

January 31, 2016

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

Matthew 7:6

Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls before swine. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces!

Christ has just taught that we are not to judge; and then He goes and talks about how He considers some people to be dogs and pigs!? What is up with that? It doesn't really matter whom He is talking about, whether the Romans were dogs and the Greeks were pigs, or, some other types of people that seemed unworthy of the sacred and the precious. And we, His hearers today, might, likewise, think of some people as unclean animals. But what is implied, here, seems to be that some are not worthy of the pearls we, who are faithful, have to offer. First, realize that Jesus is not talking about actual dogs and pigs and pearls. He's speaking proverbially, metaphorically. No one, in their right mind, would ever cast precious jewels into a pigpen. But we all speak in extremes, sometimes, in order to make a point.

So.... What's the point?

Well, let's imagine that the pearls and the sacred are the precious truths of the Gospel and the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit. And let's imagine that we are acquainted with someone who is unchurched. And when we've tried to share the good news with them, when we've tried to be merciful, good and gracious, they've been uninterested and unaccepting. I've even had people tell me, "Don't give me any of your religious mumbo jumbo." My response was simply to say, "You don't know what you're missing," thinking that they are not only missing the grace of the loving fellowship of the community of believers but, they're missing out on heaven completely. You could say they're missing the blessing of walking through the gates of *pearl*. But... I left it there. We don't need to waste the glorious truth.

What would Jesus do? Well, listen to His advice when He sends the Twelve out on their first mission trip. *"Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at their house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth; it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment than for that town!"* (Matthew 10:11-15)

In Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas drew such a crowd that some of the Jews there were *"filled with jealousy."* Paul and Barnabas said, *"We had to speak the Word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles."* (Acts 13:46) This made the Gentiles very happy. But the jealous Jews *"stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and, expelled them from their region. So...they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium."* (50-51)

It was similar in Acts 18, when Paul was in Corinth. (vs. 5-6)

We should truly want to share the precious truth of our faith. And this passage is not an excuse for inaction. Everyone needs to hear it even if they don't want to. What we need to realize is that, first of all, we may have planted a few seeds. Those seeds may not quite germinate for a long time, but those with whom we shared them will not forget us, and, hopefully, the gracious things we shared. They will remember that we were kind and good and faithful. (Of course, be sure to be kind and good and faithful all the time, no matter what. Nothing will turn an unchurched person away from Church quicker than the bad example of a poor or hypocritical "Christian.")

Second, realize that some people need milk before they can handle solid food. From First Corinthians 3:1-2, we are told, *"You were infants in faith. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it."* In fact, we should always want that milk. 1 Peter 2:2-3 says, *"Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good!"* The day will come for more than milk.... In Hebrews 5:12, it is written, *"In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!"*

What we need to do is keep it simple – milk. When you were first learning how to drive, you were not taught how the internal combustion engine works. You don't need to know everything about a car in order to learn how to drive it! We don't need to know everything about electricity before we turn on the lights! In the same way, when someone is not a church-goer, they don't need to know the theological theories of Tillich or Barth. Just love them. And.... Invite them.

Don't annoy them. That's when the precious grace of God ends up being *trampled...* and then they *"turn and tear you into pieces!"* Our hope for the unchurched makes us want to be persistent. But persistence can turn people off. After three invitations, after three attempts to witness to someone, leave it there. Unless they ask you to tell them more, don't overdo it!

We may care about them so much that we may want to be sure they're going to go to heaven, but we are not responsible for their souls. They are responsible for their own salvation. The Holy Spirit may be working on them ... slowly. Don't expect someone to go at the same speed you are going. If they seem to reject the grace of God in Jesus Christ, we can only hope that they will learn that *"it hurts to kick against the goads!"* (Acts 26:14)

Part of our purpose as believers is to tell others what we have seen and heard. We are *supposed* to be witnesses to the Truth. And... we are supposed to make disciples! It is not in our power to cause their conversion. That is up to the Holy Spirit. We can open the door, the Holy Spirit will move in their lives to help them walk through it. Leave the Spirit's purpose up to the Spirit. But... do your part too. Just don't be careless with the truth and the precious Gospel. *Don't give dogs what is holy, and do not cast your pearls before swine!* And, by the way, don't think of others as dogs or swine either. They are all souls for whom Jesus Christ has died. Think of them that way. Maybe even... tell them that that's the way you see them.