I

Children

**Object:** Candy hearts (may need to be censored!)

Good morning, boys and girls. Do you know what a tradition is? (Responses -- may be interesting!) A tradition is a story or a custom that is passed from generation to generation, usually without being written down. For example, your grandfather or great-grandfather might have always done something special at people's birthdays and the family adopted that practice and continued it, sometimes even forgetting where it started.

Well, there is a very old tradition about a Bishop named Valentinus who lived back in the days of the Roman Empire. It seems as though the Roman officials had a rule against young people being married in the church.

Many young Christians wanted to be married by the priest in the church with God's blessing. Valentinus was sympathetic to these people and continued to marry them even though he was often threatened by the government authorities. Finally he was taken to Rome and put to death for his faith and his defiance of the Emperor's rule.

In memory and honor of this man, young sweethearts started talking about choosing a Valentine when they were talking about choosing a bride.

Valentinus was later declared to be a saint by the Roman Catholic church and his name has come down to us in the day we call Saint Valentine's Day.

He served God with all his heart and the heart symbol is chosen to represent his day. We use the day and the symbol now to tell people how much we love them, don't we?

(Prayer that we learn to share love each day.)

(Pass out candy hearts.)

Adult

Have you ever noticed how many rules we unconsciously follow each day? Most of us were raised with a list of rules that help us to get along with others or to achieve some goal: Share your toys. Pick up after yourself. Don’t run with scissors. Kids often get frustrated because they have so many rules to follow. Because nobody is perfect. We all bend the rules occasionally. Yes, rules can keep us safe. They can help us create a civil society. But we can also go overboard in creating rigid rules that they interfere with common sense.

A man named Walton had put in an application for an apartment, and now he was appearing for his interview with the co-op board. This co-op board was notoriously picky. They were very proud of how quiet their building was and made this their number one rule for considering new residents.

The head of the board said, “Now, Mr. Walton, we keep our building very quiet. Do you have any young children?”

“No. I don't,” Walton said.

“Do you own a piano?”

“No.”

“Do you play any other musical instrument?”

“No.”

“Do you have a dog, a cat, or a parrot?”

“No.” Walton said, getting exasperated. “But I think I should warn you that I file my nails about once every two weeks.” (1)

Nobody is perfect. We all bend the rules sometimes. Our British cousins have found a clever way to use requirement to follow rules to their advantage. Transportation unions have found that one of the best ways to go on strike without actually going on strike is to follow all the rules of their job to the letter. When negotiations break down between the unions and management, the transportation workers don’t stop working. They do something called “working to the rule.”

If the transportation manual says that all train doors have to be closed before the train leaves the station, then the engineer walks up and down the length of the train examining and testing each door to ensure it’s fully closed. This perfect adherence to the rule is no better than the previous practice of just looking out his window to see that all the doors are closed. But it does ensure that no train leaves the station on time. It does cause chaos for train schedules all over Great Britain. But if anyone complains to the engineer, he or she can rightfully claim that they were just following the rules perfectly. (2)

And that brings me to our central question today: what does perfection look like to God? Is it all about keeping a list of rules? Or is it something deeper?

To understand today’s Bible passage, we have to understand its context. In the previous passage, Jesus tells his disciples that he didn’t come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; he came to fulfill them. He says that those who practice and teach the commandments will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. And then he says something that must have made their hearts sink: **“**For I tell you that unless your righteousness *surpasses* that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (vs. 20, emphasis mine)

The Pharisees were a religious movement within Judaism that believed in following a strict interpretation of the Laws handed down by Moses. But they also added on numerous laws and rules that were passed down through oral tradition. Some Bible historians say that the Pharisees observed 613 rules in their lives that were, to them, necessary to achieve righteousness in God’s eyes. 613! And now Jesus was saying that no one could enter the kingdom of heaven unless their righteousness surpassed that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

Imagine that you are one of Jesus’ disciples. Let that teaching sink in for a moment. It’s impossible. How could anyone’s righteousness surpass that of the Pharisees? There’s no hope, is there? We might as well call it quits and go home.

