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By HERBERT E. HOHENSTEIN

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Deut. 6:4-13

Do You Have a Split Personality?

I. *You shouldn't be of two minds about God* (vv. 4, 5)

A. Please notice it is *our* God whom we are to love.

1. For Israel that little word "our" covered and contained all of God's mercy and grace so lavishly and lovingly shown in the past—the Lord's choice of the despised, wretched, and unimportant Hebrews (Deut. 7:6 ff.), His deliverance of Israel from Egypt, His guidance and care for them in the desert, His patience with their grumblings and rebellions.

2. For us this little word "our" sets squarely before us the Gospel. He is indeed our God and our Father. But at what a cost! That we might become His sons, He had to give up His only Son, Christ Jesus, into death and then raise Him from the vainly sealed tomb. By these acts God banishes our sins forever from His sight and mind and adopts us as His forgiven and heaven-bound sons.

B. It is *one* God whom we are to love.

1. The word underscores God's unity. He is not divided. He is not a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. What a comfort.

a. For that means God doesn't have moods. He is not very jolly and indulgent one day, and the next day glum and irritable and edgy. No, God doesn't have moods.

b. That means God does not waver in His decisions for you or His gifts to you. "Should

I, or shouldn't I, permit this suffering or temptation? Should I, or shouldn't I, give him pardon this time? He has sinned so often. Should I, or shouldn't I, give him this blessing?" Is this the way God wavers in His decisions for you? By no means, for God is not divided. He does not give grudgingly. His giving is all gift, pure giving, wholehearted giving, without a grudge and without indecision. (James 1:5)

2. The word underscores God's uniqueness. He is unique, in a class by Himself, because He is so forgiving (Ex. 34:6 ff.). This passage underscores the fact that God's grace and pardon are still poured out to thousands. He may punish to the fourth generation, but He will bless to the thousandth.

C. We are to *love* the Lord.

1. This is difficult to do, if not impossible. For how can we love God? He is not like our loved ones. He is not visible, touchable, capable of being talked to face to face. He seems so vague and distant and hidden. Sometimes He's scarcely more than a concept or an idea.

2. We must remember that our love of God is not simply an emotion, a feeling. It is behavior in holy fear and reverence. To love God is to obey Him.

D. We are to love God with *all* of what we have. The emphasis here is upon the word "all": *all* our heart, *all* our soul, *all* our might. No split personality here, no part of you serving God and part of you obeying the devil, no divided heart, no split loyalty, no rent consecration—it's all or nothing.

II. *But of course you do have a split personality*

A. St. Paul says so. He writes that the flesh, that is, our unholy and godless drives and desires, constantly is at war with our spirit, that is, our righteous inclinations, our righteous will, words, and ways.

B. Our own conscience says so. We really don't need St. Paul to tell us that we have a split personality. Conscience constantly reminds us of our divided loyalties between God and goods, of our lukewarm love and holiness and our ardent envy and vengefulness.

C. And prosperity is the big culprit (vv. 10-13).

1. This is what God was saying to Israel. "Don't let the prosperity you'll have in Canaan cause you to forget that I am your one and only God. Don't make your beautiful cities, your well-furnished and filled houses, your cisterns, your productive vineyards and olive trees into gods. Be careful that you don't begin to worship and love such idols more than Me, the true God and the Giver of all these blessings.

2. Is prosperity our big culprit? Do our possessions and pleasures cause us to forget that we have only one God, the Giver of all our goods, forget that our goods are not themselves gods? Do we remember that this one true God demands all our love and loyalty and will not share our worship and adoration with other gods?

III. *So what's the solution?*

God's solution — Christ! Christ, who throughout His entire life loved and worshiped and obeyed and adored God with *all* His heart, soul, and might so that this wholehearted loyalty might be counted to our credit. Christ, whose great heart stopped beating for three days and then started again on Easter that we might have pardon for the sin of our split personality. And the

more we ponder and reflect upon this fact, the less split we'll be, the more wholehearted we'll become. _____

THE SECOND SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

Prov. 9:1-18

(NOTE: It would be advisable to take this entire chapter as the text. It constitutes a unit, and the first ten verses are rather meaningless without vv. 11-18.)

