

## For your goodness' sake, O Lord

[Parable of Soren Kierkegaard read to the whole congregation during the “children’s message” time:

*Once upon a time there was a rich man who ordered from abroad at a high price a pair of entirely faultless and high-bred horses which he desired to have for his own pleasure and for the pleasure of driving them himself. Then about a year or two elapsed. Anyone who previously had known these horses would not have been able to recognize them again. Their eyes had become dull and drowsy, their gait lacked style and decision, they couldn't endure anything, they couldn't hold out, they hardly could be driven four miles without having to stop on the way, sometimes they came to a standstill as he sat for all he was worth attempting to drive them, besides they had acquired all sorts of vices and bad habits, and in spite of the fact that they of course got fodder in over-abundance, they were falling off in flesh day by day. Then he had the King's coachman called. He drove them for a month—in the whole region there was not a pair of horses that held their heads so proudly, whose glance was so fiery, whose gait was so handsome, no other pair of horses that could hold out so long, though it were to trot for more than a score of miles without stopping. How came this about? It is easy to see. The owner, who without being a coachman pretended to be such, drove them in accordance with the horses' understanding of what it is to drive; the royal coachman drove them in accordance with the coachman's understanding of what it is to drive.]*

The story that Soren Kierkegaard wrote, and which I read to you a little earlier in the service, as part of the children’s message, is a story quite fitting to our passage from Mark’s gospel today. In Mark’s gospel, we hear that the Spirit *drove* Jesus into the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. We hear also about the Spirit, earlier on in the passage. The Spirit is associated with Jesus’ baptism. The Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove; a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the beloved...” We could perhaps also believe that Jesus, in the power of that same Spirit, went out and proclaimed in Galilee, “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

So often, we may be a little like those horses that I mentioned from Kierkegaard’s story, who lead their lives, who drive according a horse’s understanding of how it is to drive, or who live our human lives according to a human idea of how it is to lead life. And the result is not what we would anticipate. We need a driver. And we need the driver who is the Holy Spirit.

That Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit sent through Jesus Christ, the Son, is one who gives us identity—as not just any old creatures of chance, but, rather—as children of our heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, who is the Son. It’s thanks to that Spirit that we are given an identity, and certainly a high identity that is—an identity which we couldn’t really develop on our own, according to a merely human understanding of who we are.

This Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, we are told drove Jesus into the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil. Well, this same Spirit may not drive us into the wilderness, so to speak. But that same Spirit also calls us to the way of obedience, the way of the cross, in fact. Jesus said, “If anyone wants to gain his life, he will lose it...” That’s according to the human understanding of how it is to lead one’s life. But, according to the understanding of human life based on a “driver”, the Driver, who is the Holy Spirit, in order to find life, we must first lose it.

And one of the things we lose is identifying God using our own understanding. Rather, God has revealed himself by the power of his Spirit, and calls us into faith, a faith which has no tolerance for any other gods, other than the one true God who has made himself known in Christ.

Jesus had a hope in God. But, in fact, he was called into a hope beyond his own hope. Right at the end of his life, his life with us, his human life on earth, he said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And yet, beyond that apparent hopelessness—of course, he addressed God, and—God made known that hope that he had, or that new life, new perspective, of the resurrection, which he had for Jesus, and which he also has for us.

We might want to control the future, determine what the future is going to be. And wouldn't we like to do that? Wouldn't we like to have some control over events, and how they transpire? But, ultimately, we need to leave the future in God's hands, just like those horses had to leave the direction in which they were going into the hands, into the reins, of the coachman who was driving them. We are not the Driver; and if we do [think we are the driver], we don't get very far, and we get lost. And we are afraid of what is to happen. But, when God is our Driver, through the Holy Spirit, we have confidence that where we are going is ultimately a destination that is good for us and for all.

So the Driver, who is the Holy Spirit, gives us this identity as children of God, through faith in Christ, the Son—something we couldn't devise by ourselves. The Holy Spirit, who is the Driver of our lives, also calls to the pattern of giving up our lives, losing our lives, in order to gain them—trusting in God for the future in which God leads, through the power of that Spirit. And that Spirit also challenges us to serve the Lord alone, and put to death other loyalties in our lives which are distractions away from true worship. So the Driver in our lives is, through Christ, the Holy Spirit, a Driver, which is not according to our understanding of what it means to live, but according to God's understanding of what it is to live.

And, finally, associated with being *driven* by the Holy Spirit—this Driver—is that we, as individuals and as the Church, are called to be witnesses of God in the world. Jesus, after all, not only knew himself as the Son, not only went the way of obedience, putting his ultimate store and hope in God; but he also spoke the word of the gospel, shared that gospel in very concrete and tangible ways, at times. He was a witness, driven by the Spirit. And we also, as the Church, are called to be witnesses to the “time is fulfilled” (God's time has come in Christ), “the kingdom of God has drawn near” in Christ.

Therefore, we and all people are called to reorient their/our lives according to this Driver, rather than their/our own interpretation of what it is to live—and find faith, and find the life that God would have for them, as well as for us, in the life of his kingdom, made known in Christ.