

Preacher: Billie Lyn Jensen
October 20, 1996
Stewardship Sunday

Psalm 96
Isaiah 45:1-7
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
Matthew 22:15-22

(May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.)

Jesus asked to see whose face was on the coin before he answered the Pharisees' question about the lawfulness of paying taxes. When they declared that Caesar's image was on the money, Jesus told them to return to Caesar the things that were Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.

Now, just what is it that we're suppose to return to the Almighty?...Or, to put it another way...Where do we see the image of God?

Jesus said

"Seek and ye shall find,"

and I believe that what we find will be determined by what we believe. In fact, I believe that our beliefs determine how we perceive reality, itself. Let's follow this "path" and see where it leads us.

For example, when I've just learned a "new word," I suddenly see it everywhere. I simply can't believe (at least, at this point in my life) that the sudden learning of this word caused it to appear world-wide when it had never even been in existence before.

Logic tells me that The Word had always been there...and that I finally noticed it because of a change inside myself.

I brought this counted cross stitch *[hold up the needle work]* along with me today so that you could have a visual representation of what I mean by

a "belief system." This example doesn't have a readily visible *inside* and an *outside*, but, rather it has a *front* and a *back*.

All the threads on the back are like our internal beliefs. On the front is the reality that our beliefs allow us to perceive.

Unfortunately, our beliefs often conflict with one another, causing a dichotomy with what is possible in this reality.

For example, I was brought up to believe that "You only get what you pay for"...that "nothing is free." On the other hand, the church teaches us that "God freely gives us good gifts." You may find it difficult to accept the second idea if you truly believe the first.

Combining two different—and sometimes conflicting—beliefs, however, is fairly common. (After all, a pure belief system is at odds with the belief that "we shouldn't burn our bridges"...We might need that belief some day.) Unfortunately, it is also the cause of much doubt, at least on an unconscious level.

Jesus stated that if we

"believe in God and have no doubt"

then we could ask God for anything and it would be given to us.

"Seek ye first the kingdom"

and all else would be provided.

Beliefs...ideas...daydreams...the thread of every one of our thoughts...are intertwined with our perceptions of what is real and what is possible...just like this counted cross stitch.

One day as I was sitting in church...daydreaming through one of these sermons...I happened to look up and see some cherubs playing on the fans overhead. Then looking around, I saw them trying to balance on the edges of the seats in front of the pews. One of them was even standing in front of the lectern trying to get the attention of the priest. (Unfortunately, he didn't seem to notice the little tyke.)

Now, I'm not a total nut case, so I shook my head (figuratively speaking) and thought what a vivid imagination I had...when, suddenly, I was enfolded in the arms of God, and taken into the Kingdom of God.

There I was, a tiny child seated on God's lap...and God said to me,

"All things bright and beautiful...even bright and beautiful thoughts come from me."

Now, if you believe that a single, newly-learned word can change the world as we see it, just think what the Word of God can change...a Word, by the way, that has *always* been there.

The cherubs were real.

Good thoughts are food for the spirit. In today's society, that's not even in conflict with the belief that "we are what we eat."

In last week's reading from Philippians, we were exhorted with the words "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable whatever is excellent...THINK ON THESE THINGS."...because

"it's what's inside that counts."

Bodies are like houses (whether built of wood siding or brick, someday each one will turn to ashes or dust), but inside of each of our houses lives our spirit...and when we've "breathed our last," our spirit goes home.

It's kind of like the First Temple in Jerusalem. It never really could hold all of God, but the Spirit of God rested in that place. The breath of God...like a cloud or a mist...could be seen...just like our own breaths when we breathe on cold stone. (It is no coincidence that, in Hebrew, *breath* and *spirit* are translated from the same word, *ruah*.)

In about 1000 B.C., King David was just about to turn over the rule of his kingdom to his son Solomon. God didn't want David to build His temple because David was a warrior and had shed blood.

But, before turning everything over to Solomon, David asked the people for a free will offering so that Solomon could build the temple...and the amazing thing was that the people gave and gave and gave...gold, silver,

precious gems...all freely and from the heart...and they rejoiced at their own giving. David was astounded, not just at the fact that the people gave freely (although I find that kind of amazing, actually), but that God had allowed them to offer these things willingly.

And I quote:

"But who am I and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee," said David (1 Chronicles 29:14)

and he prayed to God, basically, to let this continue for all time:

"O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of thy people and direct their hearts toward thee." (1 Chronicles 29:18)

Now, I have to tell you that I had a little discussion with the Lord about the seemingly hypocritical nature of His allowing the Israelites to donate gold, silver and jewels toward the building of His temple...and then telling Jesus to tell us that all that stuff isn't important and that we should store up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

Luckily, God has a sense of humor, so I wasn't zapped on the spot. Instead, He said to me,

"Well, Lyn, what would you have done?"

And, seeing that I didn't have a clue, He fed me the answer:

"I wanted to teach them that My house is precious," He said, *"and what was precious to them at that time was gold, and silver, and jewels."*

In fact, since they were nomads, I had them build a temple in Jerusalem so that they would learn to come home to God. Later, the one temple was destroyed, and they learned that they could come home to God in many places.

In fact, they would eventually learn that each and every one of them is a temple to God...and that each and every one of them is precious to Me. In my house are many mansions."

Well now, we've come full circle.

For...money was precious to Caesar,
but what is precious in God's sight is US.

The coins that the Pharisees showed to Jesus were made in the image of Caesar, but that image was on the “outside” of the coin.

We were made in the image of God...and marked as Christ's own forever...and that image is within us.

If we feed on Him in our hearts with thanksgiving, then we, too, will continue to become what we “eat” and grow in the image of God.

Where do I see you, Lord? I see you in every face, in every smile and in every good deed around me. I see You, Lord, in all of us...because WE were made “in Your image” and we are precious to You.

Therefore, return, O Israel, unto the Lord.
Return unto God what is God's.

Amen.