

14th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Yr C July 6-7, 2019 by Kevin Williams

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Sometimes, when we're reading a passage from Scripture, something will jump out that we don't expect. That's what happened to me as I was preparing this homily. When I read today's gospel, the phrase that stood out to me was this: Jesus told the disciples that their names are written in heaven. So, why did Jesus tell these seventy-two disciples that their names are written in heaven? Well, it struck me as an interesting question, and I wanted to explore this.

These seventy-two disciples have just returned from a journey that involved following Jesus' instructions carefully. It does appear that they did everything He told them to do. Jesus knew that they had listened to His instructions and followed them well. Something else that Jesus observed was that the disciples gave God the glory for everything they had accomplished. They gave Jesus the credit, not themselves.

So, Jesus seems to be referring to two things when He tells them their names are written in heaven. First, they were obedient. Second, they didn't try to take credit for something they couldn't have done without God's help.

Let's look at that first item. They were obedient. Ewww! There's that word. We don't like that word, do we? Well, you may not have thought about this before, but obedience is very important if we are going to follow Jesus.

Now, why do we have such a problem with being obedient? Well, there are probably a lot of factors that go into that. But we can probably boil it down to this: Since God gave us the freedom to choose, we tend to want things our way. When we don't get our way, we can get pretty upset. When we do that, we are putting our pride, our ego, on full display. This tendency starts early in life. For instance, when a two-year-old is teasing the dog or the cat and the parents say to stop, and the child says, NO! You would think that the scratches we get when the pet gets tired of the teasing would teach us a lesson. Unfortunately, that will to choose is strong and we don't learn that lesson as easily as we should. That tendency to want our way gets us in trouble, not only with parents and pets, but with employers, spouses, and others, like when we get caught disobeying traffic laws.

What does all of this have to do with obeying Jesus? Well, that nasty habit we have of wanting our way isn't easy to overcome, even when the one who wants our obedience is God. Yes, this habit even carries over into the most important relationship we have. Bad habits really are hard to break.

Now, we might try to justify our disobedience with other people by saying that that person is wrong or misguided. We might say they're holding me back! We might reason that this rule or that rule doesn't work for us. But what happens when we try to apply that same logic to following Jesus? Uh-Oh. Now we have a problem. Jesus is God. He's perfect. He's not capable of leading us down a path that is bad for us. So the idea that Jesus is somehow wrong in what He wants us to do is just completely 100% off track. So, while we often don't want to obey people, it makes incredible sense for us to obey God.

Why is all of this important? One of the things that today's gospel talks about is Jesus telling the disciples to seek out peaceful households. Well, how does a household find peace? By being filled with people who are at peace with each other, with themselves, and with God. How do people find that peace? By submitting their pride to

the will of God. They find that peace by humbling themselves to a wisdom that is greater than the combined wisdom of the wisest people who have ever lived.

Now, some people might say that Jesus isn't going around demanding our obedience. Let's look at that. There are many times that Jesus is teaching the disciples, whether it was a small group or a large crowd. When you look at what He says and then read between the lines, He is giving instructions. And instructions are meant to be followed. Take the beatitudes, for example. While there are challenging words in the beatitudes, we often tend to think of them as feel-good teachings. But when we take a second look, we can see something else. For instance, if you want to have the kingdom of God, be poor in spirit. If you want to be satisfied in life, hunger and thirst for righteousness. If you want to be shown mercy, be merciful. If you want to see God, be clean of heart. If you want to be called children of God, be peacemakers. Jesus is showing us what He wants us to do in order to find the kingdom of God. Using the beatitudes as an example, you should be able to see how obedience fits in with following Jesus. I hope you can see what I'm getting at.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus is saying things like, “The one who follows the will of God is my mother, brother and sister.” That’s similar to saying that those who follow the will of God are those whose names are written in heaven. He says that to help people understand that following God isn’t just a good idea. It’s a critical piece of the gospel message.

To suggest that obedience to God isn’t necessary, is like calling the Ten Commandments the Ten Suggestions. When we start doing that, we start to pick and choose what parts of the faith we want to believe. And when we start doing that, the things we choose to believe are usually the things we want to do. Because we want our way. There’s that issue of pride again.

There is a concept here that many people lose sight of. When there is some major teaching of the church that we don’t like, we tend to blame it all on the church. That view loses sight of something very important. All of the church’s major teachings have their basis in the Word of God. The church doesn’t just make up stuff for the sake of having rules. What would be the point of that? On the contrary, the church teaches what it does because those are things that God

taught the church. He didn't give the church an option on those things. Those things include all the controversial moral issues of our day. I won't go down that list today because we don't really have time, but I think you know the issues that I'm talking about. But here's the thing. The church cannot change the things God told it to teach. Please hear this carefully. If you think the church is wrong about a certain teaching, ask this question first. Does this teaching come from the Word of God itself? If the answer is yes, and the answer is always yes when it comes to the major teachings of the church, then it isn't just that we're disobeying the church. The problem is that we're really disobeying God.

One way we can start to assure that our names are written in heaven is to look at where we are and are not obeying God. When we start to submit our will to the will of God, we humble ourselves before our Creator and we admit that He knows better than we do.

Some years ago, I saw a t-shirt that spoke to this topic. The words were simple, yet extremely profound. It said, "I've learned two things in life. Number 1. There is a God. Number 2. It's not me. When we start to live out the message of that t-shirt, we'll be on the right track.