

Have y'all ever heard this before? "It is easy to spot a yellow car when you are always thinking of a yellow car. It is easy to spot opportunity when you are always thinking about opportunities. It is easy to spot reasons to be mad when you are always thinking about being mad. You become what you constantly think about" (Facebook). I got that off of Facebook. Here's another one.

"An old Cherokee told his grandson, "My son, there is a battle between two wolves inside us all. One is Evil. It is anger, jealousy, greed, resentment, inferiority, lies and ego. The other is Good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy, & truth."

The boy thought about it, and asked, "Grandfather, which wolf wins?"

The old man quietly replied, "The one you feed" (Facebook).

It cannot be said of every meme on Facebook, but I think there are a couple of kernels of truth to these two. Number one, what we focus our time and energy on shapes us as a person. Number two, as Christians we are supposed to know we are haunted by the temptation to go our own way, and to do what we want instead of what God wants. This is very similar to the wolf analogy in this meme. The question for all of us is which of these two will we feed? Will we give into our temptations, and revel in the sins that would steal our freedom, our hope and our joy, or will we be fed by the love we have in Jesus Christ which gives us freedom from our temptations, hope for our future and delivers abundant life and joy that nothing in this world can offer? We have a choice to make.

The people in our Scripture faced a terrible temptation. Their temptation was to try to have their cake and eat it too. In the city of Corinth the people there worshipped a tremendous number of little "g" gods. There were altars to Hermes, Artemis, Zeus, Apollo, Dionysus, Heracles and a host of others. However, none had a temple so lavish as the temple of Aphrodite. There were, "a thousand temple-slaves, courtesans, whom both men and women had dedicated to the goddess."<sup>1</sup> For those not up on their Greek Mythology, Aphrodite was a fertility goddess which meant there was a lot of laying down with temple prostitutes.

In the midst of all of that idolatry was the ecclesia, or gathering of those who followed the way of Jesus Christ. These early Christians would come together for a meal every day and every day they would celebrate Holy Communion. Holy Communion was well known in the early church in Corinth and probably throughout the town. The problem with so many little "g" gods in one place is people think I can pick and choose which service I want to render to which god, and in that way serve many gods. This is a HUGE problem for Christians who have been adopted into God's holy family through the blood of Jesus Christ. While we are not obligated to follow the Law as legalistically as the Jews we are encouraged to be like Christ. Christ obeyed the Ten Commandments, and the first of the Ten Commandments is, "You shall serve no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). Israel knew the dangers of idolatry very well. Idolatry is the worship of little "g" gods, and the chief reason why the northern ten tribes of Israel were destroyed by the Assyrians. Idolatry is the primary reason why the southern two tribes of Judah were carried off into Babylon. It was God alone who turned back from God's anger and allowed a remnant to return to Jerusalem and rebuild her walls. This is the issue Paul is addressing. In the face of so many opportunities there is really one clear question. Whom will we serve?

This Sunday after Halloween it seems only appropriate to speak of demons, and evil spirits. Throughout most of the Old Testament idols are often referred to as inanimate objects of wood, silver, stone or gold. There is no life in them and as such they have no power. However, in this passage from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians Paul

<sup>1</sup> *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 10, (Abbindon Press: Nashville, 1953) 4.

pushes the point. Paul acknowledges these Greek gods as spiritual beings. However, they are nowhere near equals with God. They are demons. To offer a sacrifice to an idol is to offer a sacrifice to a demon. To eat the food offered to an idol is to eat the food blessed by a demon. To lay down with a temple prostitute is to lay down with a demon. Hence Paul makes the distinction; "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (1Cor 10:21). Man cannot serve two masters. We cannot have our cake and eat it to. We must choose whom we will serve, and be changed by that decision.

The bread and juice of Holy Communion are meant to change us. We are to be changed by the grace of God and our devotion to God because of Christ's sacrifice. Paul writes, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf" (1Cor 10:16-17). My sisters and brothers God's prevenient grace is calling us all the time. God's sanctifying grace is working to move us back to God's holy table; to this simple meal of bread and cup. Holy Communion is meant to be a means by which God provides God's powerful grace for salvation and a memorial like the Jewish Seder meal which reminds us of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. By coming to the table of Christ we participate in the blood of Christ. We participate in this holy meal with all of those who have gone before us; those who have died for their faith, and all of those who have run the race with endurance to the very end.

Here. Y'all close your eyes for just a minute. I want you to think back. I want you to think back about your mommas, and grand mommas. Think back about your dads and grand dads. Were they faithful in their walk with Christ? They are there at this table this morning. Now imagine further back to those relatives you have only heard about but never met. When we break bread at this table we are participating in the blood of Christ and we are eating with them as well. All Hallows Eve, or All Saints Eve is the time we celebrate those who were martyred for their faith in the early church, those who were martyred for their faith while serving as missionaries around the world, and all of our friends and relatives who put God first in their lives. Hebrews, chapter 11, describes a tremendous cloud of witnesses going all the way back to Adam. When Jesus' blood was shed for our sins we were adopted into God's holy family; the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob going all the way back to Adam. Their history is our history and their witness is an example to us. Scripture tells us Enoch walked with God and then Enoch was not for God took him (Gen 5:24). This is a word of hope to all of us who have lost loved ones. When we come to God's table we break bread with them as well.

Deuteronomy 6:5 says we are to, "love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all of our soul and with all of our might." When we love God we seek to spend time with God, the same way when we first fall in love we want to spend all of our time with that person. We have a tremendous example of what happens when people put their focus on God first. They are moved by the Holy Spirit to come to God's table where we can renew our strength in God's grace. Through the bread and cup we participate in the body of Christ and in Christ's life and ministry. What we receive is the blessing that comes from putting God first in all things. When we put God first we are freed from bitterness, strife, and divisions. We are freed from the constant need to have things our way because to be focused on Christ means to put things God's way first. We are freed from the need to blame others. Our sins are constantly before us and the result should be compassion on others for their sins. Others are broken and they are not right, but neither are we. When we come to God's table we are all both broken sinners and forgiven saints. This is the gift made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the blessing we share in God's Holy Communion. Now is the time to focus on God together and to be fed by the holy hound of God's grace.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen