

The Naked Truth about ourselves is: We want to be God. #4

Easter, April 12, 2009

(Sermon notes are a transcript from the sermon with only minor editing, retaining the conversational style.)

Think how simple life would be if we could sin in peace. Life would be much easier if there were no such things as shame and regret and remorse and guilt. Life would be much easier, if humans had no conscience, and if God would let us alone. Well, one would like to think that.

The fact is, God loves us too much to allow that to happen. If God did leave us alone, we would all self destruct.

Today we still like to think that we can live our lives without God. We still want to make our own decisions. We still want to be the boss of our own souls. We stand with our fist in the air and say, *I don't want a God!*

How can I be so sure of that? Because the very first chapters of the Bible slaps me in the face and tells the truth about you and me. The truth is like Adam and Eve in the Garden, we want to be God. We are not satisfied with the fact that we are created human beings made in the image of God, we want to be God. We don't want a God barging into our lives telling us what to do and what not to do. We don't want to be held accountable to no one.

**Martin Luther**, the famous Reformer, who could ask himself truthfully: *How can I say that I love God, when I don't even want a God?* The fact is I want to be my own God! And so do you.

**Malcolm Muggeridge**, the caustic, articulate, intelligent, brilliant, agnostic Englishman spent a large part of his life lampooning the Church.

During WW II he was part of the British Secret Intelligence Service. From 1951-1953 he was the editor of PUNCH magazine in England. Throughout those years as editor, he ridiculed the church, the clergy, and Christian people with satire. Through his mask of hypocrisy, God invaded his life in the late 1960's and Muggeridge became a great Christian thinker. He wrote an article entitled, *Is There a God?* This is how he described his mind set before his conversion.

*Is there a God? Well, is there? I myself, should be very happy to answer in the emphatic negative. I have never wanted a God. I have never needed a God. I have never feared a God, nor have I ever felt under the necessity of inventing one.*

The truth is, before any of us came to God, that would describe us. *I don't want a God. I don't need a God. I don't feel any necessity of inventing one.* .

So whatever God has to offer, we say no. My life is just fine. I am happy the way I am. I only want to be accountable to myself.

**Dr. J. S. Whale** of Cambridge University in England received a letter from a radio listener in Yorkshire who had heard one of his religious lectures over the BBC years ago. This is what the stranger wrote:

*"I am 65 years of age, retired after an active life, and very happy. My wife is six months younger than me. We have been married forty years very happily. We have never attended Church. We have never said a prayer. We, neither of us, believe in life after death. We believe in making the world better. Without being egotistical, I believe that we have succeeded. We are highly respected by our neighbors. We are not hampered by creeds but stare life directly in the face.*

*You might, in your talks, tell me what religion has to offer us?"*

That is a good question. What does Christianity have to offer anybody? We can approach that question from so many different angles, and we can discuss this for months if not years.

But let me approach it from one angle this morning. What would a person be **throwing away** if they continue to push God out of their lives.

**Rev. William Lawrence Sullivan** of the 1800's wrote this: (Please note these words, these profound words, with care):

*"Be a materialist, an agnostic, an atheist if you must, but open your eyes to all that that means. It means that you have no organic, important connection with mankind, - that you are standing on air, - that you are an alien to the greatest art and the most profound experiences of history, - that you have adopted a cause which, having no past, can have no future. That you must ignore or suppress the deepest and most prophetic impulses of your inner life. - That you must accept as the fundamental tone and rhythm of your existence a tragic kind of pathos that can never rise up to victorious confidence or pure joy, - and that you regard the whole universe as a paradoxical imposter, a homeless home, a discordant order, a lawless abode of law, a systematic incoherence, a wandering without a destination, an ideal-fashioner without an ideal, a reaching with nothing to grasp, links but not a chain, an unintelligent basis of all our intelligence, the blind bestowing of all our seeing. If, in sheer mental comfort and accommodation, you find it easier to believe all that than to believe in God, then no man can say thee nay,' but do not expect the outraged universe to say yes' to you."*

I submit to you this morning that a person who chooses to live their lives without God, never dares to look at their life squarely in the face. That person will spend their whole lives hiding from the truth. There will always be that nagging question, *Is there a God?* One can push that question out of your mind in certain periods of your life, but that question, *Is there a God?* will be at the forefront of your mind when life doesn't go as expected. Especially, that question will be at center stage when one is taking his or her last breath.