This Bible chapter sets before us:

Two Dinner Invitations

I. *The first one*

A. It is issued by Wisdom (vv. 1-6). Wisdom is here portrayed as a young woman who has prepared a feast and invites a young man to dine in her home.

1. But what is Wisdom? How would you define it? Is it to be found in a good formal education? To some extent this is true. And yet you and I know many people who are well educated but are still unwise. Is wisdom the result of experience? By all means, and yet there are many aged and experienced people who aren't the least bit wise.

2. Let's look at the Old Testament descriptions of Wisdom.

a. In the first place Wisdom is skill. It is that native or acquired intelligence or shrewdness by which a man performs his tasks skillfully and well. Wisdom for the Hebrew was something primarily practical. It was the ability to do his job well.

b. But it was more. We read in Prov. 4:11: "I have taught you the way of wisdom, I have led you in the paths of uprightness." Here wisdom equals righteousness. And that is why we hear in v. 10 of our text that the reverence of the Lord is the foundation principle of all wisdom. The wise man is the one who has a well-ordered moral and religious life, who fears God more than people and personal sacrifice. How does St. Paul put it in 1 Cor. 13: "If I understand all mysteries

and knowledge but don't have love, I am still a nobody."

c. Finally, wisdom is a person. In our text she is identified as an inviting woman. And then listen to these words in Prov. 8:22-31. Here Wisdom claims to have been present at creation.

d. The similarities between Prov. 8 and John 1 are indeed striking. It is small wonder, then, that St. Paul says of Jesus Christ that He is our Wisdom (1 Cor. 1:30), wisdom in its sublimest and highest sense. For by Jesus we are truly wise unto salvation. By Jesus, who died and rose for us, we know our sins are forgiven and we are headed for heaven. By Jesus, who wrested the poison sac from the cobra of death, we know that we shall not die. By Jesus, who was slain and raised for us, we know God loves us, pardons us, stands by and strengthens us, protects and preserves us, and will one day take us to joy and glory no mind can fathom or tongue can tell. And this is wisdom in its most exalted sense.

B. Wisdom invites to a dinner (v.2). This is typical of the Biblical presentation. Entering God's kingdom is often pictured as partaking of a feast. It is in a feast, of course, that we Christians have deep and close communion with our raised and ruling Lord, the feast of the Holy Sacrament. Or we think of the return of the Prodigal Son. What did the father do when the wayward, repentant boy returned and confessed his sin? Did he make him stay outside and do penance for a while? Did he drag him to the woodshed for a good thrashing? No, he had a great feast prepared. They killed the fatted calf and made merry. This is the way it always is when we return to our forgiving God, saying, "Father, I have sinned. For Jesus' sake and sacrifice, forgive me." There is pardon and the banquet of forgiveness, grace, and love in which we can revel and feast to our heart's content.

C. Wisdom invites the "simple" to her

meal (v.4). The word does not mean a stupid or mentally handicapped person but one who lacks experience and is immature, pliable, and impressionable.

D. She offers some wonderful dishes (vv.6, 11; Prov. 3:13-18). Wisdom offers a long and happy life. And yet we are often unhappy and distressed, and many saints die young. Is it really true that wisdom offers a long and happy life? We must remember that afflictions are a part of God's plan to make us wiser and are therefore one of the highest blessings He could bestow. This is the burden of vv. 7-9. The following points should be noted:

1. Only scoffers and wicked people resent correction and discipline (v.7). Scoffers regard reproof as an act of hate toward themselves and therefore respond in kind. We must be on our guard lest we rebuke and chastise people just to hurt them and to justify our own sins or to inflate ourselves. But God is not uncertain of His status. He rebukes and reproves us not in an attempt to undermine us but to build us up. And His discipline should be received in that spirit.

