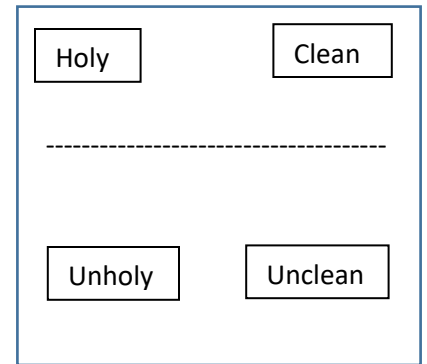


Before the coming of the Christ the world of Jesus' day was organized in four corners (the Holy, the Unholy, the Clean, and the Unclean). If your life was "above the dotted line" in the shape you see here, that meant you were living in a manner that was both holy and ritually clean. So you kept all the specified sacred cleansing-rituals and sacrifices, and you ate only the food declared "Kosher" by The Law. And it couldn't be either/or; it had to be both. Because if you didn't follow the necessary rituals of purity, or if you ate food that was considered profane, your life descended below this metaphysical dotted line, and you became both unholy and unclean.¹



But, when the Temple veil was torn in-two, so were the old conventions. A new reality has been introduced where it is not what man consumes or how often he bathes that makes him righteous in the eyes of God, but rather what's in his heart that produces his words and deeds which renders a man either righteous or unrighteous. That's what Jesus is telling us in the passage from Matthew Chapter 15.

And the parallel vision of Peter and Cornelius, points to the reasons for this – now there is to be no exclusion for salvation to "outsiders" from the chosen people. So the Covenant of Abraham that all would be saved through him, and his faith has come to be. (See Gen.2:18; Acts 3:25; Gal.3:16). And Jesus heralded Peter's vision that all of created order is holy in Matthew Chapter 15:12, when he assured us that it is what comes out of our mouths rather than what goes into them which renders us unclean. So you don't have to follow the Jewish purity codes and be Children of Abraham to be Children of the Living God – this paternity is now available to the gentiles too.

Of course, the Prophets are full of alarming warnings about people who go through the motions of performing the right rituals and reciting the right prayers, but have no intention of making amendment of life (See Is. 29:13-14): "The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught. ¹⁴ Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish."

From the very beginning, we are told that created order is good – only one time in the creation account does God say something is not good. It's what I tell people on the marriage altar – Gen. 2:18.

God put restrictions on what man could and could not eat and drink in Leviticus. But apparently, with the coming of the Christ, man is now finally free to enjoy the full gamut of God's perfect creation, with no holds barred. Apparently, we just needed the right leader to guide us on our journey to truly and completely enjoy God's creation.

Psalm 104 reminds us of the one on whom creation depends. Verses 29 and 30 remind us that it is this Creator God who gives life. And who takes it away as well. And even when that happens, we still say "blessed be the name of the Lord."

It is really interesting that the Church authorities who composed our Lectionary of Bible passages for the various seasons and occasions of the Church year chose 1Tim.6:7-19 and Mt.6:19-24 for Rogation Day. These are the passages that warn us about the immortal peril for the human soul wrapped up in the love of money which we are told "is the root of all kinds of evil."

¹ I was first introduced to this concept in David Disilva's Introduction to the New Testament (Intervarsity, 2004)

Now, surely Pau's thoughts are much more suited to talking about Tything, when pledge season comes around in the Fall. What's the point of having this passage read during Rogation Sunday, when we are thanking God for the abundance of his good earth, and praying for the prosper of our farms and fields? And things get even "curioser" with the Gospel passage, which warns us that a man cannot serve two masters, both God and money. What a strange thing to say on Rogation Sunday.

I've been doing some musing about this. First, I think there's both a corporate and a personal dimension to how we treat creation and each other. The appropriate treatment of creation has everything to do with how we love and respect each other.

But the personal call to dwelling in the created order, and how this comes to relate to the Bible passages concerning material wealth and money I think has to do with the invisible double-entry balance system. And to understand this, we need to take a trip to Venice for a moment.

Two years after Columbus discovered America, one of Leonardo Da Vinci's pals, a monk and mathematician living in Venice named Luca Pacioli wrote a book somewhat imodestly titled *Everything about Arithmetic, Geometry, and Proportions*. In it 36 chapters on how to keep proper accounts. Here, there is this very powerful concept of the double-entry, balanced ledger. So, for every expenditure you make, there is the exactly proportional reduction in your operating capital. And every time you make a sale and goods leave your storehouse, there is the corresponding increase in your operating capital. And the two sides of the ledger must always balance.

We are clearly told that there will come a time when all the words and deeds that have made you and me into who we are will be examined. John saw something that he called "the book of life" with which we will all be judged by an accounting of what we do in this life (Rev.20:12) Now, I don't know exactly what form and shape that will take: maybe a giant book, or maybe something like a movie entitled "*This is your life – James Barnhill.*" Or, maybe God will actually make an app for that. ☺ Don't know. But, whatever form it takes, we are told there will be an accounting rendered for all we have done in this life.

So, just what if there really is this kind of invisible double-entry system going on all the time in a heavenly institution called "The bank of the Holy Ghost" (If there ever were such an institution, I bet you dollars to doughnuts that one of their catchiest marketing slogans that bank is that "Jesus saves here."☺)

So, every time we do something which gives free reign to that broken-ness which is a part of every human being – so every time we're spiteful with someone, or thoughtless with our friends, or careless with the devotion gifted to us by the ones we love – there's a corresponding debit made in our invisible, spiritual balance sheet, and our immortal souls are rendered just a little shabbier. Instead, when we are able to witness the good in others and do something to bring that good to the forefront of people's lives, and bring glory to God and to his precious Son in our witness to infinite grace of God through the faith in Our Lord, maybe our souls are just a little brighter because of it, and we grow closer to God and can see his face just a little more clearly with the eyes of the New Jerusalem.

No, I do not believe in works salvation, and I know that now there is no more condemnation for those who believe. (See Rom. 8:1) But I also feel very strongly that a part of our life in the New Jerusalem will be impacted by how we live out our lives in this one.

And one of the surest ways to steer clear of the frenetic rush the deceiver wants to convince us is so important, one of the most certain strategies to avoid falling into the pit of rushing head-long toward the illusion of worldly gratification, is by dwelling in, and nurturing, and sharing that perfect order of creation which God has given to us all.

Because the truth is, every sunrise is a miracle, every sunset a masterpiece, and each plant and tree that sprouts and flowers undeniable proofs of the constancy and faithfulness of He who knit us all together in our mother's wombs.

It's true, you know: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ²⁹ And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made... and behold, it was very good." (Gen.1:28-31a)

In the name of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Ghost, Blessed Rogation Day. JWB 5.20.17