And it’s at this moment that Jesus begins teaching them a brand-new way to look at God’s Law. Our Bible passage for this morning begins: “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

Did you hear that? “You have heard that it was said . . . But I tell you that …” He used that phrase, or some variation of it, four times in this passage. Jesus isn’t undoing the Law and the teachings of the Prophets. He is illuminating them. He is showing us what it looks like when our inner being and our actions are guided, not by rules, but by the nature and love of God.

And buried in this list of “You have heard that it was said . . . But I tell you that …” is the heart of this passage. This is the teaching that I believe illuminates this whole passage. It’s in Matthew 5: 23-24: “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

I don’t think these two verses have anything to do with proper worship or sacrifices. They are about understanding what is important to God. **In this passage, Jesus is emphasizing our sacred worth in God’s eyes.**We are beings made in the image of God. Anything that violates that image of God within us is a sin. At their most fundamental level, sinful actions are rooted in our inability to appreciate the sacred worth of those around us. Read Matthew 5: 21-37 through the lens of upholding the sacred worth of human beings. This passage becomes a shocking picture of how our anger, contempt, lust, self-centeredness, and sin hurt those who are made in the image of God.

I read a great quote from Bill Coffin on God’s love for humanity. He preached, “God’s love does not seek value; it creates it. Our value is a gift, not an achievement. It is not because we have value that we are loved, it is because we are loved that we have value.” (3) Think about that for a moment. “It is not because we have value that we are loved, it is because we are loved that we have value.”

Jamie Buckingham tells of receiving a letter from an inmate awaiting execution at the Florida State Penitentiary. The man had killed a police officer. He had lost all his appeals. He had read one of Buckingham’s books and had been so moved by it that he asked if Buckingham would come visit him the night before his execution and would be present for the event.

Buckingham says he didn’t feel much sympathy for the inmate until he met the man’s family. His parents were desperately poor but had managed to scrape together enough money to drive from Oklahoma to Florida to visit their son the night before his execution. The father told Buckingham that he wanted to take his son’s body home to Oklahoma to give him a “decent Christian burial.”

After spending a little time with the inmate’s family, Jamie Buckingham reports that he saw the man with new eyes. He writes, “When I looked at the prisoner from the eyes of a state prosecutor who is upholding the law, I felt one way. When I looked at him from the eyes of the widow of the slain policeman, I felt another way. But when I saw him through the eyes of his father, I realized how God must have felt.” (4)

“But when I saw him through the eyes of his father, I realized how God must have felt.” If we see others through the eyes of our Heavenly Father, then we will see any sin against them--our anger, our contempt, our lust, our self-centeredness—as violations of their sacred worth, violations against the God who loves them.

**The second thing Jesus teaches us here is that when we see the sacred worth of others, it will thoroughly change our relationship with them.**And our relationship with others is a mirror of our relationship with God. First John 4: 7b-8 reads, “Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” Now there’s a standard for perfection that’s more challenging than following a list of rules. Our ability to love others is a direct reflection of our relationship with God. We cannot separate our relationship with others from our relationship with God. Let’s look at verses 23-24 again:  “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

That verb “be reconciled” comes from the Greek word *diallássō*. This particular word is only used once in the whole New Testament. The words “reconcile” or “reconciliation” are used a lot in the New Testament, but not this particular form of the word. This word can be more literally translated as “to thoroughly experience change.” Jesus is urging us to change our relationship with others. When we see others as God sees them, it will thoroughly change our relationship with them. We will realize why Jesus urges us to make peace with others, to heal our separation with others. It is more honoring to God to live in harmony with others than to offer religious sacrifices.

I think the story of Capt. Pete Peterson is a perfect example of thoroughly experiencing change in a relationship that seemed to be beyond repair. On September 6, 1966, Capt. Pete Peterson and his co-pilot were shot down while on a bombing run over Hanoi, Vietnam. Peterson was captured by Viet Cong soldiers and held in a prisoner-of-war camp. For six and a half years, he endured bouts of solitary confinement and torture. It’s no surprise that Peterson reports this treatment led him to hate the Vietnamese people. As he says, “I hated the Vietnamese so much during my captivity, it was almost like I had used up all the hate I had.” But when he was released from the prisoner-of-war camp on March 4, 1973, he says he “left hate at the gate.”

