

I don't know about you, but I often struggle from paralysis by analysis. This paralysis comes when we have lots of thoughts and great ideas and possible options for a certain thing, but because we expend so much mental energy on the choices, and we get so exhausted, that we don't end up actually doing anything. Sometimes this sensation comes up in personal, fun things - if I have a free afternoon, I could bake, I could read, I could take a nap, I could go hiking or running or meditate or run errands or play with the cats, lots of different possibilities.

But a lot of times this comes up with more serious things too. When faced with a difficult or offensive comment from someone, how will I choose to react? When I see an opportunity to give to and serve my neighbor, will I keep my thoughts and actions centered on myself, or will I love them in what I do? When I read a really difficult Gospel story assigned in a particular week, how am I going to preach good news out of that?

Usually, the only way to get over the paralysis by analysis is to at least do one small thing to get started. If I can't decide how to spend the rest of my day, I'll start by making a meal for myself. Or even just a cup of coffee. In the bigger or more difficult things, I start by taking a breath, a small, always-present action to keep me centered in the room. Or I just open up the Google doc and start by typing something, to take a small action towards accomplishing the bigger task of a sermon. God has a curious and powerful way of working with whatever little we can give and turn it into a blessing.

Faith requires action. While God's love is not contingent on us or our actions towards loving God, we live fully into that love when we take action on behalf of God and our neighbor. It's in the doing of the thing that we really live, a thought alone is not the fullness of a life of faith. In taking action out of love for God and neighbor, we enrich the people and world around us, and therefore bring the kingdom of heaven even closer here on earth.

The past few Gospel stories we've heard are part of Jesus' teaching about what the kingdom of heaven is like. And Jesus warns us about what not to

do in order to bring the kingdom of heaven closer. His warnings, through his stories and critiques of the high priests and Pharisees, teach of the harm that comes from your life being entirely self-centered. On thinking only what puffs up what you think is right all the time and not putting your thoughts into tangible action. Jesus' warnings, and subsequent motivation, to take action about our faith, are challenging, and yet empowering at the same time. We must not just sit back and stew in our own thoughts, or our self-centeredness. We are compelled to reach out and act in love towards our neighbors.

Within the stories, or parables, that He uses to teach, there is also a lot of language that can be challenging for us to understand, or even hear. Especially the frequent language about slaves. Oftentimes the slaves are mistreated and even killed, before then being accepted and lifted high by Jesus, the One who embodies the kingdom of heaven.

Let's not forget that the Roman Empire in which Jesus lived, as a human, with a body, that culture of empire was a slave culture. To demonstrate His points on what actions to take, and not take, Jesus framed these lessons and stories in examples and metaphors that would have made sense to people at the time. Within this culture, there was a very clear and distinct hierarchy of people, based on their economic status, property ownership, and other elements of life in that society. Slaves were treated absolutely horribly, barely even considered people. They were owned by wealthier people in that society, and forced to do their bidding, even when it meant risking their life to do so. We heard in the story today that even just the act of inviting their owners' friends to a wedding feast, a celebration, a positive thing, could not guarantee their safety, or that they'd make it back alive. Slaves were considered second-class humans, and there was extremely little opportunity for anyone to move out of this slave level of society in their lifetime.

It's jarring for us to hear the savior of our world, our Lord Jesus Christ, use the word "slave" so often. And though we don't use the word "slave" to describe people in our society anymore, there are certainly people for

whom life is significantly more difficult, that it's nearly impossible to move out of the economic status they were born into, that even simple actions like going for a run or sleeping in their apartment can't guarantee that they're going to survive. This reality should shake us to our core, to the point where we really feel compelled to reach out into the world, and take proactive action to stop our neighbors from being killed. By the powerful love and grace of God, this action and stepping out is absolutely possible, and indeed we are called to this action.

What our parable today warns us about is complacency, about inaction, about letting our faith lay dormant in our minds as lovely ideas without tangible life behind them.

We see this dormancy and complacency in the invited wedding guests who didn't care to show up to the king's wedding feast. What a gift to be invited to an event so luxurious and celebratory! Instead of showing up to what was lovely, life-giving and centered on the celebration of love, the guests made light of it and incited violence. No wonder the king was enraged! But ultimately, the people who came to the wedding and enjoyed the bounty of the feast were the ones who simply decided to show up. God, like the king in this story, always invites us into the bounty of love and goodness, feast and celebration. But it is on us to show up for it. It's on us to tell the person next to us - "hey, come check this out with me." It's on us to make sure that we do what we can for all people to share in the goodness and bounty of life. This action is what brings the kingdom of heaven close to us.

What Jesus does when he highlights and speaks about the slaves in this culture is emphasize just how powerful God's love, God's desire, and the kingdom of heaven truly are. Think about the confines this society put on its people, and just how hard life was, just how excluded people were from opportunities and simple parts of being human, like making it back alive after running an errand. These are the people who God lifts up and says the kingdom of heaven will come near for. These are the people for whom the good news of Jesus Christ literally saves their lives. These are the people who we are particularly called to love.

God's love is so powerful, to overcome any sort of human structure that was thought up in sin and perpetuated by culture, regardless of time and place. This love of God is powerful enough to forgive our past inactions, sins, and complacencies of all kinds, when we repent from them, confess them, and turn towards the new life that is created by the power of Jesus Christ. The love of God has the power to heal, to transform, to create an entirely new reality in which all people, no matter what, are beloved, are part of the community, are indeed called sister, brother, sibling, in the fullest sense of that love. And it is our calling to do what we can to create that reality, with the Holy Spirit within and alongside us, in the world around us.

So friends, don't get paralyzed in your faith by keeping it all in your head. We are in a season of living where thoughts alone and keeping things in the hypothetical is literally costing lives. Take action to live out your faith. Do what you can where you are to tangibly love your neighbor better. To love ALL of your neighbors better. God's love and grace is big enough to love and support you even in the actions that feel new or vulnerable for you. Living out our call to love God and love neighbor is how we bring the kingdom of heaven even closer, is how we get out of the sins of inaction. Be bold in your actions. Do big things to live out the love of God. And by the grace of God, the kingdom of heaven, in all its bounty for all people, including the downtrodden and outcast, may be brought even closer to us. Thanks be to God, Amen.