

Sermon – 6th Pentecost
Psalm 1 & Luke 6:17-26
February 13, 2022

“Godliness”

“Blessed is the man...”. These are the very first words of the Psalms and so much more than a nice opening line to a poem, a sacred complement to *“how do I love thee...let me count the ways”*. These four words...*“blessed is the man”* express why the Psalms were written – to disclose and give instruction in how someone is blessed.

Psalm 1 is not a creed we would recognize - it doesn't use a creed's characteristic “I believe/We believe” language followed by assertions of faith. But Psalm 1 does express what Israel believed about God and what God does. Psalm 1 confesses the faith of Israel - a significant object of which appears to be how to live a blessed life. It concerns itself with what we call *“godliness”* - how a person displays, radiates, oozes...godly characteristics.

You can imitate godly people – a person could do worse I suppose...but godliness as the Psalms understand it, as the Bible understands it, is a gift – as for example Ephesians 2:8-10 which says *“for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works that God prepared in advance for us to do.”* Use that as the starting point of any discussion or pondering you have about godliness.

The faith of Israel stated that godliness comes delighting in the “Law of Lord.” To Christian ears, that would be the Ten Commandments, but a correct understanding of what the law of the Lord meant to Israel was broader – the law touched every aspect of a person's life. We Christians would say godliness is taking delight in “the word of the Lord” so that our focus would be the “Word of life – Jesus Christ.”

So then, what is godliness – what is it that makes a person “blessed?” Lutherans say godliness is faith - believing the right things about God – chiefly that God is merciful and forgives sins for Jesus' sake. If you get no further than that in your godliness you've nonetheless come quite far. Psalm 1 says godliness is not just *“delight in the law of the Lord”* but loathing *“the way of the wicked.”* Godliness meant the active resistance of evil. We might hear that as *“keep your nose clean”*, and that would not be entirely incorrect. But it would be incomplete – one cannot say, whether one listens to the Psalms or to Jesus, that *“I'm good simply because I avoid bad.”*

This is Super Bowl Sunday so why not a sports metaphor to help us? To understand godliness as the avoidance of wrongdoing is like saying you can win a football game simply by playing good defense. But you can't win like that – the very nature of the sport demands that on the field you take chances, you move the ball, you risk a turnover or a mistake in the process – you're “in the arena” and so you have to engage in active attempts to win.

That is where the Psalms and Jesus call us to turn to godliness that actively engages the world. Jesus is all over that sort of thing by the way when in our lesson from Luke he tells his followers they would be blessed – “*when men hate you, exclude you, insult you and reject your name (Christian) as evil.*”

Godliness is the exercise of faith – both to the Psalmist and to his final interpreter Jesus. Godliness is personal, and it is public. To the Psalms, the epitome of godliness is expressed – “*blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked...but his delight is in the law of the Lord*” which meant love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength...with Jesus adding yet another stipulation...love your neighbor as yourself.

With words rather sharp, to put it mildly, this is what Jesus tells his followers in our lesson from Luke. No matter your position in life, no matter what you enjoy or lack – blessed is anyone who loves the Lord, and the best evidence you can give that you do, is how you love your neighbor. But how can we love God when to do so would have little effect on our current life – as the poor, the hungry, the grieving and the reviled are told to do? How can we love the Lord when the very things God provides in life according to Luther – food and clothing, work and income, home and property, a good name, etc. seem to condemn us?

What precisely is godliness then? Well, it is not the cozy relationship portrayed by today’s syrupy pop theology that makes the Lord of Life Jesus Christ into something akin to “my guy”, nor is it what the snooty legalist who endlessly wails at the “sins of world” and both talks and prays like the publican in Luke 18 who thanked God that “*he was not like other men*” would have us believe. What IS godly is devotion to Jesus. Godliness is as Paul says in II Corinthians 10:5, when “*we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*”

It is when we take every longing of ours, submit every gift of ours – intellectual, athletic, entrepreneurial, all of them, all that has our fingerprints on it, and refer it to God – hold it up against that light. When we take our riches in life and endow them to the purposes of God, when we take all we find beautiful and credit God in appreciation for it, and when all that we find distressing and ugly we pray to God that we might be His instruments for stopping it. Godliness thinks hard about its source and is willing to suffer the hits such a resultant posture in life earn us. In as many areas of life where sin has done bad, godliness seeks to do good.

And one final thing – godliness, its source being Christ, recognizes that Christ dwells in people in unique, personal ways – *Jesus in You*, not in some general sense but in the unique...you. Godliness as the Psalms understood it was inseparable from meditation. To think about God and to think of how God has endowed you is to be godly. Godliness according to the Psalms is on one hand “not” walking in the counsel of the wicked...so by default it is walking in the counsel of the Lord.

You dear Christian are godly when you do what you can, with what you have, for the sake of Him whose mercy you did not earn but will never lose. Blessed are you who walk about like that. AMEN