Peterson retired from the Air Force in 1981. A friend at Florida State University asked Peterson to head up a new mental health treatment program at the Dozier School for Boys, a juvenile detention facility. The treatment program reduced recidivism rates and was well-received by the boys. A friend asked Pete Peterson what he said to the boys to get them to change their behavior. The man assumed that Peterson told them about his war experiences to show them how tough he was, and that they had nothing to complain about. Instead, Peterson said, “I believe there is love in everyone and my job was to search in their hearts and find where that love was. I tried to show them the goodness in the world and how with goodness and compassion, they could turn things around.”

After his time at the Dozier School for Boys, Pete Peterson served three terms as a U.S. Congressman representing the Tallahassee, Florida, district. Then in 1997, he was asked to serve as the first post-war U.S. ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Can you imagine returning to a country where you were held captive and tortured for six and a half years? Can you imagine being assigned the job of building harmonious relationships between countries that had once been enemies?

As an ambassador, Peterson committed himself to creating reconciliation between the U.S. and Vietnam. He met with representatives from all 54 ethnic groups in the country. He traveled extensively throughout Vietnam, eating local food at street cafes, talking with average citizens, searching for ways to improve Vietnam’s economy and create trade opportunities between our two countries. He negotiated the U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement, which gave the Vietnamese economy a major boost. Peterson and his wife even started The Alliance for Safe Children, an organization that works to reduce child injuries, especially in Asia. Because such a large number of child deaths are caused by drowning, the Alliance puts a special emphasis on swimming, water safety and CPR classes for children and teens. During his years as ambassador, Pete Peterson proved that he “left hate at the gate.” He dedicated himself to the good of the citizens and country of Vietnam, and he made a lasting impact on their society all because he was determined to be reconciled with them. (5)

The Bible tells us that Jesus died to reconcile us to God. And if we are new creations in Christ, then we are supposed to carry the “wonderful message of reconciliation” to others. (II Cor. 5: 17-21) Jesus gave his life for the sake of reconciliation. That tells you how important it is to God. Consider how many of our sins---greed, lust, prejudice, injustice, anger, violence—are rooted in our inability to see the sacred worth of others. And these sins separate us from God and from each other. Our separation is a spiritual issue that matters more to God than our religious rituals. Do you want to honor God and heal that separation? Then be reconciled in your relationships with others. Thoroughly change the way you see them, the way you treat them. And this reconciliation will show the world the truth of Jesus Christ.

1. Joe Claro, *The Random House Book of Jokes and Anecdotes* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1990).

2. Dr. Arthur Freeman and Rose DeWolf, *The Ten Dumbest Mistakes That Smart People Make . . . .* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1992).

3. Cited in *The Collected Sermons of William Sloane Coffin: The Riverside Years, Volume I*, page 4. www.khouo.com. Pastor Richard Allen, http://www.mamaroneckumc.org/2008sermons/20081116.htm.

4. Jamie Buckingham, *Parables* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1991), pp. 81-82.

5. “From prisoner to booster: Former POW eager to watch 'The Vietnam War'” by Gerald Ensley Tallahassee Democrat September 16, 2017. https://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/2017/09/16/prisoner-booster-former-pow-eager-watch-the-vietnam-war/658723001/.

ChristianGlobe Network, Inc., Dynamic Preaching Sermons for the First Quarter, by King Duncan & Angela Akers

II

Children  
  
A pastor was out taking a walk one evening. He looked up and saw a little boy barreling downhill on his wagon. The wagon slammed into a tree, and all four wheels fell off. The boy said, "I'll be darned." The pastor said, "son, couldn't you think of something better to say than that?" As the two of them put the wheels back on, the boy asked, "What should I have said?" The pastor thought a moment and said, "Well, you could have said 'Praise the Lord. '" with tongue in cheek, the pastor added, "If you say something like that, who knows, the wagon might fix itself." The boy took his wagon back to the top of the hill. He came racing down again, slammed into that same tree. All four wheels flipped off. The boy said, "Praise the Lord," and suddenly all four wheels locked back into place, and the pastor said, "I'll be darned."

