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Sermon: "God Believes in Us More than We Do!"

Sermon by: **Fr. Bill Wigmore**

Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous: Selfishness - self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on **self** which later placed us in a position to be hurt.

So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of **our-selves**, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of **self-will** run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this **selfishness**. We must, or it kills us!

God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of **self** without His aid. Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our **self-centeredness** much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help.

This is the how and why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents. He is the Father, and we are His children. Most good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom.

Psalm 82:

God has taken his place in the divine council; ***in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:**

"How long will you judge unjustly ***and show partiality to the wicked?**

Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; ***maintain the rights of the afflicted and the destitute.**

Rescue the weak and the needy; ***deliver them from the hand of the wicked."**

They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness;

***all the foundations of the earth are shaken.**

I say, "You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you;

***nevertheless, you shall die like men, and fall like any prince."**

Arise, O God, judge the earth; ***for to you alone belong all the nations!**

Paul's Letter to the Church in Rome - Paul writes: I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self; but I see in my self another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in me as well.

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God! It is through Jesus Christ our Lord!

(Tonight's translation of the gospel is a modern version taken from The Message as translated by Eugene Peterson.) **A reading from the Good News according to John:**

(Jesus said these things.) Then, raising his eyes in prayer, he said:

“Father, it’s time!
Display the bright splendor of your Son
So the Son in turn may show your light.
You put him in charge of everything human
So he might give real and eternal life to all in his charge.
And this is real and eternal life:
That they know you,
The one and only true God,
And that they know me whom you have sent.

I glorified you on earth
By completing down to the last detail
What you assigned me to do.
And now, Father, glorify me with your very own splendor,
The very splendor I had in your presence
Before there ever was a world.

I spelled out your character in detail
To the men and women you gave me.
They were yours in the first place;
Then you gave them to me,
And they have now done what you said.
They now know beyond the shadow of a doubt,
That everything you gave me is firsthand from you,
For the message you gave me, I gave them;
And they took it and were convinced
That I came from you.
They believed that you sent me. I pray for them.
I’m not praying for the God-rejecting world
But for those you gave me,
For they are yours by right.

Everything mine is yours, and yours mine;
And my life is on display in them.
For I’m no longer going to be visible in the world;
They’ll continue in the world
While I return to you.

Holy Father, guard them as they pursue this life
That you conferred as a gift through me,
So that they can be one heart and mind
Just as we are one heart and mind.”

Sermon in a sentence: Recovery is our spiritual journey toward wholeness and it begins with getting ourselves rightly related to God.

Sermon: Well once again welcome – How're you all doin' tonight?

You know, I'm not sure we'll ever find a better description of addiction than that line we heard a little earlier written by St. Paul:

“I do not do the good (that) I want,
but the evil I do not want - is - what - I - do.
Who will save me from this body of death?”

Paul said *in one of his letters* that he had “**a thorn in his flesh**” –

- **Something he did and he couldn't keep from doing –**
- Something that made his life: “**unmanageable.**”

And for the past 2,000 years, people have wondered *just what that thorn in Paul's flesh* might have been? –

- **Maybe, like some of us, Paul liked his wine just a little too well –**
- Or maybe ***like others of us here*** - it was something sexual that had power over him –
- Maybe Paul really liked going to those “**Roman toga parties!**”
- **But whatever it was** - it brought Paul to his knees and sent him begging God for help.
- ... **The self that had done pretty good for him in other areas of his life – when it came to this: - it failed him totally.**
- So he knew that **the help he needed** had to come **NOT from him-self** –
- but from a Power greater than his own **self.**

Paul suffered from **what psychologists today would call** **a split-mind.**

- Part of his mind wanted to do ***right*** –
- But another part of his mind was ***hell bent*** on getting him to do **just the opposite.**
- So long as he **trusted in his own mind** and relied on his own power – then the split continued – and ***so too*** did his problem.

