal life.

Jesus said, *Do not work for the food which perishes but for the food which endures to eternal life.*

* * *

The first—and probably the truest—principle of Buddhism is that all life is suffering. Laziness makes one choice look easier than another, makes it look like we can avoid suffering and struggle altogether. But the apparently easier choice involves suffering as well.

Jesus says that we must work for the food which perishes just as we must work for the food which endures to eternal life. Work is involved with either. Suffering is involved with either. Facing life involves suffering. No religion denies it.

The way Paul talked about it was to say that, as a child, he spoke, thought, and reasoned as a child. And, when he became an adult, he put away childish things.

As we grow up, we naturally grow out of our child's body. We do not naturally grow into mature adults. It takes a conscious putting away of childish things.

And our spiritual maturity takes the same kind of effort.

* * *

There is no easy way out. There is no easy way around it. The way to reach spiritual maturity—the way to feed our spiritual hunger—is to face it and go through it.

To get the food which endures to eternal life requires work and suffering. The difference is the difference between the pain from a disease and the pain from the surgery that heals the disease.

The Law of Parsimony requires accounting for all the facts. To be equally acceptable a solution must have all the truth.

* * *

In mythology, Theseus was a great hero of Athens. When he was a youth, he began a journey to Athens to be reunited with his father the king. His grandfather gave him use of a ship for the journey. The voyage would have been safe and easy. He chose to go by land. Taking the apparently easy and safe way was not the way to become the person he wanted to be.

Going by land, he faced all the dangers that waited for him and survived them all and became a hero.

In Jesus, God entered human suffering and faced the limitations of human life. In Jesus, God chose not to avoid the suffering but to go through it for human life to be what God created it to be.

Jesus prayed, *If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.* It was not possible for Jesus. And it is not possible for us.

In Christ, God entered human suffering to show us what human life is and how to get there. It can be done. We can face suffering and go through it and survive.

God entered human suffering and overcame it in the resurrection.

* * *

After he reached Athens, Theseus faced having to enter a labyrinth, an elaborate maze from which there was no hope of escape, in which there lived a monster.

Theseus volunteered to go in. At the suggestion of his beloved, he tied a thread

WORK FOR THE FOOD WHICH ENDURES – 4

to the door as he entered the labyrinth. He killed the monster. Then he picked up the thread. As long as he held on to the thread, he could find his way out.

The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ is like that thread for us as we face life and as we face our spiritual hunger as a people and as individuals—as husbands and wives, as parents and children, as strangers and friends.

Life can seem like that labyrinth from which there is no way out, certainly no easy way. As long as we hold that thread that is Christ, it is all we need to find our way through.

* * *

In Ephesians, Paul calls us to lead a life worthy of our calling.

One preacher talked about it this way: *Do you remember the story of the rich young ruler who eagerly sought out Jesus for advice, only to turn down the advice and go sorrowfully away? I think we are like him. When, in distress, we seek guidance, we think we want to change when actually we want to remain the same—but feel better about it. In psychological terms, we want to be more effective neurotics, "preferring the security of known misery to the misery of unfamiliar insecurity." ...[T]his secure, paralyzed life, this deliberate retreat from the mysterious to the manageable. Is it not dull to live life to the minimum, to be devout but not daring? ...The art of life is to die young as late as possible. Why, then, ...do we seek to do just the opposite? ...For Christians at least, it is dishonest to go on living in fear and guilt as if the cure were not there within our very reach.*

...[T]he heresy of rejecting Christ is insignificant compared to the heresy of remaking Christ into something he never was, is not now, and never will be. We cannot say that we are Christians and then pretend the Christ is not the healer, the eternal dispenser of freedom and life. Nor can we pretend that God's love in person on earth...does not say altogether as much about what we are to become as it does about what God has become. [Coffin, 14-15]

Lead a life worthy of your calling, Paul says.

Work for the food which endures to eternal life, Jesus says.

The food which endures to eternal life is Christ Jesus, the bread is the body of Christ broken for you and for me.

Life is a banquet, someone said, and most people are starving to death.

Jesus says, *I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger; whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*