The words we speak are important. That is why the Bible has lots of guidance about godly speech. The words we speak are a barometer revealing the state of our souls. Our language is a daily advertisement of the hold Jesus Christ has on our lives. Jesus said, "It is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks." (Luke 6:45) In Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, he talked about swearing or oath-taking, but his underlying message was about the integrity and honesty of our commitments.

In the First century, most people did not sign contracts. Instead, they took oaths as a way of binding and insuring their honesty. As you might expect, this process was abused. There were several unsavory practices which Jesus despised. One was the practice of frivolous oath-taking; that is, using sacred language as meaningless slang. For example, a First-Century Jew might say to a friend, "I swear by the Temple of Jerusalem that I won't take any more abuse from these Roman soldiers." The Temple of Jerusalem was a holy place, but he was talking about it in an empty, casual way. You can hear something similar today. One student will say to another, "I swear to God I didn't study for that exam at all." Jesus condemned the irreverent use of holy names.

The other practice Jesus condemned was evasive oath-taking. That is, using an oath in a cunning way to evade keeping one's word. In Jesus' day, if you used God's name in an oath, it was binding. But if you took an oath that did not actually have the name of God in it, it was not considered binding. In reaction to these abuses, Jesus called the people of faith to speech that glorifies God and is utterly honest. When we open our mouths in school or in the workplace or in the home, we advertise what is in our hearts. Our language will either glorify Jesus Christ or ridicule him. We must watch our language.

In our scripture for the morning, Jesus gives us three guidelines to follow:

FIRST, DON'T USE GOD'S NAME IN A FRIVOLOUS WAY.

Anytime you utter the name of God or Jesus or Christ, let it be done intentionally and reverently. I stood beside a man recently in the Atlanta Airport. We were both gazing upward at the listing of arrivals and departures. Slowly and deliberately he spoke the names--Jesus Christ--out loud. Then he added to nobody in particular, "That flight is an hour late." He had used the name of Jesus as a substitute for "shucks" or "phooey."

If you had asked that man thirty minutes later if he had uttered the holy names of Jesus Christ in a profane, empty way, I doubt that he would have even remembered.

Most of us are like parrots in one respect. We repeat what we hear. Words that we listen to frequently will find a way to our tongues. One very good reason to avoid most prime-time TV is that God's names are misused constantly. The standard expression of surprise is "0 my God." And I wonder how many Christians are misusing God's name in the same way because they have heard it so often. One bright exception to the TV wilderness is a program entitled, "Touched by an Angel." I was delighted to see that it was very near the top of the ratings last month. We Christians have a responsibility to model speech that glorifies our Lord. Anytime holy names are used, it must be intentionally and reverently.

A second message from Jesus in this text is this: DON'T PROMISE MORE THAN YOU CAN DELIVER.

Remember your limitations. When we take oaths or make commitments about the future, we must remember that we don't know what the future may bring. Jesus reminded us in this scriptural passage that we don't even have the power to change one hair on our head from one color to another. Obviously, Jesus was not aware of products like Clairol and "Just for Men." While I don't use that stuff I don't criticize those who do. But since I earned my gray hair, I'm not about to hide it.

Suppose that I make a commitment to preach next fall in Jackson, Mississippi. But if in the wee hours of the very night before I am to preach, I am stricken by that dreaded little germ know affectionately as the 24-hour stomach virus, I won't be preaching anywhere. I'll be holding- on for dear life. No matter what difficulties it might present for that host pastor, I won't be preaching. The point is that we are not in complete control of the future.

The writer of the book of James grasped this truth. He declared: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money. ' Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? ..Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."' That's why many folks in rural areas often say, "I'll be there next week, Lord willing, and the creek don't rise."

Don't promise more than you can deliver. Some years ago my wife and I were in the market for a new car. We knew the make and model we wanted. We heard that a dealer some 45 minutes away made good deals. So, I called the dealership. A salesman said he had exactly the car we wanted. I told him the make and model of the car I wanted to trade. He did some figuring and then said, "Tell you what, if you can drive that car over here, I will guarantee you at least this amount for it," and he named a figure. That sounded good to me. We went to his dealership. We were very happy with the new car he had. But when we were ready to finalize the deal, he told me that he would have to give me $100 less for my car than he had promised over the phone. I was disappointed and would have walked out, except for the fact that my wife really like the new car he

had. So, I reluctantly did business with him. However, I would never go back to that dealership. Nor, would I ever recommend them to anyone else. That dealership lost a potential happy customer and advertiser for just $100. And in addition, that salesman had to put his head on the pillow that night knowing that he had violated his word...all for a lousy $100. Don't promise more than you can deliver, and condition all of your commitments on the willingness of God.

