

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, March 8, 2009
Rev. John Tapscott

"THINKING DIVINE THOUGHTS"

Mark 8:33

A stressed-out woman was late for a meeting. She was tailgating a rather slow driver when the light turned yellow and though he could have made it, he stopped before the light turned red. Furious, the woman honked the horn as she slammed on her brakes behind him, yelling in frustration, dropping her cell-phone and make-up kit. In mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked into the serious face of a police officer. He ordered her to get out with her hands up. He took her to the police station where she was fingerprinted, searched, photographed, and put in a holding cell. After a few hours a guard escorted her to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting for her. He said, "I'm very sorry for the mistake. But I pulled up behind you while you were blowing your horn and yelling at the guy. Then I saw the "What Would Jesus Do?" bumper sticker, the "Choose Life" license plate holder, the "Follow Me to Sunday School" sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish on the trunk. So naturally....I assumed you had stolen the car."

If you're a follower of Jesus, watch what you put on your car.

Jesus sometimes became angry, but never in a petulant or selfish way. Think of when Jesus strode into the Temple, whip in hand, overturning tables, driving out the traders and setting animals free. In Mark 8 we see another flash of Jesus' righteous anger. After Peter had openly confessed Jesus as the Messiah, he began to teach them that he must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days, rise again. Peter took Jesus aside and began to say something like, "Jesus, how could the Messiah do such a thing? Look at the works you're doing. Look at the crowds. They will make you king if you let them." But Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, quite sternly, I imagine. Peter's words reminded Jesus of that time in the wilderness Satan tempted him to avoid the cross. Jesus had resisted Satan's temptation. And here Peter was acting like Satan, well-intentioned, of course, but tempting Jesus again. And Jesus had to resist strenuously. We can sense the anger in Jesus' voice as he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" Can you imagine calling your best friend Satan? Maybe it's only with your best friend you could get away with it. Jesus said it and went on, "You are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things." Peter

was looking at things from a human perspective rather than a divine perspective. And that caused him to miss the true nature of Jesus' mission.

Now we are not God, that's for sure. But today let's try to set our minds not on human things but on divine things. Let's look at things not just from a human perspective but from God's perspective. Doing so can make a big difference in three areas of faith and life.

First, setting our mind on divine things rather than human things helps us to see the necessity of the Cross.

Jesus stressed that he *must* suffer, *must* be rejected, *must* be killed. From a human perspective we wonder why Jesus had to die? Why couldn't God forgive us without a Cross? But from a divine perspective there had to be a Cross.

The reason God's Son had to die is rooted in the character of God. It's true that God is love, actually, God is far more loving than we can imagine. God is pure love and cannot bear that which is not love. The Bible calls it God's holiness. God is holy and therefore must be separated from that which is unholy. And within us all is that which is unholy and unlovely, things that were in the woman at the stop-light - selfishness, pettiness, meanness. And that comes between us and our Holy God. It creates a sin debt which must be paid if the relationship is to be restored.

So God had two issues to solve. First, God had to pay our sin debt, because we can't pay it ourselves. It always costs to forgive, even on a human level. When you really forgive someone you don't keep saying to them, "Remember when you sinned against me?" and continually make the person pay for their sin. You don't do that because you love the person and because the relationship is so important to you. So you bear the cost of their sin yourself, you take it upon yourself. So God, the forgiver, had to find a way to pay for our sin and put it away forever. The other problem was how to make sinners acceptable in his sight, holy enough to live close to him in time and eternity.

God solved both problems with the Cross. God sent his Son into the world to share our life. He was like us in all respects, except that he was without sin. And when Jesus died on the Cross he cried out "It is finished," and the word he used was a word stamped on a bill by a business owner and it meant "paid in full." Jesus wasn't paying for his sin; he had none; no, in Christ God himself was paying for our sin. In the death of His Son God himself provided the sacrifice God required. And by the Cross God also solved the second problem. There Christ takes our sin upon himself and when we put our trust in Christ, God

transfers Christ's holiness to us. So God sees us not as we are; God sees us as he sees Christ, pure and lovely and holy, heirs of the Kingdom, children of God who will not perish but have eternal life. People say, "Well, didn't God forgive people before Jesus because of the sacrifices people brought to the temple. Weren't they paying for their sin?" Well, bringing the sacrifices was a sign that the people trusted in God to forgive them. But God was not forgiving the people on the basis of the animal sacrifice itself, that was a foreshadowing of a greater sacrifice. God was forgiving them on the basis of the sacrifice that his Son would make in the future. And it's on the basis of the sacrifice that Christ made that God forgives us now.

