

SERVE THE MASTER (Rev. Gregory Johnson – Sunday Sept. 12, 2010)

No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other; You cannot serve God and money. Matthew 6:24

It's a hard first sentence to read. "What's this talk of serving two masters? I won't dare serve even one!" We're tempted to read of all this talk about serving any master, even the most benevolent one with the retort: I serve no Master! I am free!

We are indignant at the thought that we might need be lowly servants. We want to say, "I have no master nor do I need a master". We like to embrace rugged individualism and think ourselves, "a man who is an island unto himself" dependent on no one. We are free! Or so it is that we convince ourselves. But wrestle with God's Word this morning and the Holy Spirit may convict of reality as Paul reminds us: "a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him". In other words, "a man is a slave to whatever controls him".

We accumulate things and think we own them but they so often end up owning us. That prized automobile of yours, some of them have lights and bells that go off. Some LED light goes off that says "Needs servicing" and we must service it or lose it. The house you think you own? The mortgage notice comes around with regularity. "Amount to be paid." And we must pay the price. And we pay out and pay out and pay out again and a thousand times again or lose it. We must serve. The dog demands his bone, the creditor his payment, the prized possession, its upkeep. We accumulate things and think we own them but they so often end up owning us. I've dropped my car keys and someone came up in jest holding them saying: "Who belongs to these?" and we think it's funny, but there is great spiritual truth spoken in humour. Who belongs to these? The key chain is symbolic of the

greater stronger chain around our necks that makes us serve. Many have been broken by such chains. Now it's possible to have the relationship reversed so we hold all things material as masters. But it's a relationship impossible by our own strength.

God's Word is replete with examples for our instruction from the very first chapters to remind us of this fact. Cain, the son of Adam, would have lived in a pristine environment compared to our own. Few habit forming drugs to bind or multiple vices that hadn't been invented yet. But the corrupted heart of sin was as strong in his time as in any age. "Sin is crouching at your door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it (Genesis 4:6b)". We know the story. Cain could not rule over his own sin. No man can. "Without me you can do nothing" Jesus proclaimed. But Cain, and all those who follow in the way of Cain believe otherwise. They are deceived. They fail. Whether they acknowledge it or not, sin binds, and submitting to the yoke of materialism, or mammon or money as today's translation puts it, leads to a heavy taskmaster. Do not be deceived. A man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. If the material world masters you and claims all you're attention and devotion you have a malevolent master indeed. You have the Prince of this World.

We balk at the idea of being servants but the Holy Spirit has perhaps convinced you of a spiritual truth that try as we might, we will be servants.

To be masters without service is not part of the human condition. God created man in his own image. He was created as the crowning achievement of creation. But he was nevertheless "created". He was to know his place under God as all the animals were to know their place under the "dominion" of man. But we rather follow Lucifer in his rebellion desiring to know "good and evil" and striving to be a god, master of all and servant of none.

But rebel as he might, this harbinger of death, cannot achieve his goal. Satan and his minions are locked and bound, released and bound again at the whim of God who lets even them, evil instruments that they are, unwittingly fulfill his purposes. It is as John saw in Revelation:

¹And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ²He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. ³He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore...

Revelation 20

Our Lord demonstrated himself “King of Angels” by being that angel who bound Satan again and again and again throughout his ministry. Read the Gospels afresh and you’ll discover case after case of him casting out demons. His power culminates at the cross and tomb where he triumphs over the greatest evil which is death. He rises in life and brings that life to all believers.

There is no future in rebelling as Satan. There is no mastery in that. For we who follow him will surely be as tightly bound as him. Hell was never really intended for man but for Satan and his fellow fallen angels but if we align ourselves with him we will suffer the same punishment as him. We will be cast into the lake of fire....We will be bound with a chain that cannot be broken, which is anchored into the eternal abyss.

So rebel as we might, usurping titles of Lord and Master, will not change the fact that we are inherently servants. We are not gods but men and will become servants of one thing or the other. “Choose this day who you will serve” was the challenge of Joshua to his people. There was no option to say “I will not serve”. It is only a question of

whom we will serve. And although we are a people who like to think we have multiple options the spiritual reality is that there are but two.

Joshua replied to his own ultimatum: "As for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord". That Lord beckons that we serve him. He calls. He invites. "My yoke is easy and my burden is light". It is light in the strength of the Lord. It is service sweet. And to show the joy and honour in service even "the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as the ransom for many".

Who cannot help but be drawn to serve such a Master who has first served us? Behold what he has done? He has offered his life. He has suffered on the cross. He has atoned for our sins. He has delivered us from the burden of our material masters and the most malevolent masters of all "the devil, the world and our flesh".

How then can we balk at the idea of being servants when our Lord Jesus never did? He embraced service. Although King of kings he is servant of all. He beckons us and invites us to join him in service that we may become a kingdom of priests and lords winning crowns with the same devotion to service. For it is in service that we may aspire to greatness. But alas, we want to be masters but never the servant.

Now here is a great gift that comes with service of the King. This is his promise, "Serve the Lord and all other things will be added unto you". When God Almighty is first, all things fall into place. We will survive. We will be sustained. The greatest trials can be borne in the strength of the Lord. He never denies that it may seem hard or difficult. After all, our very lives may need to be offered up as we follow in his steps. But there is the promise:

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man.

And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

1 Corinthians 10

Take heart. Do not fear. Do not worry. God is on your side. This is the meaning in the last verses of our Gospel lesson. Since you cannot serve two masters, serve the Lord and he shall provide.

He has proven his ability to provide. He multiplies the loaves and the fish. He feeds a poor widow in Zerah. He has given you the Gospel today. He sheds his body in blood for the forgiveness of your sins at Calvary. He offers the same today in the Sacrament to be celebrated this morning. Rejoice oh servants of the King. Serve the Master!

Remember that he has first served you!

Amen.