

9.17.2023 Trinity 15 (St. Matthew 6:24-34)

There's an old saying which would have us believe some Christians are "too heavenly minded to be any earthly good," but in *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis refutes that claim by arguing that it is in fact the Christians who think most about eternity who are of the greatest use here and now. Lewis wrote, "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth thrown in: aim at earth and you will get neither."

According to Lewis, we have only two choices toward which to aim our lives: heaven or earth, and he believes the one who lives in this world, but is "*not of the world*" (John 17:14-16), or to use the words of St. Paul, the person who sets their mind "*on things above, not on things on the earth*" (Colossians 3:2), in the end, will in fact gain both heaven and earth. "Aim at Heaven and you will get earth thrown in: aim at earth and you will get neither."

This morning I'd ask you to consider the way Lewis' thought finds its source in the words of our Gospel lesson, which begins with Jesus declaring, "*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*" (Matthew 6:24). No one, at the same time, can serve both God and money, God and possessions, God and a career, God and anything we would value in such a way that it would become His rival. We must be sure to keep those things that are of this world firmly in their place, a distant second to our love for the Lord, knowing that if we're not careful to do so, even good gifts may not only prevent us from loving and serving and drawing near to our Lord, but can actually lead us to secretly despise Him, and the things of heaven.

This fact is revealed in the language Jesus used to describe the person who tries to serve two masters. Our Lord said that person “*will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other,*” and isn’t it true that if we *love* the prosperity and honor of the world, we will *hate* the poverty and humility of the Cross. If we *hold to* the shifting sand of our own subjective truth, we will *despise* and reject the unchanging, objective truth contained in Holy Scripture. If we cling to the “*cares and riches and pleasures*” (Luke 8:14) of this transient life, we will, day by day, let go of the eternal treasure found in the next. This is the truth Lewis expressed when he wrote, “aim at earth and you will get neither.”

No person can serve two masters, therefore Jesus encouraged His disciples to aim only at heaven, saying, “*Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on...*” (Matthew 6:25). He then gives the example of the birds of heaven and the flowers of the field, birds that “*sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly father feeds them...*” Flowers that “*toil not, neither do they spin: yet... even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these*” (Matthew 6:26-29). These everyday examples naturally lead us to ask: If the birds of heaven and the flowers of the field that don’t know what we know: the heart of God as it revealed through the Cross of Christ, the truth that God gave His only Son to perfectly reveal His love for us and to reconcile this world to Him. If birds and flowers that don’t know what we know always “aim for heaven” and therefore live in such peace, then why don’t we?

We don’t because we’ve lowered our aim. We’ve forgotten our Lord’s promise: “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*” (Matthew 6:33). *Seek ye first the kingdom of God... Aim at Heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at heaven... and all these things shall be added unto you.* Just like birds and flowers, the people who have aimed their selves, their souls and bodies toward heaven aren’t anxious or troubled by the cares and concerns of this earthly life, and in the Gospel of St. Luke we find an example of this in the story of Jesus visiting the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

Luke writes, *Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a*

woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42).

The *one thing* which is necessary, is again, a singleness of heart. In this passage, Mary served one Master. She aimed at heaven. Her affection was undivided, and therefore she peacefully "*sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His teaching.*" Mary chose the "*the good portion,*" which Jesus said, "*will not be taken away from her.*" Martha, on the other hand, was trying to serve two masters, heaven and earth, and this left her, according to the text, *distracted, anxious, and troubled about many things.* In her example we recognize the fact that when we lower our aim, when we aim at earth, the enemy, who Scripture describes as "*the god of this world*" (2 Corinthians 4:4), a thief who comes "*only to steal and kill and destroy*" (John 10:10), seizes the opportunity to steal our peace, kill our joy, and destroy the intimacy of our union with both God and neighbor.

Notice how clearly that truth is revealed in the difference between Mary and Martha. While Mary experienced peace, joy, and communion with our Lord and all who were present to hear Him teach, Martha was *distracted, anxious, troubled,* frustrated with her sister, and in a very real sense separated from this time of intimacy with Jesus and those whom she'd invited into her home. Martha was a faithful follower of our Lord, but on this occasion she let the cares of this life distract her from the *one thing* which is necessary, and so we see that even something as good and commendable as serving others, if it consumes our every thought, can begin to obscure the real target: Heaven.

Aim at Heaven and you will get earth thrown in... "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*" God calls His people to serve only one Master, to aim our selves, our souls, and bodies toward Heaven, and only Heaven, and promises that if we seek first His kingdom - *all these things shall be added unto you* - we will "get earth thrown in." When our every thought, care, and desire is directed toward

God, when we have fixed our eyes on the *one thing* which is necessary, we have no reason to be anxious or troubled by any other thing. The cares and concerns of this earthly life don't distract or trouble the person who has chosen *the good portion*, which *will not be taken away* from them.

If the Lord blesses us with many years on this earth, may we be people who look back on our lives to find that God was the *one thing* which always occupied the first place in our hearts, and souls, and minds. May we, like Mary, sit *at the Lord's feet* and listen to His teaching, not allowing the cares and concerns of this life to distract us, and when we struggle in that endeavor, may we remember the birds of heaven and the flowers of the field, that in their own way "aim for heaven" and live in peace, yet do not know what we know. May we remember them as we reflect on the eternal truth that the love of God is perfectly and painfully manifested in the fact that "*God did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all,*" so "*how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*" (Romans 8:32).

Aim for the One who gave His Son.