2. Refusing correction is a way of despising one's self. To resent and to rebel against God's correcting hand is to fail to profit by that reproof. Thus we despise ourselves and fail to become the holier and happier people by submitting humbly to God's disciplining hand.

3. The ability to accept correction represents a flexibility necessary to life. The writer of the Proverbs informs us that the person who hardens his neck against correction will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. A tree which refuses to bend is in danger of being broken when the storm comes. A tall building that does not sway in the wind might come tumbling down in the mighty hurricane. Bend, or break.

4. Wise men therefore love correction (v.8) because they realize that discipline is

a treasured proof of God's love. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens. They love such correction because they realize it is of great personal profit. It makes the wise man even wiser. Suffering is God's school where we get an excellent education, where we learn how to bear a bigger crop of holiness (John 15:2). In suffering the gold of our faith is purified and made even more precious.

E. Wisdom also gives one insight (v. 6), that is, the ability to discern and distinguish between right and wrong. And how often haven't we struggled and puzzled over the right thing to say or do at a given moment, at a critical juncture! What we needed was insight. And insight is what we receive at the banquet table of Wisdom.

II. *The second one*

A. It is issued by a foolish, loud, and lewd woman, a prostitute (v. 13). The word for foolish here means thick, dull, a person who is so stupid as to be insensible to moral truth. Folly is here pictured as a harlot whose charm seduces the immature young man. Folly is physically alluring and appealing to the lust of the eyes and the desires of the flesh. How hard it is to turn down this harlot's invitation! For what she offers appeals so to natural appetites and instincts.

B. She, too, offers a big spread (vv. 16-17).

1. "Stolen water is sweet." For some reason the forbidden act has an added zest because we like to think we are independent when we flout convention and law, while we are really only slaves to our own passions.

2. "Bread eaten in secret is pleasant." We think we have gotten by with something, that we have put something over on people, yes, even on the Almighty. No one knows or cares; therefore it must be all right, and we won't have to pay for it.

3. The bread offered at Folly's table and in her lap may be sweet in the eating, but, oh, what a bitter aftertaste (v. 18)! Wisdom

leads to the fuller life, to eternal life. Folly ends only in death. Take the short view, and you'll take the invitation of Folly. Take the long view, the eternal view, and you'll accept Wisdom's invitation.

But this side of the grave you'll always have two dinner invitations. Which one will you choose? Think of your dying Lord, and you'll have but one choice.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Is. 12:1-6

We all like to sing. Therefore let's join in:

A Song by the Well

I. *Israel's song* (v. 3)

The poet had often heard the village maidens break into sweet and happy song as they drew their water from the village wells. It is significant that in the simple forms of social life singing is associated with labor.

B. This is what they drew from those wells—salvation. In v. 2 the poet indicates that God Himself is the Salvation of His people. The picture apparently is this: As the poet viewed the singing maidens lift their buckets of water from the well, he thought: This is a wonderful picture for our whole nation. We Israelites are those happy, singing girls, again and again drawing upon our Savior God for rescue from every adversity and affliction. God is our Well. From Him we lift the water of life and pardon and deliverance from every sorrow, and He will never fail us. He will never run dry.

C. This is what those Hebrew maidens sang at those wells:

1. A song to the Lord (vv. 1, 2).

a. About His anger (v. 1). The Hebrew here indicates that the poet was thinking about God's anger as he praised Him. God's wrath always gives way to such rich consolation. The poet of Psalm 30 writes that God's

anger is always only for a moment while His favor lasts for a lifetime. And again we think of the words of Isaiah: "For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion will I gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid My face from you, but with everlasting love will I have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer." Our agonies may last months and years. But His comfort and consolations outweigh and outstrip our present sorrows to the point of no comparison.

b. For His salvation (v. 2). It is interesting to note that these are precisely the same words the Hebrews sang at the Red Sea after their miraculous rescue from Pharaoh's pursuing armies. For the ancient Israelite salvation was often linked to this great saving act. In this act God became Israel's Savior, and because of this act the people were confident no strait could ever be so narrow and no distress so deep that they would be beyond the rescuing reach of the Lord, their Savior. For hadn't God parted the waters of the Red Sea for them and then closed those watery walls over the pursuing Egyptians? And surely no present strait could be worse than that past one from which the Lord delivered the fathers. Therefore sing, for salvation will be ours even in this present sorrow.

