

The 1st Sunday in Lent: Holy Trinity Church: March 5, 2017

Matthew 4: 1-11: *Isn't It Time For Jesus To Meet Your Mr. Hyde?*

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote the unforgettable story about a Dr. Jekyll and a Mr. Hyde. Dr. Henry Jekyll was respected in his community. He was a gentleman in every way. But Dr. Jekyll had some secret vices which he kept carefully hidden from public view. So, Dr. Jekyll had a dilemma faced by some people today, he wanted to maintain his reputation in the community, but free to practice the vices that he knew would be repulsive to his neighbors. So Dr. Jekyll hatched a plan. Late at night in his laboratory he devised a mystical potion that would allow him to transform his physical features at will. After he drank this potion, he became a different person altogether. He was able to move around town and practice his unsavory vices without his neighbors knowing anything about it. During the day, he was the amiable Dr. Jekyll, but at night he was transformed into a sociopathic

monster called Mr. Hyde caring for no one at all and wreaking havoc everywhere he went. In the beginning, Dr. Jekyll was able to control these transformations, but such unrestrained evil could not be kept in check for long. One night in his sleep, without any intent on his part, he was transformed into the infamous Mr. Hyde. Even worse, the evil monster within began dominating his life and eventually took over completely. Dr. Jekyll disappeared completely; only Mr. Hyde was left. Stevenson's point was that there is a battle going on within each of us. Each of us carries around within a little bit of Mr. Hyde and if we do not pay careful attention to our character, we too, can be dominated by our lesser selves.

My sisters and brothers in Christ, why should this be? In Paul's letter to the Romans, he tells us that it is because we are descendants of Adam. Through one man, says Paul, sin came into the world. Paul wants us to know that the primary problem in human life is sin. That truth is at the very heart of our understanding of the relationship between God and humanity. Part of being in a right relationship with God is to always try to do the right thing. Deep in our hearts we know that. That is why we feel guilt when we do something we know is wrong.

So, how do we please the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? You do it by obeying God's laws and taking to heart Jesus teachings. God is a holy God who desires holiness, righteousness and, most importantly, love on the part of God's children. But, how can I always do the right thing you may ask. I'm only human. Yes indeed and our humanness can be a real problem. Many of us are prone to laugh at the idea of sin today.

There is an old story that tells about a man who was visiting a strange town. He stopped at a telephone booth to call his motel. In the booth he saw a sticker that said, "If you are tired of sin, read John 3:16. Some wayward scribe had written in below the sticker, "If you are not tired of sin call Klondike 3-3344. We laugh at that little joke, but the truth of the matter is that the more we know about life and people the more acutely aware we are of how great a price is often paid because of our moral and ethical weaknesses. Unresolved sin and guilt are often like that. A small act unconfessed can lead to serious heartache and pain later in life. It doesn't seem fair but we can spend a lifetime paying for a foolish, youthful mistake.

There was a farm boy who was angry at a neighboring farmer who hurt his feelings when he wanted to date the farmer's daughter. The boy tried to think of some way he could get even. So, he devised a plan. Early one morning he

rode twenty miles on horseback to purchase a bag of Johnson grass seed. After dark he sowed his neighbor's richest bottom land with Johnson grass. Now, Johnson grass has traditionally been a pest, and it is nearly indestructible. So the Johnson grass came up, and the neighboring farmer fought Johnson grass until the day he died. The young man had his revenge. At the very same time, the young boy grew up and fell in love with the farmer's daughter. They were married, and when the farmer died he left the farm to his daughter. The young man, who went to such great trouble to hurt his neighbor years before, spent the rest of his life fighting Johnson grass too. Usually the penalty for our sins is not that obvious. Still, the moral of the story is valid. We can pay a lifetime for a foolish and sometimes petty act of moral impropriety.

By our very nature you and I are sinners. We read in Psalm 24, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in this holy place?" The Psalmist answers, "The person who has clean hands and a pure heart," and we have to confess that we have neither. It begs the question my sisters and brothers, is there no hope for us?

