

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
June 17, 2018

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Theme: “Aiming to Please”

It’s Father’s Day. On this day we are thankful for fathers, for their lead, for their provision, for their examples. Father’s set before us standards of what is right and what is wrong, what is in bounds and what is out of bounds. They give us something to aim for. Usually children want to please Dad. Now that could be from fear or love or a combination thereof. Let’s focus on the love part, wanting to do what the one who loves me has set before me as good. Now there could be ongoing issues when one never seems to measure up to Dad’s standards.

Dads can teach many things. They may encourage when it comes to sports, like basketball. Here I have a goal (Nerf). If one excels at basketball he could grow up to play in the NBA finals and get beat by the Golden State Warriors. Now this is highly unlikely, but a few do make it.

In basketball the goal is the target. The idea is to get the ball through the hoop. Those who do this at a high percentage even when someone is trying to stop you from doing that very thing can make a lot of money—maybe. It takes good aim, concentration, execution.

We do aim to please, do we not? We aim at the target and it is pleasing when we hit it. We would like to hit it every time. There are few exceptions to that. Maybe you need two points to win and you are shooting one free throw so you miss in the slight hope of a rebound and a put back for two. Yes, we do aim to please. Today we remember the aim to please our heavenly Father.

We have quite the issue in that on our own. We can't please Him. It's like trying to play basketball with our hands bound. Here, I can illustrate that with this chain. All bound like this limits motion; it's hard to shoot. The binding by sin is much worse than this. But we are not only bound, we were also blind. We can show that with these blinders. It really helps to be able to see, to see well. We can get by with a little fuzziness, but limited sight brings limited success. It's hard to hit what you can't see.

It's like a wild shot in the dark. A ball may occasionally go in, but aim has nothing to do with it, just chance. We have no success in pleasing God apart from faith. Now we are not totally blind to the target. Our conscience gives us an image, though that image is always fuzzy. God's law puts the target before us very clearly. The Law shows us what to do and what not to do. But if it's just the law we are still blind to reason for aiming at the target. We may well think the reason is to be good enough to make God's team; God will be pleased by my aim, by my success. The fact is we were bound to sin and death and bound to miss every time, a good shot is no good when for the wrong reason. Also God's standard is 100%, one miss is one miss too many. We may aim to please but our aiming will never be pleasing.

Then there is Jesus. He is the One who comes preaching and teaching like no one ever had. A lot of His teaching was in parables as we see today (Mark 4:26-34), teaching that stuck with you as a figure was given to grab your attention and through which to convey the point. No one every taught like this One. And no one ever did the deeds that this One did. He cleansed the lepers, drove out demons, gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, leaping to the lame. He even raised the dead. All this is truly remarkable.

But all His life was as remarkable as these signs and wonders. You see He always hit the target. He always, always walked by the commandments for the right reason. It

certainly wasn't to get in good with God, after all, He is God. It was from love for the Father and for the world. Yes, always hit the target even when Satan and His enemies were waving the hands of temptation and opposition in His face. He focused on the right target as His well-intentioned fans waved other targets—targets like a renewed Kingdom of David, a good life here below of always enough and more, an appealing life of sharing in that power. Certainly they had no target of suffering and death in mind. There were hands waving, voices shouting, opposition on every side pushing and shoving, no fouls called you see, and He hits it every time—every time, never a miss.

Because He has finished His work and because we trust in Him and His work, faith, we are no longer bound and blinded like we were. The light of the law does expose our darkness to us. And then there is the light of the Gospel. The God who said let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). God the Son laid aside the show of the glory of holiness and majesty to shine forth with the glory of obedience as He took on the tent of our human flesh, perfect obedience. The One who is all light takes on our darkness. We have that verse that says that so completely here in 2 Corinthians 5. “God made Him to be sin for us, the One not knowing sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (vs 21) God doesn't overlook sin. Jesus is the reconciling sacrifice. Every sin comes with a price tag and Jesus has paid the price in full for all.

