

Lent Day 15

Friday March 2, 2018

Reading: John 8:1-30

¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

¹¹ “No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Reflection

Have you ever heard of a pendulum swing? You might picture an old Grandfather Clock which has a long length ending in a circle hanging below the clock face, swinging back and forth. That is a pendulum swing from side to side. I find, as a pastor, I use the imagery quite a bit in my ministry with people. We see, as humans, to like to move from one pole to another. We do this with our lives of sin as well.

If you are trying to ensure you hold consistent theology, you would need to answer the question about the human condition as a result of sin. For example, are humans free to turn to God without God’s intervention that would enable them to do so? Or, are humans ‘dead’ in sin, unable to turn to God unless he intervenes to enable us. As theology became systematic the answer shifted from yes humans can turn to God irrespective of his intervention (perhaps to be more fair, due to his general grace in the world) to no, humans cannot turn to God because they are dead in sin and they need particular grace not general to enable them. This is the doctrine which came to be called total depravity.

This was seen as a key doctrine because it prevented people from any idea of being able to save themselves. Because you and I are dead in sin we cannot just wake up one day and choose God. God must choose us. But, this doctrine had an unintended consequence; people began to feel worthless. The idea that people were without worth. This perpetuated the idea that God was generally wrathful about these worthless humans and the best thing we could do to appease him was to keep confessing our worthlessness. Of course, people tired of being seen as worthless by themselves, their neighbours and by God. So, there has been a push back. People aren’t worthless, they are beautiful, wonderful, and worthwhile. And, God is reshaped to fit. He loves us because we are beautiful, wonderful, and worthwhile. Poles and pendulums.

The results of this thinking also impacts our view of ourselves, God and ongoing sin. We seem to move into another either/or. One side seems to magnify the power of sin (in order to uphold total depravity) so people are never free from it — we can only repent of it and repentance is needed for God’s grace to forgive it. Then the other side says we all sin and there’s nothing we can do about it, but, good news, God is cool — he’s forgiving, because after all he loves us.

Jesus — God with us — avoids the either/or and opts for the both/and. He tells the woman, I don’t condemn you *and* he tells her sin no more. We are ‘dead’ in sin and cannot turn to God on our own, *and* God loves us and has intervened for us. We have worth because we are the handiwork of God and we’re shown that worth because God sends his own son to die for us. That doesn’t mean God doesn’t want us to take sin seriously. God isn’t cool, he’s holy and he calls us to be holy and he makes us holy and he enables us to be holy. So, sin no more.

Prayer

O Holy One, thank you for revealing to us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Keep us from falling into ditches of thinking we are worthless due to sin or inherently worthy because we exist. Root us in the love of your gospel. Free us from the bondages of sin even as we flee the bondages of sin. Thank you for your grace and mercy and love. Amen.