c. For His strength (v. 2). These Israelites had learned the vital lesson (Deut. 8) that both suffering and prosperity have but one purpose: to teach man the lesson of complete dependence upon God, to teach people to lean and to count upon God for everything. When we are whole and happy we must remember God, not our brain or brawn, is responsible for all our blessings. And when we're starving for joy and absolutely miserable, then we remember God has taken us into this wilderness of affliction to teach us that He alone is the God we must lean on and love.

2. A song to one another (vv. 3-6). This is what they sang:

a. Call upon God's name. This is a familiar phrase in the Bible and apparently refers to individual and group worship. Here the phrase obviously involves two things: praising God and making Him known among the nations (v. 4). To call upon God's name is not first and foremost to ask Him for anything, to try to get something out of Him; rather it is to give Him something, praise for all of His benefits, and then to tell how great and good and saving He has been to you.

b. The Holy One is great in your midst (v. 6). Why is God great? Because His love triumphs over His wrath (Hos. 11:8,9) and won't let Him abandon His beloved Israel. And why? Because He is God and not a man, the Holy One in our midst. God's greatness is His grace. It's His salvation and His pardon that should cause us to shake our heads in amazement when we think about God.

II. *This is our song by the well*

A. We, too, have our well. It is not made up of bricks and stones but of flesh and blood, for Christ Jesus is the Well. From Him we draw the water of life and pardon and the sureness of heaven. Christ Jesus was parched and racked with thirst on the cross that God might pardon our constant and overpowering thirst for evil. Christ Jesus came back from the dead with the refreshing news: "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who lives and believes in me shall never die." And this well of Christ will never run dry no matter how frequently we draw upon it. In fact, the more we draw, the more water there is.

B. We, too, must sing by our well.

1. A song to God.

a. For His salvation. The Israelite was confident God would eventually deliver him from every distress because of the great redemption typified by the rescue at the Red Sea. And we, too, have that same confidence. We go back to a rescue on a hill and in a garden. For on the hill of Golgatha Jesus

died to deliver us from our sin, and in a garden He rent His grave to bring us relief from the clutch of death. This is the rescue to which we return in every adversity for the sure proof of God's eventual deliverance. Christ's death and resurrection mark the beginning of the end for sorrow and death. They live now on borrowed time until Jesus returns to abolish them.

b. For His strength. Of course, it is impossible for us to confess that the Lord is our Strength unless we are willing to stop saying, "I did this," or "I did that," or "I'm going to do this," or "I'm going to do that." Rather we ought to say, "By God's grace I did this," and, "If God wills, I'll do that." How does St. James picture our life? It is like a thin and curling wisp of smoke hanging in the air for but a brief moment.

2. A song to one another. And this is what we sing:

a. Call upon God's name. How we need to remind one another that we are to lift our arms in praise to God instead of trying to twist His arm by our prayers and thus force Him to give us only what we want. How we need to remind one another that our chief goal in life is to bring people to the Well, to join them to Christ by the invitation of our lips and above all by the invitation of our lives of love.

b. The Holy One is great in our midst. And how we need to sing this to one another! It ought not to be mysterious and senseless or unsearchable or unfair or loveless, but great is God in our midst, great because He never tires of forgiving us and loving us. This is our song by the well.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY

AFTER TRINITY

ISAIAH 65:17-25

"Daddy, look at me!" How often doesn't a small child shout those words to his father as he performs some feat which he's sure

merits attention and praise. This morning it is the father who shouts these words to the children. It is God who says to us:

Look at Me

I. *As I create new heavens and a new earth* (v. 17)

A. Now let's be literal about this. God doesn't say: "This new heavens and earth won't really be made up of touchable matter. These won't be heavens and earth as you now know them with sparkling stars and trees and flowers and lakes and oceans and birds and beasts and real flesh-and-blood people." We may be inclined to think of the world to come as an immaterial place, a matterless abode where only bodily spirits flit about. But this new heavens and earth are described much like the original creation before sin intruded.