The reason why that question will be nagging on us is because we know, if we have the courage to be honest with ourselves, that there is a God. Because that truth has been written on our hearts by the Creator Himself. You can never escape that reality no matter how hard you try.

The late **Mary Ellen Chase**, was an American educator, teacher, scholar, and author. She is regarded as one of the most important regional literary figures of the early twentieth century. She writes of the persistent dream that she had as a little child. It is a sharp and vivid symbol of all the fears that we harbor in attempting to live without God.

*"In this dream," she says, "I walked across this desolate expanse in a strange obscurity, neither dark nor light. And even more terrifying than the dimness, the utter silence and vastness, was the understanding that I must walk alone forever. For not only could I make no progress, but there was no end to reach. At every step through the white substance, my heavy, tired feet sank deeper until I thought I could not draw them out, that at last my whole body would be out of sight, and I must finally be lost in nothing at all. At every step, too, I looked back to see the impression that my footprints had made in the white substance, but they were never there. Even this sign of me and my endless journey was not given to*

*me. This dream became my terror by night. Always the empty, white and endless plain, the silence, the half light, the weight of my sinking feet, the knowledge that I am abandoned, helpless, alone, and that at last I must become nothing at all."*

While I'm playing this game of playing god, the God of the universe comes down and rescues me from self destructing. It is at the Cross that we find the Christian faith most fully revealed, because, again in that strange paradox, it is upon that bloody, shameful, Cross that God reveals himself to us.

As we live out our lives, thinking that everything is Okay, being oblivious to the fact that we are heading for destruction, God made the ultimate sacrifice in order that we can be saved.

**BRIDGE:** There is a powerful Oscar Nominated movie entitled: The Bridge. It tells the story of the close relationship between a bridge operator and his young son

One fateful day, a steam train, ahead of schedule, full of hundreds of passengers are unaware of the danger as they head towards an open drawbridge. The passengers are laughing and carrying on. The bridge operator sees the train coming from a far distance. Just at the moment his son falls down in the big cranes of the bridge.

Now the bridge operator is forced to make a decision, to save the life of his son or to save the hundred of lives on the passenger train. The clip is not graphic in itself, but it's intense. Take a look

### **The Bridge (3:56) WingClips**

While we are riding on this train call life, thinking that everything is okay, my life is fine, God had to make an **excruciating decision** \* to either allow His only Son Jesus Christ to die on that terrible cross in order to give us an opportunity to be rescued \* or to allow the whole human race to eternally self destruct.

Back in the 1970's there was a bumper sticker that many of you may remember. **I Found It!** Other bumper stickers came out in obvious ridicule, such as *I never lost it* or *I've always had it*. The *I found it* bumper stickers were meant to mean that the person had found Christ, or the Christian faith, or life in Christ.

The fact is, the Christian faith is not anything that anyone can find on his own! Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, states that unequivocally in his own words, *You have not chosen me; I have chosen you*.

Like Adam and Eve, we flee God. We run away from God because of our shame and guilt. Like Adam and Eve we hide from God. We use every human device and strategy to escape him. Instead of worshiping God, we prefer to worship ourselves.

The late famous actor **Richard Burton** "*The more I study religions the more I am convinced that man never worshiped anything but himself.*"

It's only because of God's grace that He comes calling for us. Looking for us. Searching for us so that we can be found.

**Luke 15** is the classic Scripture that Jesus tells about three parables, back to back to back searching for something of great value. **The Lost Sheep Lost Coin,, The lost Son.** Jesus said regarding the lost Sheep, *Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep*. Jesus said regarding the Lost coin; *Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin*.

Jesus said regarding the lost son, *But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and*

*is alive again; he was lost and is found.*

God is out searching for each one of us today.

Do you remember the great **Carthaginian general, Hannibal**, who conceived from the time he was a young man that he would raise an army in Carthage and make his way up through Spain, over the Pyrenees Mountains, down through Italy and attack Rome?

