

July 16, 2017

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

“No Room for Egoic”

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Egoic? Really? I did a double-take when proof reading the bulletin and came across that line in today’s corporate confession, “By living according to our egoic plans for success, we live the lie that we are somehow indebted to the flesh...” Merriam-Wester’s and Microsoft Word say “egoic” isn’t even a word, yet the final authority, Google, says it’s an adjective relating to the ego, the belief in one’s self importance. But I left it in, because today’s confession really spoke to our epistle from Romans.

“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

In just about every case, if you are a debtor your ego comes into play. If you owe a debt, you are self-important because **you** have to pay the debt. When I got my first house in Illinois I was the “victim” of what the media called “predatory lenders”. All that means is that I was dumb enough to take out a mortgage I couldn’t afford. I busted my hump working my air freight job and then delivering pizzas at night to pay that monthly note and the rest of the bills. It was all up to me.

Our confession today highlights the egotism (egotism; that really is a word), the egotism that runs rampant today—that we, by means of our own hard work and effort, can gain enough things and pleasures of the world to make us happy, keep us safe, and give ourselves a good life. Basically, this lie is that we—absent of God—can be victorious in life. And it is a lie because the obvious truth is that no matter how successful you are, absent of God your sins come a-callin’ and you die. Only in Christ do you gain forgiveness, resurrection and life.

But since y’all spoke that confession, I’m going to assume you know this. But for Christians this “egoic” thinking can still come into play in our lives.

Christians know the price that was paid to redeem us from death; it was God’s own Son. It was the holy, precious blood and life of God made man nailed to the cross in our place. God didn’t give some, or a lot to save us. In Christ God gave all to save us. We are indebted to Him for that wondrous sacrifice.

In our sin, we can become “egoic” even about this. We can do this in a couple of ways. The first is simply when, despite all that God’s Word tells us, we still think that it’s up to us to pay God back.

This happens when we don’t come to God in prayer and confession because somewhere back in our head we’re thinking along the lines of, “I haven’t been good enough to come before God. I haven’t been trying hard enough to avoid those sins I seem to like so much. I’ve been chasing after the world, and God’s not going to want me back unless I straighten up my act.” It happens when in some way we start thinking that our willful sins are somehow outside of God’s forgiveness because we haven’t done enough to stop them.

Now don’t get me wrong. God’s Word is clear that we are to resist temptation, flee from sin and strive to maintain lives reflecting the holiness and purity with which the Holy Spirit gifts us in our Baptism. But what kind of stupid “egoic” thinking it takes to believe we can in any way, shape or form come close to paying the debt our sins have created when we know the price that was demanded—the perfect life of the very Son of God! No. Don’t even go there. That still

is living according to the flesh because you're saying your flesh has to pay the price of being righteous! Jesus has paid that price and calls you to lay your unrighteous sin at the foot of His cross and be done with it by His victory! Pray, confess, be forgiven, and walk away in Christ, in your Baptism, living holy because Christ's grace has made you so.

The second way we get "egoic" is when we think it is up to us to redeem or to judge the world around us. The sin of judging others gets covered pretty often so I'll just say "Don't do that" and move on. But a lot of Christians get racked with guilt because those they love simply don't seem to follow Christ. Parents and grandparents wonder where they went wrong that kids and grandkids aren't going to church, couldn't care less about Christ and are happily chasing after the world and the flesh.

Again, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying you don't pray for, talk with, and do what you can to promote the faith and share the Word of God's grace. By all means, do that! But if there is no response don't despair as if you somehow have failed—failed to meet your obligation, your debt, to save them...or failed your debt to God to bring Him your loved ones in faith. That again is saying salvation is your job, and it's not.

Preachers do a lot things with Jesus' parable of the sower, some good, some not so good. But the simple truth is that this parable is about how God works. God sows the seed, the Gospel Word of life, all over the place. It grows where it grows. It doesn't where is doesn't. But God is the sower and the harvest is His.

"So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

God does the work. The Father sent the Son to the cross and through the tomb. Humanity's sins are paid for. The Holy Spirit calls folks to faith and keeps them in faith by Word and Sacrament. Some receive and live. Others do not. They reject the gift and that's on them. But that's how it works.

I've made this point simply because of what Paul says, *"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. for all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."* Living according to the Spirit really is simply knowing and trusting that God is in charge, that He has done salvation for you and everything is working out according to His plan.

A repeated line in our VBS lessons this week was, "We never would have done it that way." It's true, and knowing this is part of living by the Spirit. We know that through Christ we stand adopted by God's grace into His family. We know we did nothing to gain this. We know by faith that we do nothing by which we can lose this. We simply cry, "Abba, Father!" and know God hears and holds us in His care. Salvation simply is...of God. You can't do it for yourself or for anybody else. It's just done. And you know it has been and is being done to you continually in the washing, the supper and the Word.

Living in the Spirit, "egoic" isn't a word. There's no room for it. God's abundant grace and mercy leaves no place for you to contribute to salvation. It's all His to give as a gift.

The fact is that Paul is correct when he says, *"Brothers, we are debtors."* But it's not a debt we can repay. It's like that awkward debt you feel when it's your birthday and you get a present that's way better than anything you expect or deserve. You can't do anything. You can't pay for it. It's all gift.

That's the debt of thanks we owe as God simply saves us from ourselves, our sin, our death and into paradise in His presence.

So yes, put to death the sinful deeds of the body. Put to death any thought to your body earning salvation. Put to death anything “egoic” between you and God. Your Abba, Father does it all, and He has done it all to you. Trust that and live.

Amen.