

The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost – 2021

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

Ephesians 6:10-20

Mark 7:14-23

Thomas Creek; it was a summer wonderland. Thomas Creek; it was a teenage boy's version of heaven in the backwoods of Oregon. Thomas Creek; it was a somewhat hidden destination, an oasis in the forest known only to a privileged few. A covered bridge was ideal for jumping into a perfectly formed pool. Thomas Creek; all the backwoods' girls would sunbathe on the rocks and the city boys would jump and flex and dream. There was always an abundance of adrenaline at Thomas Creek; test your nerves and perfect your 50' dive in the pike position. As one who was on the diving team in high school and eager for every adventure that was saturated in adrenaline, I was a regular. The route was etched in my memory (I didn't need a map). I would leave the urban sprawl of Albany (population 26,000 in those days) and head out highway 20, turn left at Cottonwoods Dance Hall, and then half a dozen other rights and lefts at sleepy junctures and hello Summer Splendor.

I got lost. Dang it! I could taste the day's fun and I was lost. Stubborn even as a youth, I drove this way and that... lost. Defeated, I pulled into an old-timer's driveway and asked for help. "How do I get to Thomas Creek?" And, deadpan, he said this: "You can't get there from here." Now, I've always been a literal kind of person and I knew that the phrase he used was incorrect. One can get anywhere from anywhere. You can get to Katmandu from Timbuktu. You can get to Bourbon Street from Temperance Way and back again if you so choose. But that ole boy had me. He knew that he had me. I suspect that he wanted to teach me a lesson and so I resigned myself to his folksy manner and said: "Excuse me?" He gave it to me straight: "You're on the wrong road, slick." He'd no doubt seen me drive by his house more than once – this way and that. "You won't find what you're looking for going back and forth on this road." "Okay, King Solomon" (I didn't say that, but I wanted to), "where do I have to be in order to get to Thomas Creek?" And with that I was on my way to heaven.

You can't get there from here. You've seen plenty of people traveling on the wrong road, back and forth they go, eager to get someplace that you know that they will never find if they keep on keepin' on. Believe it or not, everybody wants to get to Thomas Creek. There is no sin, no disease, no death, no sorrow, no pain, no loneliness, no fear, no loss, no grief, no shame, no worry, no guilt and no night. Heaven; it is full of joy, full of light, full of rejoicing and music and contentment and laughter and bliss and love and friendship and vitality and hope realized. Heaven is full of the glory of God. Every moment is more delightful than the last. There is only one alternative to heaven. Some are hell-bent on pursuing their end on whatever false road they are on in this life because they are stubborn or willfully blind or too cool for school. One day they will learn it. One day they will know that they afflicted themselves immeasurably by rejecting Christ and they will weep. Hell is real. Hell is ugly. In hell there is only death, only dread, only fear, only loss and it is ravenous and it is relentless and it is eternal. No one, not even the insane, wants to be there.

We are all traveling. We are all on our way. The roadmap is clear. Unalterable basics define our road. Sin; it is in us. Defilement haunts us and it must be solved. Only a quack would treat

a broken arm by cleaning the wax out of the patient's ears. It is not by hand-washing or dietary restrictions that one gets to Thomas Creek. Jesus told them plainly: "you can't get there on that road." All people, and I mean that sincerely, all people know that there is a problem between God and man. All people know that they are at odds with God by virtue of their ill behavior, their sinful thoughts, and they need, they want a remedy. Those who corrupted the OT offered a false road. They had turned God's self-revelation of grace, His self-revelation of sacrifice and love, they turned the true faith of Israel into a rulebook of man saving himself. They were lost. On the wrong road, they were lost and they couldn't get to Thomas Creek from where they were.

Jesus is not "folksy." He is wiser than Solomon and He brings straight talk. Defilement can't be solved by a Jenny Craig method or by some hypoallergenic antibacterial Irish Spring. In other words, it's not handwashing or dietary restrictions that get you to Thomas Creek. Works righteousness; any religion that is based on your works is bad religion, false religion, the wrong road. Your works aren't going to cut it. Your heart is so corrupt that you can't fix it by slathering works-righteous make-up on it, by hanging fabulous works-righteous jewelry from it, by praying enough, giving enough, reading enough. Works righteousness is a religious road to nowhere. There is another Way; the Way and the Truth; the Way and the Truth and the Life.

You *know* who is that Way. Jesus came into this world to be smothered in my defilement, your defilement. There is only one remedy, only one solution – and God takes it upon Himself. To cleanse you, to save you, to make you His own – to draw you to Thomas Creek, lost though you have been. The Son of God commits to a blessed exchange: He takes the muck of your sin and give you the glory of His righteousness. Jesus said: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). I have come to give you MY LIFE. I have come to give you MY DEATH. I have come to give you MY RESURRECTION. On the Holy Cross the man Jesus was all of us, humanity reduced to one. In His flesh, all of the iniquity of the world was localized – all that has ever come and ever will come out of the heart of man – (it was put) on Jesus, who is truly God. It was bound to Him on a dark Friday afternoon. Your sin was dealt with there. Your sin was dealt with then. Your sin was embodied in the Seed of the Woman, the Second and Greater Adam. And God the Father punished it. The object of His wrath was His Son for Jesus Christ was the vessel in which sin was found. Your Savior cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Jesus was forsaken because He was defiled. His own sin did not defile Him for He HAD NO SIN. Yours was put on Him and this defiled Man, this Incarnate God, died. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). What does that tell you? It tells you many things but it certainly tells you this: He wants you at Thomas Creek.

Christ constructed His church, including this blessed congregation, to bring you to heaven. He constructed His church to bring you to Himself, to feed you with His life through His Word, through His body and blood, to build your faith, to strengthen you with His love, His service. We do not generate our own holiness; it is a gift. We are not saved by what we do; we are saved by grace – by what the Lord Christ has done and what He is doing now. What is He doing now? Sharing His holiness, giving you Himself; blessing you with His Spirit. Day by day, He is actively drawing you closer to heaven, to life as it has always been intended. We will struggle. Not one of us is a spiritual Hercules. When we are weak, then we are strong. We live not for ourselves. There is a battle taking place are we are combatants. The world is fallen and there is

a battle for the hearts and minds of men and women, boys and girls. We have a Word to speak, a Word to defend, a Word with which to inspire generation upon generation. If we neglect the right, the responsibility to speak this Word in all its fullness then the space for speaking will get smaller – even in America. We know the way. If there is a constant caravan, with banners about going to Thomas Creek flying from our cars, fewer people will get lost. If we hide who we are, if we pretend not to know the way, what will the fallout be?

You may think that we are overmatched. The enemy has entrenched himself in every institution, every hallowed human hall, every former stronghold of virtue. Our Lord appeared overmatched. His glory was discovered in His shame. His power was made perfect in weakness. His triumph was secured when He seemed defeated. It is He who now calls us to take up the full armor of God. We are not overmatched. The victory is won. We are children of the light and His resurrection is life that can never be taken away from us. We are on our way... to heaven. On our Way we hearken to His Word as children of the resurrection have done for millennia. “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the just decrees that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you” (Deuteronomy 4:1). The Promised Land...we get there from here.