

When All Is Said and Done

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Have you seen the new movie *Hereafter*? It's the story of a man with psychic abilities who is able to communicate with people who have died. It's another version of the ongoing story of humanity's ongoing search to know what lies beyond death.

About sixty years ago, a young man joined the Army. This was right near the end, or perhaps just after World War II. Before ever deploying overseas, however, that young man got sick with influenza. He developed a fever and congestion that kept getting worse. Finally, they admitted him to the infirmary, but within a few hours he had died. That is when his adventure began.

Writing many years later about his near-death experience, he described in great detail his ever-expanding experience of being dead yet fully alive, of opening to new dimensions of awareness--enough to fill a book! In what was probably the central event of the experience, he found himself standing before a being of light, a Christ figure. He described this being as knowing him completely--every secret thought or private action. It was as though there was a movie of his whole life playing all around him. Then the being asked him, "What have you done in your life for me?" He felt humiliated at being so fully known. In the same instant, however, he felt so fully loved by the being that he could begin to accept himself.

Throughout much of the Christian Church's existence, one of the most compelling reasons for following Jesus has involved the image of Judgment Day. What will happen to us when we die, when we are fully known and accountable for the lives we're now living. One of the great measures for living well is to imagine yourself at the end of your life looking back on this time you're now living. The author of the New Testament epistle 2 Timothy depicts the Apostle Paul, at the end of his life, pouring out his reflections to the young man Timothy.

As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. *I'm about to die, my life an offering on God's altar.* I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. *I've run hard right to the finish.* There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will give me on that day; *God the honest judge.* (2 Timothy 4: 6-8, NRSV, *The Message*)

The Biblical image for honest self-reflection is standing before God on "that Day" and taking responsibility for what you've done. Paul seemed eager to show God that he had been faithful in terms of the calling he had felt for his life. Despite the challenges and hardships, he had "fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith."

What are you most looking forward to showing God? What are you most concerned about showing? How will you feel then about your life and your choices when all is said and done? These are challenging questions, but the essential question is this: what are you going to do about all that here and now?

This current teaching series is called *Why Should I Follow Jesus?* In it, I'm sharing at least some of the reasons for my faith--why I choose, on my life journey, to follow Jesus. The first reason is the divine secret of joy Jesus showed us. The second reason is how he revealed a sense of abundance that is available to each/all of us. And the third reason is that he always pointed beyond himself to show us what is ultimately true about life and about what underlies the universe.

The fourth reason I follow Jesus is that he showed us how to live lives worthy of ourselves. The fifth reason is that he showed us God's invitation to live as the heroes of our own story: to receive the healing of knowing who we are, discovering whose we are, and deciding where we're going. And the sixth reason is how Jesus enabled us to recognize and envision a new way of living through our relationship with God—not of dependence on an all-powerful deity, but of an independence that comes as we discover and embrace the God-presence that lives within each of us.

This sermon reveals the seventh reason why we should follow Jesus. When all is said and done that we can say and do, following Jesus leads us along the way to become fully human. In the fullness of our humanity, we can embrace full depth of our relationship with God. We can begin to embrace our calling as full partners with God, shaping this world according to God's vision of *Shalom*.

Judgment Day is the ultimate metaphor for self-reflection. The Christian tradition describes God as the One from whom nothing is hidden—no secrets, no deception. We may hide our deepest secrets from our friends, our families and life partners and even from ourselves, but not from God. So the prospect of standing before God and reviewing how we've lived our lives is a very daunting scenario!

To the extent the Bible depicts God's ultimate judgment, it tends to turn not on correct belief, but on internalized values that lead to life choices. It is the nature of those choices that determines the judgment. For example, in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats from Matthew's Gospel, the sole criterion was what was done for Christ who was present in "the least of these." Jesus showed us the face of God in a human face. Through his life, his teaching, and what he has left us, we're able to know God more clearly. Jesus was also a mirror for us to see the fullness of our own humanity, to see ourselves as we can be and seek to be that best self

You can't hide out in this life—not ultimately. There really is no way through this life but to move through it, to get to know ourselves more honestly and clearly, and to meet our challenges with courage and daring. There is no hiding place. When we stand on Judgment Day, it won't be a theology test or a popularity contest. It will be more like that story of the ancient Rabbi Zuscha who, on his death bed responded to a question about life after death. The rabbi said, "I don't really know about life after death. But one thing I do know: when I get there I am not going to be asked, 'Why weren't you Moses?' or 'Why weren't you David?' I am going to be asked, 'Why weren't you Zuscha?'" (from *Invitations* by Francis Dewar, 15) Why weren't you you?

Poet W. H. Auden wrote this chilling verse:

God may reduce you on Judgment Day
to tears of shame
reciting by heart the poems
you would have written,
had your life been good.

What does it mean for your life to have been good? What about the poems you would write if your life were good? What poems will Crossroads Church write if our life is to be good?

God knows us fully, loves us totally. God invites us both to know ourselves and to act as a result. There is an urgency that we engage in this process now. Self-knowledge comes through prayer and meditation, taking the time in your life to be still and sense God's presence

within and around you. Self-knowledge comes by learning to lean into that presence in living your life. Self knowledge also comes through honest one-to-one conversations with others-- each other and those with whom we feel uncomfortable. All this is not to earn God's love. That is a given. It is not so much to determine where we will go when we die, but it is to enable heaven to be more fully present here and now as we live.