When his army was high in the Alps, they were in shepherding country. A poor peasant shepherd came to the control center of the army at their bonfire and he said, *Soldiers, one of my lambs is missing, and I wonder if some of you might help me search for him.*

And so a group of them set out into the rocks and the darkness. In a couple of hours, most of them were back, tired, exhausted, and went to sleep, unsuccessful. But as the gray of the morning was beginning, they were awakened by the sound of someone coming into their circle around their bonfire and they looked up to see General Hannibal - dirty, scratched, bloody - but in his arms he was holding the lost lamb.

That is a picture of our Heavenly Father as he searches unceasingly for us.

So the question that I have for you this morning is a simple one: *Are you tired of running? Isn't it time to call it quits?* If you are honest, you know that you are doing a very poor job in playing God. Deep down inside there is this huge void, vacuum, that you are trying to fill, but nothing seems to work.

- \* Are you finished with your intellectual searchings which have occupied so much of your time?
- \* Are all of your human devices bankrupt?
- \* Are you desperate?

Because you see, this is the faith of desperate people. Our desperation is God's opportunity to come into our lives.

God is not standing around whispering words of self-improvement, offering material happiness as a bribe to us, if only we are good little boys and girls. But God is offering Forgiveness. God is offering grace. God is offering eternal life. God is offering to take that which is old and make something new.

As the **Archbishop of York** put it: *"There can be no new order without a new man, no new earth without a new heaven, no new world if we use only the old building materials of the old worldliness. "What difference does it make if we see Christ as our Risen Lord and the destiny of our own lives? Just this - we have a power able to overcome evil. We have a testimony from God himself to a power that is greater than death, the assurance that the mundane affairs of our lives which, in themselves, are stupid and endless, have eternal significance and, therefore, relevance."*

Easter means the facing of the reality of life in this world.

Easter means the overcoming of real evil by a real God.

Easter forces us to confront life, not to evade it.

Without God, my life and yours is empty, meaningless, brutish and short. With God, my life has eternal meaning. I'm telling you this morning, that God is searching and looking for those who are lost so that He can be in a love relationship. He paid the ultimate price, in allowing His Son to die in order that the justice of His character is satisfied.

**John Newton**, slave trader and great sinner, who later became a great saint, *Amazing Grace how sweet the*

*sound; that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost but now I'm found,*

I pray that you will have the courage to accept the new life that God is offering you today.

Let us not be like a peasant fisherman who in England in the days of **King Edward VIII**- who, incidentally, was a very warmhearted, benevolent, monarch, very interested in improving the lot of the poor in England. He decided that because he had to go down to the waterfront to christen a ship, he would stop there and visit in the homes of some of the poverty-stricken fishermen who lived along the water's edge. He went up to a door and knocked, and a surly voice came out from within: *Who's there?* Edward replied: *It is your king. May I come in?*

Suspecting a cruel joke, there was no sound, the door remained shut. And the king, respecting the right of his subjects to make that decisions, turned away from that doorway.

Oh, let us not be so stupid! God forbid that we should ever turn away the King when we are confronted by him! I pray this morning that you allow yourself to be found by the Almighty God who desperately is seeking you out.

A soft-spoken 22-year-old, **Nick Adenhardt** often looked and acted more like a bat boy than the Angels' top pitching prospect. He showed up to the ball park this past Wednesday wearing a faded Washington Redskins T-shirt and jeans with holes in them. Then he went out and pitched the best game of his brief big-league career, holding the Oakland Athletics scoreless for six innings. This past Friday morning he was struck down in a fatal car accident.

As one of the baseball players stated, "*You dream your whole life about playing in the big leagues, you make your first start and have a good start and then it's over.*"

I bring that story up to say, don't gamble with your life. It's too precious. God paid the highest price in order for you and for me to be rescued from our self delusions.

The poet **Henley** wrote the prophetic lines, "*I am the Master of my Fate, I am the Captain of my Soul,*"

I encourage you to break out of denial and realize, you're not God. That position is already taken. He is seeking you out today, so that He can be in a love relationship with you. Will you let Him?

Postscript: The purpose of posting this sermon is for personal Bible study and resource material for pastors:

**Resources Used for this Sermon:**

- \* *So you are Searching for God? Poppycock!*: Louise Valbracht
- \* *Trying It Without God*: Louis H. Valbracht