

Title: Everything is permissible (2024)

1Sam 3:1-10

1Cor 6:12-20John 1:43-51

Our scripture lesson for today from 1Cor 6, speaks of Christian freedom. But not the freedom to follow our sinful nature. Rather it is the freedom from sin freedom from blindness, freedom from being lost.

Long ago I went to Disneyland to meet some friends. Disneyland has got to have one of the largest parking lots I have ever seen. This is back in the time when you parked your own car, and walked to the park. I know they try to make it easy to find your car, by naming the parking sections, after Disney characters. Now this is all fine and dandy if you are 8 years old. But what if you don't know all the Disney characters. Snow white, Cinderella, Ariel sometimes I get the stories all mixed up. I remember once leaving the park very late at night. I knew my car was about 12 degrees west out of the main gate. However, I couldn't remember where it was. All I remember was that it was some dog thing Goofy, Pluto, Old Yeller, or something like that. It was here that I came to grips with how large Disney's parking lot was. It wasn't good enough to know approximately where my car was. This was back in the days, when you didn't have the electronic beep things to help you identify your car. My car was lost. I was lost. The story gets worse.... Not only was I lost, but I tried to look like I wasn't lost. I tried to keep a purposeful look on my face, I tried to walk in long straight lines, so I looked like I was heading for my car. I wanted to find my car before anyone could figure out that I was lost. If anyone would ask "are you okay?" I'd answer, "yeah, I left my jacket in the car..." "just heading back" "no problem" So for 20 minutes I wandered the parking lot. It's bad being lost, not knowing "where you are," or "where you are going."

This has a spiritual application as well. Being lost spiritually is also "not fun". There are a lot of people out there who are trying to find their own path. but they're not succeeding. They are not finding the answers to their most basic questions. And the sad part, is that, though they are wandering around spiritually, ultimately, seeking after God. They want to keep an appearance of not being lost. They want the image of looking like "they know what they are doing." But basically, "they are lost." And it's terrible place to be... being spiritually lost, not knowing where God is, not even knowing that you need Jesus.

At some time or another, every one of us was in that place. Thanks be to God, thanks to the love of God, He did not leave us there. Scripture tells us that Jesus died on the cross, for "the lost." Scripture tells us that God sought after and found us. So now, a special task has been set for us, the found. Scripture calls US to seek after "the lost." One of the problems we face in "seeking the lost" is that sometimes the lost don't want to be found. They resist our efforts to bring them

back. They are like men who refuse to ask for help when they are lost. You know the stereotype about men and asking directions. We'd rather spend an hour randomly driving around, than stop and ask for directions? Many of "the lost" of this generation do not want directions. they want to follow their own path. And they resist any who would stand before them or any who would lead them. As part of the people of God, as part of the found, you might wonder - "Why would anyone want to resist being found?" "Why would anyone want to reject to love of God?"

The reason "the Lost" resist being found,... why they refuse help.... is that "They don't realize they are lost." In fact, when scripture talks about seeking the lost. It is more than just seeking those who have lost their direction. "Lost" implies those who are "perishing," those who are "dying," "dying" because they have no relationship with God. They do not know they are lost, because they are blind to God. Now putting aside stereotypes of men and asking direction, why would someone persist in "going the wrong way?" Why is it so hard sometimes to help "the Lost?" For those who know the Good News that Jesus brings, it's almost impossible to understand "why someone would want to remain lost."

One of the reasons is that "The Lost" reject help is that they have resigned themselves to being "the Lost." Have you ever experienced the feeling of "not being good enough." Have you ever had someone pick at you and pick at you, or constantly put you down or make fun of you. Eventually, you start feeling like a failure. You start to believe "I'm not good enough." When a person receives constant badgering, especially for things they cannot change, it can do a number of things to them emotionally. They can start to feel like "I am bad." "And there is nothing I can do about it." And when I start to believe this, I will retreat from anything which reminds me of it.

This is how some people think about God. This is how the lost think about God. They think God is up in heaven watching over us, judging us. When I do good. He is pleased with me. When I do bad. He is angry and he will punish me.

What makes it worse is that "I do bad a lot." Not only do I "do bad a lot," but frankly there are times that I'd rather do bad. God says Thou shalt not take the Lord's name in vain. but there are times when in anger I have to cuss. God says Thou shalt remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, but there are Sundays that I just don't feel like going to church. Thou shalt honor thy father and mother which includes all authorities whom God has placed above us. But these authorities are the very ones who are making me do things I don't want to do. Sometimes I steal Sometimes I lie Sometimes I am just mean to others. The list goes on.