The Gospel is the power of salvation for everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). In it a righteousness of God is revealed from faith into faithfulness (a rebirth that results in walking faithfully). Yes, there is forgiveness and there is life! We who were dead in transgressions and sins have been made alive in Christ, joined to the resurrected and reigning Jesus in baptism. Now there's the target. There's what God wants me to do, even

has transformed me to do. He wants me to love Him and love my neighbor and the way I do that is in His commandments. It's not about me, not about being good enough to please by what I do, no, it's for the good of my neighbor and for the honor and glory of God. Life now in Jesus!

We do aim to please, but we realize our aim is not always pleasing. We still live in this material body of flesh. No, material is not evil. It is God's creation along with spirit. But our material of this body is faulty, corrupted by sin. The old nature is always with us in this world. It is susceptible to the temptations of the devil and the cheering crowd, the world calling us to shoot, but it's the wrong target. The old nature is always at hand. We do see, but our vision is not perfect. It's like looking through these slitted blinders. The old nature is also like a burden pulling us down. All this results in aim that is less than pleasing.

It results in the groaning Paul writes of. We are not pleased with our not pleasing. Our conundrum is like that Paul expresses in Romans 7. Missing the target pains us as we know it pains our heavenly Father and brings pain to those around us. It would not be good if that pain just went away. That would imply callousness. "Who will rescue us from this body of death (Romans 7:24)?" we groan. We also groan under that burden of affliction Paul spoke of in chapter 4. It is light and momentary in light of what is coming, yet it is real and it is painful.

We groan for the better under the burden. Paul says our groaning is not to be unclothed, that is, not that we think death as a better answer than bearing the burden. No, our groaning is to be clothed, better clothed, to put on that not subject to death, the day when the mortal is swallowed by life. It will be out of the tent and into the house. We are

not alone in our groaning. All creations longs to be delivered from this bondage of decay (Romans 8:20-22).

No, we have not experienced this final deliverance, yet we do have life. We are God's children right now through faith in Jesus. Actually, believer, brother and sister, you will never be more a child of God than you are right now. In that eternal dwelling we will not be more of a child as we experience the wonders of the fullness of glory. As His children now we make it our aim to please Him (vs 9). We could translate that, "love of honor [love to honor our Father] motivates us to please Him." (**filotime, omai**, philotimeomai). It's the "love" part of "fear and love God" that we remember from the explanation of the Ten Commandments.

But there is verse 10, maybe that not so pleasing part about appearing before the Judgment Seat "so that each one may receive what is due him in the body, whether good or bad." Consider these verses. "They said to Him, "What must we do to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answer them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (John 6:28) "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) Works come from faith, not faith from works, works don't bring salvation, but works flow from those who have been saved.

We remember Jesus own teaching about the Judgment Seat. Look who's seated on the Seat. It is the One who has been judged for us, the One made sin for us. Each does receive what is due, due according to promise and judgment. There are the sheep on the right and the goats on the left. Of the sheep is recounted no bad, only good. Is it they never did bad? Of course they did. They had to miss the target a lot, but all that missing has been put on Jesus. They have been cleansed, washed. They are surprised at being

commended for their good. They were just being sheep. But for the goats only bad is recounted. Did they do no good? They must have as the world accounts good, but they were hitting the wrong target, the target of aiming to please for self. they too were surprised at the words, thought they must have been doing their share. They were goats being goats.

Each group receives what is coming according to judgment or promise. To the sheep are the beautiful words, “Come, you blessed by my Father, **inherit** the kingdom having been prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34). And to the goats the frightening words, “Go away from me, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” (Matthew 25:41)

Yes, we groan, yet we aim to please, a pleasing life is our purpose as we do those good works God has prepared beforehand for us to do. Through our pleasing others we have opportunity to be persuaded concerning God’s pleasing. For Paul it was through His office as apostle, God’s ambassador. For you and me it is as those who have heard and heeded the message, believed, now new creations. As others are served by our deeds we have the opportunity to speak our Lord’s words, explain why we are aiming at the target and tell of the One who hit it every time.

We groan now even as we rejoice, but one day no more groaning, fully clothed and fully free. For Jesus’ sake. Amen