Paul's answer is that our hope is in Christ. Paul is saying that there is a second Adam and that second Adam is Jesus Christ. The first Adam brought

death and destruction through his disobedience to God. In stunning contrast, the second Adam humbled himself and submitted to the will of God and provided for us the means of our salvation.

Matthew gives us that unforgettable picture of Satan taking Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple at Jerusalem. There Satan tempted Jesus to use earthly fame and glory to establish His kingdom. Later Satan took Jesus to a high mountain where he could behold all the kingdoms of the world. All of this would be his, Satan declares, if he bowed down and worshipped him. The greatest temptation of all, however, came later in a garden called Gethsemane where Jesus prayed, *“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want, but what you want.”* Each time Jesus was tempted, he submitted his own will to the will of God. And the impact was this: Just as each of us share in the consequences of Adam’s sin, so each of us share in the benefits of Jesus’ obedience. St. Paul writes, *“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”* That one man, of course, is Jesus Christ.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus can free us from the power of sin! That is the first thing we learn from today’s readings. Personal discipline is

helpful, but there are many disciplined people who are still captive to their sins. Good intentions are a starting point, but there is a much time-proven truth in the adage that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. You see, there is a flaw in the fabric of human character that only God can mend. There is only one way that we shall ever be free from the sin that so easily besets our character, and that is to open ourselves to God's grace, God's forgiveness, God's love.

My sisters and brothers, Jesus Christ is our only hope. I think this little story will help us understand our situation: A French writer named Henri Barbusse was in a trench full of wounded men during the First World War. While in that trench he overheard a conversation. One man in the trench was dying and he knew it. He only had minutes to live. He turned to another man and said, "Listen, Dominic, you've led a very bad life. Everywhere you are wanted by the police. But there are no convictions against me. My name is clear, so, here, take my wallet, take my papers, take my identity, take my good name, take my life and quickly, hand me your papers that I may carry all your crimes away with me in death. This wounded man wanted his friend who had made many mistakes in his life to be able to make a new start, a fresh start. So he gave him his identity, his papers, his wallet and his good name. I ask you, is there a better example of what Christ can do for us? All we have to do is turn

to him and accept his amazing grace. And that brings us to our greatest challenge. Dr. Jekyll may I introduce your Mr. Hyde to Jesus? The only way we are set free from the power of sin is to humble ourselves following the example of Christ in his obedience to His Father and seek to live a new life by his grace. So how do we begin to do this? The answer is very simple. We must cooperate with God's grace. In other words, God helps those who help themselves. (twice) God's grace is the many, many blessings that are poured out upon us every day of our lives. Here is the rub, if we want to free our lives from slavery to our sins, those actions that separate us from God and one another, and then we must cooperate with God's many graces. We must help with the heavy lifting. If your Mr. Hyde is alcohol, then you must put down that drink and pick up alcoholics anonymous. If your Mr. Hyde is addicted to gambling, then you must put down the cards, the one armed bandits, the lottery and scratch tickets and pick up Gamblers anonymous. If your Mr. Hyde is an at work or online extra marital relationship, then you must put down that relationship and bring those conversations back into your marriage where they belong. If your Mr. Hyde is your relationship with your child, then you must put down pretending to be a friend and pick up your role as a parent bringing them up with the discipline they want and will need for their lives. It's so much easier being a pal. They don't need another friend.

Whether your child knows it or not, they need a parent who cares enough to have those hard conversations. If your Mr. Hyde is lying and stealing, then you need to put down these character flaws and pick up honesty and integrity as you file your tax returns. A clean conscience will thank you.

There are two natures within us. Only you know your Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Only you and almighty God know what you must put down and pickup as you cooperate with God's grace. Lent gives us 40 days to make this fresh start, this new life. If you're in a trench you can crawl out of it a new man, a new woman. You can have a new life if you just drop Mr. Hyde off and pick up God's grace through Jesus Christ.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we are both dust and divinity. The central tragedy of our lives is our inability to save ourselves from our lesser nature. But the good news is this: Jesus made it possible for us to be free from the power of sin. All we need do is cooperate. It will change your life forever. So, Dr. Jekyll isn't it time for your Mr. Hyde to meet Jesus? AMEN.