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Predestination to What?

Isaiah 26: 12-16, 19 and Romans 8: 26-39

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*"O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: **but by thee only will we make mention of thy name**"* (Isaiah 26:13).

This is not a scripture to read over lightly or quickly. There is more authority in this simple verse than a causal reading can comprehend. There are those who persist in thinking that they come to the Lord in their own power and that by their own perseverance they have found God. Many like to lay claim to their own recognizance supplying the fulfillment of their faith and in the end their very fate. They ask and God responds. Though, there are those scriptures whereby we may advocate for such a position, *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened"* (Matthew 7:7-8). All true statements. The question persists though; how is it that we know to ask in the first place?

There is a sticky concept out there that stems directly from our second reading today and while it is scripturally sound, the interpretation thereof has established wide theological gaps. See if you can pick up on the potential hazard, *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did **foreknow**, he also did **predestinate** to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified"* (Rom. 8:28-30). This scripture has been used to designate to some, predestination to salvation and to the rest predestination to damnation. What I hope to present to you today is an insight resting in the cliché "you can't put the cart before the horse."

So, let us begin. Which came first...the seed or the plant?...I believe we can find our answer in Moses's book of Genesis, *"And God said, let the*

earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so" (Genesis 1:11). Okay, so I feel compelled to risk that God created the tree first and there was the seed within ready to spring to life or potentially fall into death...a precarious situation. So, the tree is the father of all that belong to it and its seeds are within (it's womb if you will) where they are nourished and propagated until the time comes to emerge on the scene where they will have to fend in the world responding and choosing. At this point we must consider that every acorn that springs from the Oak Tree is predestine to be a mighty Oak...that's logical right? Of course...its not going to have any chance at being a banana or a kangaroo! So, we can rightly agree that the acorn is predestine to be an Oak at some point in its growth. But...does this happen in every case? Of course not. Some things that are meant to be never see their fruition...this is what sin has done to mankind and it is a sad condition that we must accept. In the Gospel of Luke our Lord speaks frankly in a parable concerning the inevitable success on the part of some and the unfortunate failure on the part of others.

"And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold..." (Luke 8: 4-8). In this parable we see that not all seed that was destined for life found it. Some fell along the wayside, some fell on rock, some fell among the thorns and some, only some, fell on good ground (see Luke 8:11-15).

Here's my point: Every human being is made in the image of God, we are the seed of the Father and it is not the Will of God that any should perish, but that we all come to repentance. Yet we know from scripture that not all made in the Father's image will see eternal glory; *"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven"* (Matthew 7:21)...those who choose the good ground. It is our freewill that allows to

act on the graces given us by the Father or reject them. Some choose to ignore the Word of God...they are simply not interested, some confuse the Word of God with heretical views and personal interpretations and some try to find God outside of faith and miss the spiritual connections offered within the church. The Lord has planted us as seeds in His garden and it is within this Garden-home that sin has caused many to turn from God and look to the unsavory ground for truth.

It is severe enough that some will choose to deny the Father, deny Christ, but it would be unimaginable to think that a gracious and good God would predestine someone to damnation and preserve only a fragment of His creation for the Kingdom. Judas Iscariot was a chosen disciple of Christ, sitting at His feet and being guided by His teaching. In John chapter 6 Christ says, *"Have I not **chosen** you and one of you is a devil?"* And again in John chapter 17, *"Holy Father, keep through Thine own Name those whom thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy Name: those that thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, **but** the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled."* Judas was part of the elect of Christ, a sheep that sat for awhile at the feet of the creator. But in time, Judas lost his way and sought the pleasures of the world squelching the spirit and possibly losing his salvation. The once saved always saved position is a risky stance. If you claim to love the Lord, if you claim to be a Christian, why would you deny the necessity of what the Apostles established...the Church! So many believe that once they are baptized they can wander off and do whatever they please...they are forgiven right? Maybe...maybe not, why take the chance? If you believe in God and in His Son, if you have hope for eternal life, church should be the best part of your life!

Many are called our Lord says, but few are chosen. Only those who answer and follow are the sheep of the pasture, only those who answer the call in action produce fruit. The Canonical Sacraments of the church are there for the benefit of man. They are a means by which we can come to our Lord in faith and receive the graces that will strengthen us for this life as we commit ourselves to the Great Commission of spreading the Gospel to all who will listen and respond...we are the garden keepers still, and it is our duty toward God to cultivate the good seed.

In our own 39 Articles of Religion, which set boundaries and ward off heresy, we receive these words, "For it appears most probable that what we learn there (from scripture) concerns only predestination to grace, there being no revelation concerning predestination to glory."

In the end, within the boundaries of Anglican insight and inclusiveness, our basic conclusion from scripture and the writings of the Early Church Fathers, is the election of **all** to the Universal Church, the Holy Nation of God through the rite of baptism without the assurance of election unto eternal glory. Just as many did not cross into the promised land, although they were Jews of the elect, neither will all the elect through the baptism of the church be guaranteed election into paradise.

So, let us put the horse back in front of the cart that we may continue on our journeys. *"O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but **by thee only** will we make mention of thy name."* It is by the grace of God alone that we are called, and all are called. We did not choose Him, but He chose us...all of us. We can squelch the spirit or we can respond to His call by committing to gather in His name in worship and share at His table. We are predestine for all the glories God has for us, but only if we act on the graces given us by responding to His call. Don't be as some, expecting the outward sign of your baptism to save you. Actions without a heart of faith are dead actions. The sacraments are made for man so that we may grow in our sanctification, but if we do not accept the words of Christ...the sacraments are only empty vessels and a waste of time. You are real, the sacraments are real, and you are predestine to glory as long as you act in accordance with God's will. Sin has removed the guarantee of everlasting life, but Christ has returned it to all who choose to follow Him to the end. Commit yourselves to Christ and to His Church, His Holy Nation, for it is here where we are truly one body with Him.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.