...Bill Wilson also had one of those ***split minds*** –
and just like Paul, as long as he relied on himself –
he could never seem to overcome ***his*** own
very-thorny problem with alcohol.

Bill landed in the detox ward **three times** –

And three times he left there – having made up his mind and fully intending to stay sober – ***Three times he failed.***

You see, each time Bill left that hospital,

Bill left there putting his trust in *the same split mind* that he went in with –

- **And before he knew it – the darker part of his mind won out.**
- The irrational part that still **wanted to drink** – *it won over the rational part that wanted him to stay sober.*

But then **in 1934** an old friend came to visit him
and he brought with him ***a very different solution.***

That friend shared *openly with Bill*
about “the thorn” he had in his side:

- **It was a drinking problem** that Wilson knew was *every bit as bad* or maybe worse than his own.
- **Bill could identify with all of his friend’s many failed attempts to quit or to moderate.**
- Bill remembered what his doctor had diagnosed as: “*the absolute hopelessness of his situation.*”

But then his visitor shared with him about a radical solution he had found – He said he’d joined *a new kind of Fellowship*

A Fellowship made up of men and women – all of whom had serious problems –

but now many of them had found *a way out*.

- Some of them *he said* were adulterers – *and some of them were thieves* –
- Some of them were gossips *and some were drunks*.
- It didn’t seem to matter *too much* what their particular problem was –
- In fact, *the worse* their problem was –
and the more desperate they were *to change* –
then the better they seemed to do in this new program.

Now the Fellowship all these people belonged to
was *a thing known as* **the Oxford Group**.

It was made up of people from all over the world –

People who started calling themselves:

“**A First Century Christian Fellowship.**”

- See, they knew that the first followers of Jesus had **changed** and had changed **radically** –
- They’d somehow tapped into **a source of power** that brought them into a new life –
- It brought ‘em a whole new awareness of who they were, and where they were going, and *how it was* they were related to God and how they were related to one another as well.
- It also brought them tremendous peace.
- **A peace that passed all of their understanding.**

And pretty soon these people had developed a real “program of attraction” –

The people around them wanted what they had –

and so within just a few hundred years –

they’d managed to knock Caesar and all of the
Roman gods off of their thrones

and they’d put Jesus and his *Father-God* in their place.

In tonight’s gospel-story from John, we get a little taste of what some of those early followers of Jesus likely experienced.

- **The gospel-writer-John writes a poem** –
- **It’s a love poem** that he takes from his own heart-felt experience and puts into the mouth of Jesus -
- He tries to explain to his readers *the deep, deep mystery* of just who this man Jesus really *was and is*.

This 17th chapter from John is known by scholars as,

“the Priestly Prayer of Jesus” –

and sometimes it’s called: “**Jesus’ Farewell Address.**”

And in this poem *Jesus tells God* just how much he loves the
people of this world –

the people his Father has placed in his care.

In John's story, Jesus is on his way to the cross –

He's preparing to suffer and to die – but first, he's taking time to say *THANK YOU TO GOD* **for you and me.**

- And I think it's really important to remember that *the ones who first followed Jesus* –
- the first *two or three generations* that formed the original **First Century Christian Fellowship** -
- they were **by and large** people whose lives had also become “**unmanageable.**”

Jesus didn't attract many of *the wealthy or the wise* –
the ones whose lives still worked for them –

- Those people were too busy **enjoying** what those same psychologists would call: **their own inflated selves** –
- Selves that (**for the moment at least**) were doing pretty well in the world.

And after all, if your life is working well

and if everything's coming up roses all around you -

What need do you have to go looking for God or to go find yourself a Savior? –

But Jesus always attracted *the ones who had fallen down* –

- The ones whose ego-lives were very much **de-flated instead of in-flated** –
- The ones who **had had all the air** knocked out of them.

Only people like that **both then & now,** were desperate enough to respond to a message of really radical change.

