

Still At Work in the World

Wayne Waibel – 05/08/2022

Today's Gospel lesson, while short, is rich with substance. There are numerous dynamics to explore, and we shall, but what we must never lose sight of in our faith is that God is still at work in the world.

Again – there is an abundance of material in this little section, but I favor simplicity. Not just because simple is my intellectual "go to" either. Although it could be argued that we practice what we preach.

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In this context today, the phrase, "I and My Father are one," is not used to proclaim the Trinitarian theology we are all very familiar with. Jesus is dealing with a body politic that is either preparing a hostile attack, or is very genuinely curious if He is the Messiah, so both perspectives are at play in asking the question.

Understanding this, Jesus in John's view has used the neuter form of the Greek adjective "one" – not the masculine. The unity in this passage is a unity of deeds. Jesus does the work of the Father.

It's an important distinction, especially given the nuances and complexity of the early church. "I and My Father are one." In other words, they do the same work – they have the same agenda.

Folks tend to rely too heavily on intellect as the primary faculty in their Christian life. We've forgotten that the early church grew dramatically not because the multitudes were convinced of the truth of creeds and dogmas, but because the multitudes experienced the living Lord.

Faith is not simply a human deed. Faith includes the action of God. We don't choose Him. He chooses us. The story of Jesus reveals the character of God. And that character is on display dramatically in the twenty third Psalm. Which informs the simple focus, "The Lord is my shepherd."

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Christ has promised to remain with us as the good shepherd even to the end of time, so that in life and in death we may be confident that we belong not to the powers of evil, sin, and death, but to Him of whom we can say with confidence and trust, "The Lord is my shepherd."

What is going on in Psalm twenty-three is the location and recapitulation of God's relation to His people in the living of one individual person. It speaks to all of us, but more importantly it speaks to each of us. The twenty third Psalm is a very personal and present idea.

Another important distinction needs to be made here. God grasps us, we do not grasp God.

- The Lord is my shepherd
- He makes me to lie down in green pastures
- He leads me beside the still waters
- He restores my soul
- He leads me in the paths of righteousness
- It is He who has made us

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All these things Christ does for us and then to top it all off – He gives us eternal life. And this eternal life is not necessarily something we receive at the end of the line. Eternal life starts here and now.

When we consider all of the amazing ways we are taken care of, how can we be left with anything but reverence, gratitude, and an abiding certainty that God is still at work in the world.

The one consistency I've found in all the souls I've encountered over the years is that the most devout among them are also the ones who are overflowing with praise. They cannot spend enough time and energy in worship and praise.

They are also some of the happiest people I know. It should come as no surprise that some of the most unhappy people I know spend little to no time at all in acts of praise.

As we reflect on our salvation in Christ, it's very easy to see the symmetry at work. When Jesus is nailed to the cross, He is commended to His Father. He is not in the hands of the emperor or in the hands of death – He is ultimately in the hands of God. Just as we are in Jesus' hands. The clarity is inescapable.

We are so well taken care of that we can stride confidently through our daily living knowing that for us, all is won. We have been given the power to become children of God with life everlasting. Our life has been blessed by God through Jesus Christ in such a way that our fears dissipate, our worries are persuaded, and our troubles evaporate.

Just for clarification – this is not to say everything is easy. Quite the contrary. There will be suffering – nowhere does God say otherwise. You can be sure of that, but that in itself provides the very spice we are all looking for in life.

Life is to live. And when you have the hand of God on your shoulder – what have you to fear? The art of living a life of love in Christ Jesus is the single most fulfilling way to live, so when it comes to eternal life, why wait? Why not enjoy the wonder and beauty of it all with our own eyes presently.

We know two things – this life is not the end, and we know nothing of the next life. Who's to say there's a specific break between one and the other? Perhaps it is a seamless transition that renders death itself obsolete.

Again – with our tendency to overly scrutinize our lives we get in the way of actually living it. If we were to live our life here and now as though here and now was part of the eternal process – I don't know that we'd be out of line necessarily.

After all – we are His sheep – no harm can therefore befall us. And since we are His sheep and He and the Father are one, and He has redeemed us to everlasting life, why not get on with it and go about the business of being at work in the world? Amen.