

Sermon, October 4, 2021

When I retired and Sara and I moved full time to our house on Oak Island, one of the first things we did was repaint the whole interior. The house had been through two of our kids' families over the 12 years since we'd built it, and we wanted to spruce things up.

I learned a couple of really valuable things while painting my whole house, with the furniture in it.

First, I learned that while I like cutting in the detail when we paint, it's a lot easier to cut in the edges at the baseboards than it is to do it up around the ceilings.

Second, I learned that it really is worth it to pay someone else to paint the inside of your house for you.

But getting back to that first one. There's something really difficult about working with your arms over your head all the time, when you have to reach up to do anything.

And while it's not easy to get on hands and knees at my age, taking my time and investing in some good knee pads took care of most of that. And I wasn't fighting gravity all the time.

Now why am I telling you all this? Because I want you to remember how much easier it is to deal with something you want to accomplish when it's below you than when it's above you.

And why does that matter? Because in today's reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, we are reminded,

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
or mortals, that you care for them?

You have made them for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned them with glory and honor,
subjecting all things under their feet.”

(That's a quote from Psalm 8.)

And that's important. Important because most of us don't see ourselves as God sees us, as we really are, as exalted above all things because we are in Christ Jesus, who is exalted above all things. And if we could learn to see ourselves as He sees us, as having all things beneath our feet, life would get a lot easier.

You see, one of our greatest troubles is that we spend too much time “striving.” We struggle, often fiercely, to do what we think we're supposed to do, or to make a difference, or just to do the right thing.

And for the most part we view ourselves as striving to climb, to climb out of the chaos that surrounds us, and, as much as we can, to carry others up with us. It's always about climbing the mountain *WHEN WE'RE ALREADY AT THE PEAK.*

What happened when Jesus died and rose again is that He took our humanity and returned it to the glory for which it was intended. Our job isn't to attain to that glory, but to learn to live into it, to use it for the welfare of others and the world.

This doesn't mean that we are absolved of any responsibility to reach out to others. On the contrary, we who know what it is to live on the edge of the ravine will find that our hearts ache to draw others up to where Jesus has put us. We don't have any claim to pride in having discovered where we are, we're just happy to be here and we share Jesus' fierce desire to see others delivered from the despair that lives below.

And it's a lot easier to lift someone from despair when you live above it.

I can drop a rope to someone a lot more easily than I can push them up from below them, or drag them up the side of the ravine while they hang on my back.

This change in our way of seeing ourselves is mightily important. We're not as effective when we see ourselves struggling against the brokenness of the world from below.

I was trained as a life-guard when I was a kid. When you saw someone floundering in deep water, even if you saw them go under, you didn't try to swim to them underwater. You swam to where you'd last seen them and THEN dived to find them.

When I was painting, I could paint a LOT longer near the floor without resting than I could up over my head.

It's a lot easier to see the right solution when you're viewing a problem from above, where you can see it all, then when you're in the midst of it and can only see the wall in front of you.

I don't mean to say everything becomes easy, but it becomes easier. We find that we think more clearly, we see more clearly, we're less subject to exhaustion and burn out.

I can imagine that some might find this point of view dangerous. It could lead to a sort of detachment that causes us to just stop caring. If it were one of the half-baked self-help philosophies floating around these days, I'd agree.

I'd agree because none of them knows what it is to be lifted to that place through the love of Jesus. When we step into that love, and allow it to change our perspective on everything else, we also step into His love for everything else, and our hearts begin to burn as His does to see every person, indeed all of Creation, come to the fullness of being for which they were created. Our hearts break for that which breaks His. Our hearts rejoice when He rejoices. That's all an inseparable part of living in Him.

But with that love, that ache, also comes the Joy that He has because He knows His own victory. While some still suffer in bondage because they don't know the Freedom that He's bestowed on them, He knows that in the end, they'll know, and they'll rejoice too.

This is how we continue in a world that sometimes seems far more broken than it was when we signed on to help restore it. We spend time, probably daily, meditating on who we are, and where we are in Christ Jesus. We're not working to get anywhere. We're working because we're already there. We're not working to get anyone else into a new place, either. We're working to help them realize where Jesus' sacrifice has already put them.

And as we live that truth, day by day, and as we enable others to live that truth, the world is slowly but surely transformed into the peaceable Kingdom it was meant to be.