

Easter 2, 2018  
The Goodness Deception  
*I Peter 2:19-25 / John 10:11-16*  
St. Andrew's Church - Jacksonville, OR  
By Fr. Bill Baker

Last week I read a little book on goodness. The author starts out by relaying a story of a Sunday School teacher tasked with explaining to a group of six-year olds what someone had to do to get into heaven. So, to begin, he asked a couple of questions to see what they already believed about heaven. Here is the exchange:

“If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, would the get me into heaven?”

“NO!” The Children answered.

“If I cleaned the church everyday, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into heaven?”

Again the answer was, “NO!”

“Well then,” he said, “If I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children and loved my wife, would that get me into heaven?”

Again they all shouted, “NO!”

“Well then,” he asked, “how can I get into heaven?”

A boy in the back row stood up and shouted, “YOU GOTTA BE DEAD!”

You gotta be dead. He's right...to a point. It is obvious that the meaning of death implied here is a physical death before one can be resurrected into the heavenly realm, but there is another death that must take place first...yes, we gotta be dead, but first we gotta be dead unto sin by finding new life in Christ in the 'here and now'. We don't wait for physical death before we give our lives to the Father's calling through Jesus Christ. How do we get to heaven? How do we know for sure that we are going to dwell in paradise? For us the answer is simple because we are heirs of the Kingdom through faith and the blood of Christ. But for many and even those who call themselves Christians in today's over-sensitive world, the answer has become multifaceted.

Several years ago while sharing my faith with a co-worker another co-worker overheard me. He approached me with tears in his eyes, moved by my conviction. He too wanted that kind of foundation, that kind of resolve. I was excited seeing a seed planted and seeming to take root. He approached me the very next day with a big smile on his face. I was ready to help take his first steps into a new life with Christ! Glory be to God!...but, not on this day...He could hardly contain himself as he expressed to me that he had stayed up all night until he too could formulate a philosophy he could rest in as strongly as I rested in Christ. He had founded his own religion...a religion of one...based in being a GOOD person.

On another occasion an opportunity opened for me to inquire of a friend's faith. She told me that she was not a church person and that she had her own religion. Concerned with the path she was on I asked her, "Will your religion save you?" "I think so," she replied, "I'm a GOOD person, you don't have to worry about me." "I will always worry about you," was the only reply I could muster.

And this I came across just last week; at a prominent Christian university a student described her Christian journey this way, "When I realized," she said, "that my faith wasn't necessarily about the Church, and it wasn't even necessarily about the Bible but about my relationship with God and that God is all-encompassing and loving, I felt very free." Free indeed...here is a freedom found not in the body of Christ but in the solitude of independent and conjured belief.

There is a common creed in the world today that has infected even sects of the Christian church to its own end. It is the belief that goodness will set you free into God's heaven. After all, we should not expect bad people to occupy God's paradise. All religions have this in common – "good people go to heaven", even those whose religious nature is violent believe this...*their* goodness rests in what they are taught goodness is. Regardless...is it enough to be a good person? I am sure you have heard it said several times, "Oh, I live a good life and I'm happy. If there is a God I am sure I will end up with a harp in my hands." Do good people go to Heaven? I don't know...if we look at the thief on the cross we might be inclined to say that bad people go to Heaven. In Christ's own words,

as His innocent body hung next to a criminal, He proclaimed that this 'bad' person, this sinner would see paradise.

But popular opinion supports the idea that those who lead good lives will see eternal life. But, goodness is subjective isn't it? I tried to help an old man up from a sitting position a couple weeks ago and instead of the positive response I expected I found that I had angered the man. I was taking away his independence, his sense of pride. My intended goodness turned out to be problematic for this gentleman. Although my intentions were good, my actions were not perceived as good...goodness is in the eye of the beholder. And if goodness is our ticket to eternal life, how much goodness would be good enough? Can we squeak by, "whew that was close"? Or, can we fail by a single act of kindness not acted upon and find ourselves outside the presence of God for our eternal lives?

We must be careful where we put our faith. We as Traditional Bible believing Christians must be cognizant of the social twist that is being applied to Christian understanding. This new form of Christian belief is creating a secularized form of Christianity. In his encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI made the following observation:

"A Christianity of love without truth would be more or less interchangeable with a pool of good sentiments, helpful for social cohesion, but of little relevance. In other words, there would no longer be any real place for God in the world" (*Caritas in Veritate*, pg.11). In a nutshell, good sentiments without truth have opened Pandora's box to individualized religion and it is gaining popularity.

And Charles Chaput, in his book Strangers in a Strange land, states that "genuine development requires a transcendent vision of the person, it needs God: Without him, development is either denied, or entrusted exclusively to man, who falls into the trap of thinking he can bring about his own salvation." Think about that. Here we see that this development of independent religion fools those who succumb into thinking they are their own savior. Sounds like the Garden of Eden story is alive and well today, but we are no longer simply picking the fruit that bore our sins, but are now planting our own trees.

Easter has come and gone. Most are looking forward to the three-day weekend of Memorial Day; an extra day off work and maybe some sunshine at the lake. We are so self-centered aren't we...The Easter season speaks volumes of our personal relationship with Christ in Truth. For some he is only someone from the past who may or may not have anything tangible to do with mankind (if he really existed at all). Goodness becomes the measuring rod of a life worthy of eternal riches with no belief beyond personal experience. Is your goodness enough to enter death with confidence? That is the big question of our day and no one has the basis to make that claim!

But here is our hope: CHRIST IS RISEN MY FRIENDS! HE IS RISEN INDEED! And for what purpose? Because your goodness is worthy of the trash heap! *"There is none GOOD but one, that is, God!"* (St. Mark 10:18). And standing in our midst, God in the form of man says to us, *"I am the GOOD shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep...I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine."* *"For ye were sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."* Oh, happy are those who maintain biblical truth!

If our sins do nothing for us but to bring death, we must admit that it is impossible to change our minds and become GOOD in the true sense, we have jumped off that cliff, we have eaten of the fruit. In Jesus Christ death was defeated in the resurrection, despite our sins or our perceived goodness. Only by accepting the gift offered to you by God Almighty can eternal life be yours. Self proclaimed philosophies and privately devised religious beliefs are the comfort foods of heart disease. As a church holding fast to our traditional heritage passed down by the Fathers of the church, we must share clean hearts to a sin-sick world that they too can come and see that *"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* Amen.

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