

“Worldview”

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First Presbyterian Church
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Old Testament Lesson – Isaiah 43:16-21 New Testament Lesson - Philippians 3:4-9

While setting the table for dinner one evening, a little girl entertained herself by bringing the utensils to life. Her mother listened as knives, forks and spoons carried on conversation and wrestled their way onto the table. Suddenly the girl looked over at her mother and said, “If I had to choose – I’d be a spoon!”

“A spoon,” her mother replied. “Why would you want to be a spoon? What would be wrong with being a knife or a fork?”

“Well,” the girl explained, “forks are too grabby – always stabbing stuff and taking it like it’s theirs. Like in school – I hate it when somebody takes a piece of my dessert with their fork and eats it.”

“Okay,” her mother agreed, “what about being a knife?”

“No, knives are scary – like, they cut things, and you can’t really eat with them, just slice stuff up.” “But,” the little girl continued, holding a shiny spoon in front of her face, “spoons can scoop up lots of stuff and even pass it around. They’re just –” “– Nice and round and smooth and friendly,” her mother suggested. The daughter’s eyes lit up as she exclaimed, “Right! I’d rather be a spoon!”

Helping out at the dining room table one evening, this little girl had a life-changing experience – one that defined who she would be, how she would treat people, what she would value most and strive to achieve in life. She would be spoonlike.

The Apostle Paul had a similar experience when he first encountered Christ, an experience that redefined his worldview. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul explains why he wants to be Christlike, or spoonlike, if you will.

As the little girl noted, spoons are different from knives and forks. Spoons are designed to serve; they offer sustenance to others. A spoon is not just concerned with stabbing at whatever is nearby, or cutting away at things so they fit into a certain space.

“Spoon people” exist for one purpose only: to serve. Fork people are the “gimme” people of the world, those who never seem to have enough on their own plate to satisfy themselves. So they are constantly on the lookout for something more, something better, something different.

While knife people are fixated on what lies before them – but only because they are trying to figure out how to carve it up into a new shape – a better shape that only they can create. No matter what is placed before knife people, it's never quite right. Fork people; it's never enough.

When Paul first encountered the risen Christ, he had a knife-and-fork problem. Paul spent his life stabbing at more and more success, single-mindedly pursuing all the important social distinctions he thought one needed in life.

This was Paul's entire worldview before Christ entered his life; Paul was a knife-and-fork kind of guy. He went through his day using all the power and knowledge and connections he had to jab at others and to cut them down. Paul admits it; he was "a persecutor of the church." You knew that about Paul, didn't you, that when it comes to the church, he was against it before he was for it?

Yes, Paul was a zealous Pharisee for whom Christianity just didn't fit into his view of things. Clinging to religious law, Paul alone knew right from wrong, clean from unclean, the chosen as opposed to the fallen, and he had no qualms about slicing the world up so everything fit just right – for Paul.

In our world, we are continually encouraged to make things fit just right – for us. We become champions of materialism, collecting more possessions than we can ever hope to use; fans of intellectualism, trusting only our heads and rarely taking the time to search our hearts and follow them; we are defined – and confined – by our politics, dividing into factions instead of joining together for the greater good; we are subject to racism, sexism, and ageism – both on the giving and the receiving end – and this traps us in our own little worlds, rather than bringing us together in communities; we get lost in the narrow confines of the present – obsessed with our day-and-age and our way of living, while failing to invest in the future of our children and our children's children.

This is the worldview that dominates our society – the worldview that whether we know it or not influences and drives our actions and decisions everyday.

What kinds of changes could we make in our lives that would broaden our view of things and have us stop frantically stabbing only at what we want in life? What would it take for us to stop heartlessly slicing up the world so that everything fits just so – according to how we see things?

What would it take to replace those actions with some more gentle, spoonlike actions – actions that serve rather than jab and slice?

A woman accompanied her husband to the doctor's office. After his checkup, the doctor called the wife into his office alone. He said, "Your husband is suffering from a very severe disease, combined with some horrible stress. If you don't do the following your husband will surely die.

Each morning, fix him a healthy breakfast. Be pleasant, and make sure he's in a good mood. For lunch, make him a nutritious meal. For dinner, prepare an especially nice meal for him. Don't burden him with chores, and don't discuss your problems with him. It will only make his stress worse. And most importantly, do all those little, loving things that make your husband feel special.

If you can do this for the next 10 months to a year, I think your husband will regain his health completely."

On the way home, the husband asked his wife: "So what did the doctor say?"

To which she replied, "Sorry honey, you're going to die."

- What actions might we take to be more Christlike?

How about going that extra mile for those we love; being helpful to your brother or sister, instead of competing for all the attention, or grinning with the self-satisfaction of being right all the time, How about listening to and encouraging one another?

What if we no longer spent so much time and energy trying to "have it all," and instead looked for ways to share what we have?

- Instead of cutting down those who are different from us, we could shift our focus to bringing people together.
- Or just put a stop to all that worrying we do. Stop obsessing about all that's on our plate, and instead, let's focus our attention on the needs of others. Wouldn't that be a "worldview shift" worth making?

But, what would it take? What would it take for us to make such a shift in life – to take on such a selfless way of being and to adopt a more loving and inclusive view of the world around us? What would it take for us to truly see things through the eyes of the Lord; for us to live our life for the sake of others?