So I know that God would be mad at me if he knew these things. I know that God will punish me when he finds out about "what I have done." I know that many of

the bad things which happen in my life were probably punishments from God for bad things I have done. Like the saying goes “What goes around comes around.” This is what “the Lost” think. They see God as constantly demanding things of them things which they cannot do. They realize that they cannot help but sin. They have resigned themselves to being bad, to being an victim of God. So, what is the best they can do? The best they can hope for is to try and hide from God to avoid punishment. Kinda like Adam and Eve, hiding in the garden, after they disobeyed God.

The sad part is that without Christ, this is all that we have. Without Christ, nothing we do is acceptable to God. Without Christ, the only thing we can do is hide from God. Without Christ, the only thing we can do is resign ourselves to the fact that every time God sees us “do bad” we will be punished. By our human nature, we all are “the Lost!” The sad thing about many of “the Lost,” is that they reject help. They reject God’s help. Rather than crying to God for help they try to make it on their own.

One of the things crazy things they do, i.e. crazy from God’s point of view, is to pretend that “it is okay to be bad.” They try to change the truth to say that “it’s okay to be bad.” When confronted with their sinfulness they say “Hey that’s not fair. We can’t be perfect. We cannot follow God’s laws all the time.” So they try to rationalize God and say “God loves us.” “I can’t believe in a God who would send someone to hell because they are not perfect.” “I can’t believe in a God who says “all people are sinful.” They may say this. They may try to come up with ideas on “how God ought to be.” But they are wrong. God has told us exactly “how He is.” God is a holy. God is perfect. He cannot stand sin. He cannot stand pride. He cannot stand adultery. He cannot stand people who do not love their neighbor as themselves. In other words, God hates “what we are.” He must punish “what we are.” Because we are sinful, we deserve his wrath and anger. The wages of sin is death. We deserve death. How depressing! This is why many of “the Lost” resist being found. They want to hide from God. They want to make it “okay to be bad.” They want to make themselves feel better about being bad by changing God. These are “The Lost.”

But there is good news! We do not need to hide. We do not need to resign ourselves to punishment. We do not need to pretend that God likes sin. God loves us. God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Though we are sinful all the punishment that we deserve was directed against Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross, all of God’s anger, all of the punishment we deserved was poured onto Jesus. If you watched the movie the Passion of Christ, you might wonder why did he have to suffer so much. The reason was that He was carrying..., he was suffering the punishment for the sins and imperfections of the entire world.

For this reason, now we are free from judgment and punishment. We do not need to hide. We do not need to pretend that God likes sin. My heart goes out to all those who still hide from God, who persist in denial about sin because they do not know about God's wonderful gift. What is sad is that they are "the lost" and they don't have to be "the Lost." God loves "the Lost." God goes after the Lost. You and I, we, are simply ambassadors of God. It is God who has chosen to go out after the lost. You know, in fact, at one time or another we were all part of the lost. We can be comforted to know that it was God who came after us. You are a part of God's family because God came after you. Even if you were baptized as a baby, know that it was God who brought you to the baptismal font, it was God who came to you in the water and the word and brought faith into your heart, and made you one of his flock. God went out to find you and brought you in. We rejoice in this. The Angels rejoice. Each and every one of us can be an example of Jesus' love and mercy to all those who might come to believe on him and receive eternal life. Each and every one of us can be a witness to "the Lost" that God came after us, and found us. and that God is seeking them.

At Immanuel First, we have chosen to make friends with the community and "the Lost" As they get to know us, as we develop a relationship with them they will develop a relationship with our Lord. You know, seeking out the lost is not just a job to do. We don't do it "just because God commanded us." It is more than that. Look around you. Are there anyone here who you love who is part of the church? Is there anyone in your life who you are glad that they are a Christian, that they are your brother or sister in Christ? Is there a loved one who you would feel terrible if they were gone. You know, several of our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, are not here with us today in Church. They are not here because they are not Christians yet. But God is going to bring them into our family. and we will be close to them, just as we are close to the brothers and sisters we have now. These are "the Lost" we are to seek. They are our future "brothers and sisters." This is why all Heaven rejoices "for every sinner that repents" because the eyes of heaven span all space and time. When they see a sinner repent they see a family member finally coming home. They see "that which was lost" is "found."

May we share God's love, comfort and hope with "the Lost" in the expectation of a joyful reunion with our future brothers and sisters in Christ