Jesus third message for us is the primary one of this text:

BE PEOPLE OF PLAIN, OPEN HONESTY.

Your word- yes or no- should be enough. Christians should have such integrity that neither an oath nor a signature should be needed. Our word should be trustworthy.

We must be radically different from the culture we are a part of. In this culture, people are constantly asking, "Do you have that in writing?" "Despite what we promised to do, what am I compelled to do under contract?" "If our company does not provide what we said we would, could we get sued?" In our culture, people are always looking for loopholes so they won't have to keep their word. We must be radically different in that we stand by our word even when there is no oath or contract.

Jesus instructed us not to use oaths because they shouldn't be necessary for Christians. Many Quakers even today will not take an oath, even in a courtroom. George Fox, the Quaker founder, would go no further than to preface a sentence with the word "verily." If George Fox said verily, you could count on the truth of what followed. This instruction from Jesus is not intended to forbid us from taking an oath, for example, by serving on a jury or in the military. Both Jesus and St. Paul took oaths on at least one or two occasions. Jesus is telling us among his disciples, oaths ought to be unnecessary. A person's word should be binding enough.

One of the great construction companies in the southeast is the Daniels Construction Company. Mr. Daniels, the founder, died just a few years ago, but for as long as he lived, he operated with verbal rather than written commitments. Many projects involving millions of dollars were sealed simply by his word. So it should be with Christians.

Our text for today is about the words we speak, the commitments we make, and the integrity that should permeate everything we do. Every commitment we make, every contract we sign, has some invisible fine-print right beneath our signature. It says, "I make this commitment as a representative of Jesus Christ and of Christ united Methodist Church."

Charles L. Trivol was a Midwestern jeweler, who enjoyed the highest reputation for integrity. That is very important in the jewelry business because most customers don't know a great deal about precious stones. One of Charles Trivol's customers had purchased an expensive pair of pearl earrings and insured them. Not long thereafter she reported to her insurance agent that one of the large pearls was missing. He instructed her to return the earring to Trivol's for its replacement and to send the bill to him. When Charles Trivol examined the earring, he grabbed the telephone and called

the insurance agent. "Don't turn in that claim report," he said, "I can tell by looking at the prongs of this earring that they were not made strong enough. It is my fault the pearl was lost, and I'll pay for its replacement." To have done otherwise, he explained later, would have been to steal from the insurance company.

All our words and commitments should be saturated with integrity. When our integrity shines, it reflects the glow of Christ who lives in our hearts.

ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., Collected Sermons, by Bill Bouknight

III  
One time my daughter had a friend over and the friend borrowed my son’s bike and they went bike riding together. My son wasn’t home and didn’t mind his bike being borrowed. Since we were new in town my daughter did not know all the places to ride bikes. There were schools where children hung out in a field to talk and do what middle school children do together. They would go to stores and pick up things or to the mall and get something to eat and talk. My daughter had a lot of fun. Is this something that is good?  
Well, one day the friend said to my daughter that she did not like her. Of course all relationships have those events. The next day the girls went out bike riding again.  
After a while, my daughter saw many places and there were some she liked more than others. That’s normal we all have favorite places. What are some of yours?  
My daughter would say let’s go here and the friend said, No and started riding off to where she wanted go. Some people have bossy friends don’t we?  
BUT what is really happening is that the friend didn’t have a bike and she knew that she could borrow my son’s bike and became friends with my daughter to get to use the bike. Is this okay?  
Jesus tells us that we cannot use people to get what we want. Friends do not use friends. Friends may help out other friends out of friendship but should not use other people.

Adult

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Your word- yes or no- should be enough. Christians should have such integrity that neither an oath nor a signature should be needed. Our word should be trustworthy.