- So Jesus hung out *with the poor and with the prostitutes* –
- He had lunch *with the lame* and dinner with the lepers –
- The holy people were shocked.
- They said: – “*What the hell are you doin' hanging out with those **low-life, scuzz-buckets?***”

We're the holy ones! – *We're the ones you ought to be talkin' to **and we're over here!***”

But Jesus loved *the ones the world had rejected* -

the ones who'd been thrown out along with the day's garbage.

And that's because

Jesus put those people in touch with a **whole new self** that lived inside each and every one of them–

- a self that was loved by him and loved by God.
- Before they ever came to believe in him –
- **He came and he believed in them!**

Now when Bill Wilson left the hospital for the fourth time –
it was shortly after that visit from his friend.

- **And Bill left there “a changed man”** –
- *He left* having come into “conscious contact with God” **and he left with a mind** that was no longer split.
- Now his **mind** was fixed on one thing and on one thing alone: **Doing God's will in his life.**

...I've been sober 37 years now – and while I'll confess to being confused a time or two

as to **exactly** what God's will might be for me –

- whether I take this job or I go and see that person -
- **I'll tell you one thing I've always known for sure.**
- **I know its never been God's will for me to take another drink or to pick up another drug!**

We all call ourselves *addicts & alcoholics* –

We call ourselves *drunks & dope fiends* –

and all of that is true – We are all of those things! –

But if we leave here thinking *that's all that we are*

I don't think we're going to make it very far in recovery.

- If we leave here without getting a little taste, ***a little vision,***
a little first-hand experience of what the Big Book calls: *the fourth dimension of our existence*
 and what Jesus called: *living our lives in the kingdom of God* – then we probably shouldn't dare
 go out these doors!

We **are** drunks & **we are** drug addicts –

But Jesus tells us we are also a whole lot more!

- He tells us we are the **sons and daughters of a living & loving God.**
- **Jesus got his relationship with God right.**
- **He knew who God was**
- **and he knew who he was as well.**
- **He was God's own Kid – he always was – and he always would be.**
- *So far as I can tell* he's the first and only human being who's ever gotten that relationship **completely right.**

But if we listen closely to Jesus –

he says that **who he is – is who we are too.**

He says that *he is returning to the Father* –

but *his life will still be here* and his life will now **be on display** in us.

- The brightness of the Father that shines in his Son –
 is the very same brightness that now shines in us –
or at least – it can be –
 if we're willing to grow along those same spiritual lines
as his first followers.

Now what I'm gonna say next **is, really, really dangerous** –

and I may get myself in a some trouble with some of you for saying it –

But the truth is: **We are Gods** – that's what our Psalm says.

- The Big Book says: "**we played God**" and that didn't work.
- But the Bigger Book says: "**We are Gods**" ***and that does work!***
- We're the Sons and Daughters of the living God!
We find our life in Him – and God finds His life in us –
 As John says it: we are **One** with Him.

The split mind can only be overcome by listening to God –

By letting God come into our lives and having His way with us –

- Most of us here have listened *long and hard* to our own selves –
- To our own inflated ego voices

- The Big Book calls it the voice of selfishness – self-centeredness –
- That’s the voice we listen to and that voice got us drunk

And so, as addicts we always make it a point to end our Third Step Prayer by saying:
 “Thy will not mine *be done*.”

- You see, my will – as an alcoholic - **is to drink** –
- But God’s will is that I have life *and have it in abundance*.
- Jesus got his relationship with God right..
- **He, ... and the Father, and we... : are One.**

So as recovering Christians - what we believe – is that *somehow* the Power of God that shone through the life of Jesus:

- The Power that attracted the lost and the desperate of his day
- The Power that raised Jesus from the dead
and brought him to the right hand of God
- That very same Power is available to you and me right here and now.
- **Lack of power is our dilemma** – But there is One who has **all power**.

Paul asks: “Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

Then he answers his own question:

“Thanks be to God!” He says:

“It is through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

It worked for Paul – it’ll work for us too – if we work it!

Amen.