Lee Strobel in his book the "Unchurched Harry and Mary"¹ tells of a women he calls Mary who grew up attending church and Sunday

¹ Lee Strobel, Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry & Mary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1993), 118.

school. In her teens, she became friends with the other youth, and through her adult years, continued attending church on and off.

By the time Mary was 31, she had two small children and her plate was full. A friend invited her to attend a church rally for deepening people's faith. Mary isn't sure why she agreed (to go), but she did. Listening to the gospel message, Mary heard it as if for the first time. She heard the same old words but somehow they took on a deeper meaning, and she really got what it is to be a follower of Jesus.

Mary had had a profound experience, kind of like what Paul experienced – and maybe what you experienced – when first encountering Christ in a real and meaningful way. After the church rally, Mary had some questions for the preacher. She shared with him, saying, "I've just realized I've been playing religion all my life."

She told how she was active at church and how she even served on committees, and then said, "I've heard about the Crucifixion so much since I was a child that I've been numb to it." And then it struck her: "I realized today," said Mary, "that I don't have a relationship with Christ." "I don't want to play church anymore!" she said. "I don't want to play any more games."

Mary had a shift in her worldview, a shift in her faith-life. Mary took a lifetime of what she thought was Christianity – church attendance and not much else – and tossed it all away in order to come along side Jesus, first and foremost; in order to have a real relationship with Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul had a similar-if-not-greater shift. Paul says, "If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh – (confident in going through the motions) – I have more." And then Paul lists his accomplishments as a smart and powerful Pharisee: circumcised as his religion required, an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; (and a zealous) persecutor of the church, (and in all that) ... blameless (under the law)." Paul: doing all the right things according to how the world works.

But after his encounter with Christ, Paul tosses all that aside, saying, "Whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ... For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all (these) things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him...."

Being found in Christ means being found more spoonlike than knife- or forklike. It means allowing our faith to round off our sharp and ragged edges and to soften the pointy, jabby ways we treat others.

Being found in Christ means allowing our narrowness to be widened and our rigidity to be formed into a gentle curve that makes room for the needs and perspective of others.

After Paul had a spiritual encounter that made him more of a spoon kind of guy, Paul dedicated the rest of his life –even unto death – to serving Christ by serving and building up others.

What character traits of yours might need to be smoothed out and rounded off? What would it take for you to be more spoonlike – more Christlike – in life? Maybe the world has left you bitter and disappointed, and you really need to replenish your storehouse of empathy for others and hope for the future.

Maybe you've got a heap of self-righteousness on your plate and it's right in the way of your love and acceptance of others.

For some of us, our need is for the strength to live in constant pain, or the grace to forget the past and the confidence to move forward toward a new horizon. Think about what character traits of yours could be more spoonlike; less jabbing, less cutting.

As we approach Easter this year – and particularly as you gather around the dinner table with loved ones, surrounded by all those knives and forks and spoons – let us each make a commitment right now to seek out and accept a real and meaningful shift in the way we live our lives, a shift away from our self-centered worldview and more toward a Christ-like worldview.

Now, I can't tell you what that might mean for you, but I do know who can: Jesus Christ. Find sometime this week to allow Christ to draw alongside you. Maybe at this time, right now. Christ, sitting right next to you, as we prepare to listen to a special anthem from our Chancel Choir.

It's taken from the hymn of St. Patrick. As you listen to this morning's anthem, let it draw you to Christ, and then take that sense of Christ's presence with you, and allow it to lead you to a new way of viewing the world around you, a new way of seeing things as you encounter each day this week, with Christ standing by your side. Allow Christ to draw near, and don't leave him behind. Allow Christ to change your worldview.

Christ Be Beside Me (from the Hymn of St. Patrick)

Christ be beside me, Christ be before me,
Christ be behind me, King of my heart.
Christ be within me, Christ be below me,
Christ be above me, never to part.

Christ on my right hand, Christ on my left hand,
Christ all around me, shield in the strife.
Christ in my sleeping, Christ in my sitting,
Christ in my rising, light of my heart.

Christ be in all hearts thinking about me,
Christ be on all tongues telling of me.
Christ be the vision in eyes that see me,
In ears that hear me Christ ever be.

James Quinn, adapt. from St. Patrick's Breastplate, 8th cent.
Another version of St. Patrick's Breastplate

Pastoral Prayer

God of grace, we come to this house of worship and place of prayer with thanksgiving. We come into your presence with gratitude, O God, that you hear our prayers.

Help us when we struggle to carry the cross of Christ faithfully this Lenten season.

For those who travel a rocky path in their homes or jobs, we ask for your calming presence. For those who cannot find their way through grief and loss, we ask for the light of the Lord to guide them.

For those who are ill and for those providing care for them, we ask for the peaceful serenity of the Holy Spirit.

For those who feel abandoned because they have taken a stand for what is right, we ask for the assurance of your love.

We know that to carry the cross is a commitment to a way of life; we try to it faithfully. But sometimes we falter. Help us in our travels that we might walk steadfast and sure to Jerusalem – and beyond.

Help us for the sake of those who come after us, that we might lead them to you. We ask all this in the name of your precious Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

