

7.15.2018 Trinity 7 (Mark 8:1-9)

In the year 1999, Time magazine published their list of the 100 most important people of the 20th century. At the top of that list was the man that they named the Person of the Century: the great physicist, Albert Einstein. A man whose intellectual achievements and originality have made the word *Einstein* synonymous with *genius*, and while Einstein possessed one of the world's greatest minds, his memory was notoriously poor. He was unable to remember dates, he couldn't remember his own phone number, and further proof of his bad memory is found in this story that was shared by the Reverend Billy Graham:

Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle, punching the tickets of each passenger. When he came to Einstein, Einstein reached in his vest pocket. He couldn't find his ticket, so he reached in his other pocket. It wasn't there, so he looked in his briefcase but couldn't find it. Then he looked in the seat by him. Still, no ticket. The conductor said, "Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it." Einstein nodded appreciatively. The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. As he was ready to move to the next car, he turned and saw the great physicist down on his hands and knees looking under his seat for his ticket. The conductor rushed back and said, "Dr. Einstein, don't worry. I know who you are. You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one." Einstein looked at him and said, "Young man, I too know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going."

This life is a journey, and the image this story brings to mind of a brilliant man down on his hands and knees desperately searching for his lost ticket, helps us recognize the truth that if we are to experience any enduring peace as we travel this side of heaven, we must know where we are going. Einstein could not rest until he knew his destination, and we will find no rest until we are assured of our own. In the Epistle we read this morning, a passage from St. Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul directly confronts this subject, and in just one verse he declares the truth that there are only two possible destinations for every person that comes into this world. St. Paul writes: "*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life*

*through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).*

This single verse is the entirety of the Christian message, and as we journey through this earthly life it stands before every person as a great fork in the road. When confronted with Absolute Truth, the Word that proceeds out of the mouth of Almighty God, a person must make a decision to turn one way or the other. St. Paul offers only two possibilities, death or life, and Jesus presented the Gospel in the same manner. In His Sermon on the Mount, there is the wide gate and the broad way that lead to destruction, or the strait gate and narrow way which lead to life (Matthew 7:13-14). There is the house built on the sand that is destined to fall, or the house built upon the Rock that will withstand any storm (Matthew 7:24-27). The Word of God offers no shades of grey, only black or white, and this great fork in the road is literally the moment of Truth for each one of us. We must choose one path, and by doing so, reject the other.

When we consider these examples from the Sermon on the Mount and the verse from our Epistle, we quickly recognize the fact that these two paths are completely different. From where they begin to where they end, in every possible way, they stand in absolute contrast. St. Paul describes one of the paths, and its eventual and inevitable end, by writing: *“The wages of sin is death.”* Paul wrote this letter two thousand years ago, but the word *wage* is as familiar to us as it was to his original audience. We know, as they did, that wages are something a person earns. We go to work, we do our job, we expect to be paid, and for most of us our paycheck arrives in a formal and impersonal manner, in a plain white envelope, because this is simply a business transaction. We completed a task, and the amount in the envelope is the payment due for the work we’ve completed.

We recognize that kind of fixed certainty in the wages we receive from our employer, and Paul wants us to see such certainty in the wages paid by sin. He tells us that sin pays a wage, and that wage is death. His words aren’t easy to speak, and they aren’t easy to hear, especially in our culture. They aren’t fashionable, trendy, or pleasant, but they do possess a quality far more important: These words are Truth. Many people choose to reject the truth because of their personal belief that things should be different, that somehow we are entitled to receive a different wage, but wages are certain, and so

that's a whole lot like believing that the next paycheck we receive from our employer should be many millions of dollars, instead of what we've earned. We may try to fool ourselves, but experience has revealed to all of us that every road we choose to travel leads to its eventual and inevitable end. The person who chooses the path that begins and ends with a deliberate rejection of God will receive the wages they've earned, not a penny more, not a penny less.

St. Paul describes two paths, one is a path paved by what we've earned and leaves us separated from God, the other is a path covered with the precious Blood of Jesus Christ, and this path leads to eternal life. *"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* The first path we considered is based on wages, but the path we turn our attention toward now is entirely different, for it is a gift, the gift of God. Once again, Paul uses a word that is as familiar to us as it was to his original audience. Everyone knows that a gift is completely different than wages. A person does not earn a gift. Gifts are wonderful, personal, unexpected, and are often wrapped up so that we don't know what's inside the mysterious package, and this gift, in so many ways, is a holy mystery.

What is this gift of God? What is eternal life? It is certainly everlasting existence. We will live as long as God Himself, and as unimaginable as that truth is, endless existence is the least significant thing about eternal life. Eternal life is best described by our Lord, who said, *"This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent"* (John 17:3). Eternal life is intimate knowledge of God. Eternal life is to know the Creator of Heaven and Earth personally, to serve Him joyfully, and to freely love His Son, who gave His life that He may offer this priceless gift to the world.

Eternal life is to live in union and communion with God. Eternal life is to be renewed, transformed, and fulfilled; and eternal life begins now. We don't have to wait to receive this gift. We can know the only true God, and Jesus Christ today. We can live in His intimate presence now. We can love, we can worship, and we can experience the unspeakable joy of His life-changing, life-giving power at this very moment. We don't have to wait for eternity to experience the unimaginable beauty and breathtaking glory of God. The gift

of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, and this gift is ours today.

You are standing at a fork in the road. Two paths are there in front of you. Take one and you will work yourself to death, receive the other and God will give you life everlasting. Christian, remember who you are. Choose the road less traveled, and rest in the assurance that is found in God's great love, grace, goodness, and mercy. Take your Savior's hand today, and you'll always know exactly where you are going.