We must be radically different from the culture we are a part of. In this culture, people are constantly asking, "Do you have that in writing?" "Despite what we promised to do, what am I compelled to do under contract?" "If our company does not provide what we said we would, could we get sued?" In our culture, people are always looking for loopholes so they won't have to keep their word. We must be radically different in that we stand by our word even when there is no oath or contract.

Jesus instructed us not to use oaths because they shouldn't be necessary for Christians. Many Quakers even today will not take an oath, even in a courtroom. George Fox, the Quaker founder, would go no further than to preface a sentence with the word "verily." If George Fox said verily, you could count on the truth of what followed. This instruction from Jesus is not intended to forbid us from taking an oath, for example, by serving on a jury or in the military. Both Jesus and St. Paul took oaths on at least one or two occasions. Jesus is telling us among his disciples, oaths ought to be unnecessary. A person's word should be binding enough.

One of the great construction companies in the southeast is the Daniels Construction Company. Mr. Daniels, the founder, died just a few years ago, but for as long as he lived, he operated with verbal rather than written commitments. Many projects involving millions of dollars were sealed simply by his word. So it should be with Christians.

Our text for today is about the words we speak, the commitments we make, and the integrity that should permeate everything we do. Every commitment we make, every contract we sign, has some invisible fine-print right beneath our signature. It says, "I make this commitment as a representative of Jesus Christ and of Christ united Methodist Church."

Charles L. Trivol was a Midwestern jeweler, who enjoyed the highest reputation for integrity. That is very important in the jewelry business because most customers don't know a great deal about precious stones. One of Charles Trivol's customers had purchased an expensive pair of pearl earrings and insured them. Not long thereafter she reported to her insurance agent that one of the large pearls was missing. He instructed her to return the earring to Trivol's for its replacement and to send the bill to him. When Charles Trivol examined the earring, he grabbed the telephone and called the insurance agent. "Don't turn in that claim report," he said, "I can tell by looking at the prongs of this earring that they were not made strong enough. It is my fault the pearl was lost, and I'll pay for its replacement." To have done otherwise, he explained later, would have been to steal from the insurance company.

All our words and commitments should be saturated with integrity. When our integrity shines, it reflects the glow of Christ who lives in our hearts.

ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., Collected Sermons, by Bill Bouknight

IV From Fr Desiano

It’s hard for us to realize just how much goes on behind some of the things that are part of everyday life; in particular, what we see on TV. We watch it, and the immediacy of TV makes us feel that it’s true, it’s real, and it’s spontaneous. But everything we watch on TV is produced—that is, everything has an elaborate behind-the-scenes set of actions that people rehearse and direct, even those things that seem so “real”—like reality TV. Even the news and interviews are, to a great extent, produced and contrived.

But this may be true of almost everything we do except for some simple parts of our biology. What goes on in our lives to allow us to be able to do the jobs we do, to be the parents we are, to make playing sports possible? And what goes on behind the scenes, Jesus says, to make up the Christian lives we are called to lead? What you and I do in our faith lives are happening on three levels.

The first level involves the actions and decisions we make. But there’s a second level behind this. Jesus points to the internal life we need to live as we want—the prior virtues of integrity, honesty, finding peace, and prayer. Our actions do not appear out of nowhere; they emerge from the background work that involves a commitment to holiness and following Jesus.

But this Christian life involves yet another level—how our lives are taking place in the overall plan of God to bring about a Kingdom of unending life and love. This level we rarely see yet its truth remains. The simple decisions and actions we do become part of the fabric out of which God’s ultimate Will is being accomplished, God’s eternal desire to frame human life and history in an unending vision of the Kingdom. This is what Paul is trying to describe in the almost mystical words of the second reading.

Our hope, of course, is that our worship on Sunday helps us to see all these levels, that it puts us into a state in which we can glimpse the fullness of heaven as it slowly emerges in our personal history and in the history of the world. A large part of heaven will be our seeing how our background formation made it possible for grace-filled deeds to emerge, and how these grace-filled deeds made it possible for us to accept and live God’s vision as our own.

Many things today are produced, but we are part of what God brings forth for the glory of all.