

## **Faith Informed Habits**

Our Gospel reading for this evening is part of a larger prayer prayed by Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane only hours before His betrayal, arrest and crucifixion. It is by far one of the most profound prayers we have in Scripture for in it Jesus prays deeply for Himself, His disciples and all believers. The prayer He offers for us, and all believers, is quite remarkable; for Christ prays that we should be in the world, but not of the world. This is Jesus' desire for us— that we live in the world, but not be conformed to ways of the world. What exactly Jesus means by this thoughtful prayer is worthy of our attention. How are we to live in this world, but not be effected by it? The answer to this question lies in the gift of faith, and how it creates a whole new reality within us. Christ's prayer for us is not so much about changing the external world around us as it is about creating a new internal world within us. In this way we live in the world without being worldly. Since we cannot remove ourselves from this world, Faith begins the process of removing the world from within ourselves. God's Spirit stands like a warrior at the gate guarding our very souls from the many dangers of the world, protecting us and shielding us so as not to allow the world to conquer what is most precious to God. But the interior world God creates in us is more than just a defensive posture. Faith is not reactionary, it is creative. It creates within us a new way of being, a new way of thinking, a new way of living. It is these positive attributes I want to explore with you today. For faith is the substance of hope, the foundation of joy, and the means by which we contemplate the Divine in the world around us. Faith affords us the opportunity to have new thoughts and form new habits. In fact, there are three habits formed under the influence of faith that stand out and make it possible to live in the world, but not be of the world. They are the habits of godly thinking, godly understanding, and godly willing.

The first habit formed by faith pertains to our thought process. It is impossible to stop thinking. If you have ever tried to do it, you will know the closest you can ever come to it is simply thinking about

your wish not to think. The mind can never be turned off. It is constantly active, even in sleep. And what the mind loves to think about is what it most desires and loves. Apart from Christ, the mind is left to wander aimlessly, fixating on various mundane trivialities in a frantic search for meaning and purpose. But in faith, Christ becomes a focal point of our mind's desires, an abiding presence upon which to focus our love. This new habit of thinking formed by faith redirects our thinking. It stimulates an overriding desire to know and love God above all things. Christ becomes the center of our attention, which allows our minds to rest upon Him and know peace.

The second habit formed by faith pertains to our understanding. We not only think new thoughts about God, we understand new things about God. This habit of understanding opens up a whole new body of knowledge to us. We begin to process all information of this world in light of God. We come to recognize God in all things, the pattern behind the chaos, we see Christ, who is the Alpha and Omega as the source and end of all that exists. We look upon this world and see God's movement behind everything, nothing operates outside of His control. He is like an invisible sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. It is hard to know the mind of God, that's for sure, but it is easy to see his love and goodness at work. This habit of understanding the goodness underlying all the wickedness we see around us draws us closer to Christ. We learn to see the world as He sees it. As broken, but redeemed. As fallen, but exalted in Christ's death and resurrection. We memorize the manner and example of Christ. We cultivate a Christ like perspective, which checks the ingrained habit of operating according to our own norms or defining our own goodness. This habit overcomes the limited concepts of what we think is good that have no place in the mind of Christ. We also learn to consider temporal things with reference to eternal things, and through this process we acquire knowledge of what is eternal through ordinary experiences. As faith grows we are freed more and more from our fallen habit of operating on the belief that the created realities we see is "all there is", and we come to understand the Maker from

what is made. Creation is restored to its original intended purpose to make known God's invisible attributes in and through the world He has made.

The third and final habit formed by faith pertains to our willing. This new habit is a commitment to unlearning the fallen habit of refusing to give up the things regarded as too important to relinquish. Learning to sacrifice the self and cling instead to God; that is to deny ourselves take up our cross and follow Christ spiritually to Golgotha from Gethsemane, where He gave up the will to do His own will. "Not my will but Thy will be done", we pray. This is far from a decision to abandon our personal identity. To follow Christ along this sacrificial path is to abandon the desires that enslave the free expression of our human spirit. As the empty tomb at the end of Christ's own sacrificial path confirms, this loss of the self is really the resurrection of the self. The new self in Christ, who glorifies the Father through every expression and action.

In being thus conformed to Christ's image, we develop these new habits, and grow in knowledge and understanding and willing of God. By living a life that is not conformed to this world, but rather lived in conformity to Christ, we reflect the image of God and are prepared for an ultimate encounter with the Reality of God. For when Christ returns and the need for faith passes away, our way of thinking, understanding, and willing will be transformed. We will know completely and love abundantly and will resolutely the Triune God for eternity. The whole goal of these new habits is for us to make a seamless transition from this world to the world to come: to learn to enjoy Him to the greatest possible extent in the present so as to maximize the experience of Him for all eternity. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Jeremy Mills