B. There will be a blessed amnesia in this new creation (v. 17). You know, of course, what these former things are. They are described for us in Rev. 21:4. In this passage the former things refer to tears and death and crying and pain. This is one state of amnesia we should look forward to. And God assures us in the Gospel that we shall one day experience this amnesia, this forgetting of all our present sorrows. In the Lord's Supper we partake of Jesus, whom God forgot about on the cross that He might never remember our sins. We remember God's blessed amnesia of our sins is our pledge of one day enjoying the glad amnesia of the new creation, the forgetting of every earthly distress.

C. This amnesia will not be a foolish and unrealistic refusal to face up to the grim facts of life; evil will actually cease to exist.

1. There will be no more weeping or cries of distress (v. 19). Think of it. The moment we leap out of our last resting place on the Last Day we immediately lay sorrow to rest, and there won't be any tears at this funeral.

2. There will be no more death (v. 20). In Isaiah 25 the prophet pictures the

world to come as a big banquet. At this meal God, too, will do some eating, and one of the dishes He devours will be death itself. He will swallow up death in victory, writes Isaiah. He will? He has, in the resurrection of Jesus. At least that's when God took the first bite out of death. And that first bite is our blessed proof and assurance that the Last Day will bring the complete and eternal devouring of death by God.

3. There will be no more war (vv. 21, 22).

a. For Israel these words meant no more conquest or captivity by foreign nations. They would live in the houses they built and eat the grain they sowed, and not their conquering foes. Their lives would be long like an aged oak or olive tree, and they would see and enjoy the fruit of their labors.

b. And for us the worst war of all will be over, the war inside us between our noble and unholy passions, those feuds between fussing relatives that bring such hurt and heartache, the rents in Christendom that split brother from brother, the hot and cold conflicts between the nations, all these will be gone for good in the new creation. And did we hear that Israel in its untroubled and peaceful existence would live long like a tree? Well, we by a tree shall live forever, by the tree of the cross on which the Lord Jesus died to free us from our sins.

4. There will be no more silent God (v. 24).

a. For Israel this meant the sleeping arm of God would sleep no longer (Is. 51:9 ff.). For Israel this meant that there would be no more famine. (Amos 8:11)

b. For us these words mean the same.

aa. No more sleeping arm. No more of those miserable moments when we're sure God's rescuing arm has gone to sleep and we're wondering if it will ever wake up and

deliver us before we are asleep in death. In the meantime, remember the time God's arm wasn't sleeping, when Jesus died and rose for our salvation. That's when God bared His arm to bring us eternal joy, to bring us release from every misery. And this baring of God's arm in Christ's death and resurrection is our guarantee that God's arm isn't really sleeping at all but is quite active, shaping and controlling all of our miseries for our temporal and eternal profit.

bb. No more famine.

5. There will be no more hostile creation (v. 25). Now there is plenty of disharmony in creation. Animals fight and kill one another as well as men. It won't be like this in the new creation. Not only will lions and lambs get along, so will lions and people. In fact, Isaiah tells us in the 11th chapter of his prophecy that in the world to come children will have wolves and lions and leopards as pets. For you see, the thing that now causes the disharmony between beasts and beasts, and between beasts and men, namely, sin, will be gone for good.

II. *Look at Me, shouts God, creating new heavens and a new earth*

But we immediately ask: God, are You really doing this? We don't see anything now but an old creation full of sin and pain and death. God, are You already at work on the project? Yes, He replies. I've already started. The proof of it is in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We recall it was on the first day that God called forth light out of darkness. And even so St. Paul tells us that God has created light in the face of Jesus Christ. Christ is simply the first day of God's second creative activity. He is the proof that the new heavens and the new earth are just around the corner.

Richmond Heights, Mo.