During the American Civil War President Abraham Lincoln was the target of much criticism. A friend said to Lincoln, "Why do you put up with it? Why don't you resign and let the people sink or swim? Lincoln replied, "If I resign, the people will perish." If God had resigned over sin, we would perish. But God didn't resign. In Christ God gave his very best to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Paul says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them." When we think divine thoughts we know there had to be a Cross because God is love, pure love, and we are sinners. Nothing less than a Cross can reconcile a holy God and a fallen world.

Secondly, when we set our mind not on human things, but on divine things, we take the longer view.

Jesus told the disciples that he must suffer and die and after three days, rise again. And then Jesus took three disciples up the Mountain and gave them a glimpse of the glory he would have after his resurrection. Jesus was saying to his disciples in effect, "Trouble and suffering is coming, but keep your mind on the victory which is ahead." I'm sure Jesus himself had to do that often, as he went forth to Jerusalem. He is our example. The Book of Hebrews tells us to "run the race with perseverance, looking unto Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising its shame and is seated at the right hand of God."

Human thinking tends to be short-term. And to a point it needs to be. But setting our minds on divine things enables us to take a longer view. Certainly we need to do this in the current economic situation. Yes, these days are difficult and painful for many people. But in the midst of this, we know that someday, the sun is going to shine through the clouds, and brighter days will come. And for now we persevere with courage, with the longer view in mind. This is true for all of our difficulties. We will come through them. There is light on the other side of the darkness. There is resurrection on the other side of death. Beyond the strife of this broken world is God's new heaven and new earth.

One hundred years ago, or even fifty years ago, who could have imagined that in 2009 the Governor-General of Canada and the President of the United States would sit together, and they would both be black people. But in the midst of the suffering of black people, particularly in the United States, there was a dream, and that dream kept hope alive and eventually the dream was fulfilled, the dream that anyone of any racial background can aspire to and even reach the highest office in the nation.

Yes, present circumstances may be difficult. You may be troubled over something in your life or in the world. But these things are not the final word. Take the long view, as God does. God is not finished with his creation, or with any of us. If you're the parent of a teenager, you may sometimes think these years will never end. But they will, and thinking of the mature young man or woman he or she will be in 5-10 years helps you through times of perplexity and discouragement. Set your mind not on human things but on divine things. Think as God thinks. It will help you take the long view.

Finally, setting our minds not on human things but on divine things puts us in the right place.

With his mind set on human things Peter thought he knew what was best. He tried to tell Jesus what to do. But Jesus said, "Get behind me." Jesus then called his disciples and said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me." It seems strange but when we set our mind on human things we tend to take God's place. We put ourselves in the centre. We even begin to second-guess God and tell him what he ought to do! But when we think divine thoughts we fall into our rightful place and that is behind the Lord, as followers.

You know, we are not equal partners with Jesus in a business enterprise. We are followers in an enterprise designed to help the Kingdom of God grow on earth. We follow Jesus, we listen to him, we obey him, we take up the Cross, we make personal sacrifices in a small imitation of his infinite sacrifice for us. Denying yourself means more than giving up chocolates or alcohol for Lent. To deny yourself means giving up human notions of how things should be in order to follow God's way. Jesus doesn't need people to tell him what to do; he needs followers who listen and do what he tells us to do. We do not walk beside him, though he may sometimes choose to walk beside us. Our place is behind Christ, followers who hear and learn and obey. Thinking divine thoughts puts us in the right place. It reminds us that we not God; but that we are God's creatures, beloved by God, saved by Christ, and followers of Christ. "If any want to be my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me."

