

Ordinary 24B - 2021

Don't You Know I Am?

Hospital waiting room - One rather self-important individual was getting impatient. Unwilling to wait any longer, he barged in and demanded to be seen by the doctor. "Don't you know who I am?" Shouted the man. The secretary calmly pressed the button on the microphone of her loudspeaker system and asked the waiting patients. "I have a gentleman here who doesn't know who he is. Can someone please assist him in finding out? Thank you." If you were to go around asking your friends, "What do people say about me?" Or "Who do you say I am?" they might take it as an evidence of pride or dementia. But what people believe and say about Jesus Christ will determine their destiny. Your confession concerning Jesus Christ is a matter of life or death. (by Stephen Sizer from *Who Am I?*)

Stop Following Your Shadow

There is a fable about a man who lived in the desert. He would wake up every morning and follow his shadow. So as the sun moved across the sky from east to west the man essentially walked in a large oval. At sundown he ended up where he had started. This continued for years. The man walked in circles day after day, following his shadow. One night the man heard the voice of God in a dream while he slept. The voice told him to stop following his shadow. Instead, "Follow the sun," the voice challenged, "And you will experience life as you have never dreamed it could be." The man thought for many days about his vision of God while he continued to walk around in circles in the desert. But one day he mustered up enough courage to break away from his shadow. Little by little, step-by-step, the man began to follow the sun. And he discovered a kingdom that was, heretofore, way beyond his wildest dreams and imagination. Ultimately, he became friends with the Son. "For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it." (by Robert L Salzgeber from *Assayings: Theological Faith Testings*, CSS Publishing Company)

Ambition: Bigger Is Not Always Better

The American businessman was at the pier of a small, coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large yellow fin tuna. The American complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took to catch them. The Mexican replied only a little while. The American then asked why didn't he stay out longer and catch more fish. The Mexican said he had enough to support his family's immediate needs. The American then asked, "But what do you do with the rest of your time?" The Mexican fisherman said, "I sleep late; fish a little; play with my children; take siesta with my wife, Maria; stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my amigos; I have a full and busy life, señor." The American scoffed, "I am a Harvard MBA and could help you. You should spend more time fishing; and with the proceeds, buy a bigger boat; with the proceeds from the bigger boat, you could buy several boats; eventually you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman, you would sell directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery. You would control the product, processing and distribution. You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City, then Los Angeles and eventually New York City where you will run your expanding enterprise." The Mexican fisherman asked, "But, señor, how long will this all take?" To which the American replied, "Fifteen to 20 years." "But what then, señor?" The American laughed and said that's the best part. "When the time is right, you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich; you would make millions." "Millions, señor? Then what?" The American said, "Then you would retire and move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take siesta with your wife, stroll to the village in the evenings where you could sip wine and play your guitar with your amigos." Sometimes our American culture thinks only about things that are bigger. Bigger is always better. We get so caught up in the success syndrome of our culture that we forget the way of Jesus which called us to simplicity and, in our text today, to a life of self-denial. (by Mickey Anders from *Self Denial*)

Music in the Soul

Paganini, the great violinist, came out before his audience one day and made the discovery just as the applause ended that there was something wrong with his violin. He looked at it a second and then saw that it was not his famous and valuable violin, but a cheap substitute. He felt paralyzed for a moment, then turned to his audience and told them there had been some mistake and he did not have his own violin. He stepped back behind the curtain thinking that it was still where he had left it, but discovered that someone had stolen his violin and left this old secondhand one in its place. Paganini remained back of the curtain for a moment, then came out before his audience and said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I will show you that the music is not in the instrument but in the soul." And he played as he had never played before; and out of that secondhand instrument, the music poured forth until his audience was enraptured with enthusiasm, and the applause almost lifted the roof off the building, because the man had revealed to them that the music was not in the machine but in his own soul. Don't let anyone tell you that the soul does not exist. We were created in the image of God. That doesn't mean God looks like us. It means there is something divine within us. (by King Duncan at www.Sermons.com)

Sermon Closer: We Have a Choice to Transform

There is a story about two young brothers who were caught stealing sheep. The punishment back then was to brand the thief's forehead with the letters ST which stood for sheep thief. As a result of this, one brother left the village and spent his remaining years wandering from place to place indelibly marked by disgrace. The other remained in the village, made restitution for the stolen sheep, and became a caring friend and neighbor to the townspeople. He lived out his life in the village--an old man loved by all. One day a stranger came to town and inquired about the ST on the old man's forehead. "I'm not sure what it means," another told him. "It happened so long ago, but I think the letters must stand for saint." We have a choice. We can lay down the cross we have been given to bear and passively live life with no challenge to change or we can take it up and be transformed, living for something greater than ourselves: The Kingdom of God. The choice is yours. But I adjure you: Take it up!