

Text: Matthew 6:24-34

Title: What is more important, the body or the clothes?

Translated by Min-Jun Hur

1.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent according to the church calendar. Advent (Daerim-jul in Korean) is the season that begins the year. So, according to the church calendar, we open the year today. The word Daerim is made up of two characters: waiting (Dae, 待) and coming (Rim, 臨). As we begin this season, we wait for Jesus who came to this earth as the baby Jesus, and we also eagerly anticipate His Second Coming. Waiting for the Lord to come again means that we too dream of the world that Jesus dreamed of. As we confess in the Lord's Prayer, we earnestly hope that the Father's kingdom will come to this earth and that Heaven's Will be done on this earth.

We are all authors, each writing our own story. As we go through life, we hear countless stories and think about what kind of story we will live as a part of. When we believe in God as our Creator and Jesus Christ as our Savior, it means we are determined to live as part of God's story of salvation. It also means that we will make Him as the owner of our lives. We decide to write the story of God's desire, not my desire. Today's Scripture says that one cannot serve two masters. The world has only two paths: to serve God or to serve money. Even a great-looking cause in the world comes down to "Will you serve God? Will you serve money?"

The story of serving money as the master considers efficiency and making profits the most important value. In this story, consumption is the best value. What kind of clothes you wear, what kind of car you ride, what kind of bag you wear becomes the standard in determining a person's value. Humanity and development of character, which seem impractical, are considered worthless. In a society where consumption has become a virtue, you think about what use it is to the world if you embody the image of God and become a lot like Jesus Christ. In this consumer and capitalist society, it is difficult for character or dignity to be a virtue.

2.

But God teaches us the opposite way and tells us to live the story of life. Does your body matter or do the clothes on top of the body matter? The body means life. Is life important, or is food or clothing that we consume for life important? The body and life is what is really important. What good is food and what good are clothes if there is no body or life? The Bible says our bodies are made in the image of God. We are beings made in the image of God. Therefore, our life was created for the purpose of embodying the image of God, or in more general terms, humanity, character, and personality of God.

Being made in the image of God also means that we have to be a little warmer and more humane. No matter how beautiful the clothes are, they will not be beautiful at all if the wearer is cruel and coldhearted. If the life of the person is messed up like a ghost or a zombie, what is the use of wearing beautiful clothes? The difference in salary makes a difference in clothes. A

person with a higher salary will be able to buy better quality clothes. However, it is not the clothes, but the person's personality, that ultimately determines a person's worth. What would Gucci or Louis Vuitton be good for if we are living like beasts?

Are clothes important? Or is the body important? A body and life are far more important than clothes. Here, we need to determine the path of our lives and decide on the design of our lives. Christianity is a religion about life. Walking the way of God means living a life paying a special attention to one's body and life. Then, what kind of life is a life that takes care of the body and life? What kind of life does today's Scripture teach us about?

3.

In order to lead a life that takes care of your body and life, you must first believe in God as the Creator. To believe in God as the Creator is to believe that we are beautiful beings created in the image of God. Psalm 139:13-14 says, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." Have you ever looked at yourself and felt that you were fearfully and wonderfully made? This means that we are so amazed to the extent that we are afraid. We use the Korean word *kyung-tan*, which means "wonder and admiration." This means we are amazed at the fact that we were created by God. I hope you often marvel at your reflection in the mirror. "Am I this beautiful? Did God make me this cool? Can a masterpiece like this come out again?" As you say these words, I hope you will rejoice in God's creation.

Those who believe that they are created beautiful in God's image naturally know that other people are also made beautiful. They know how to marvel not only at people, but also at the little grasses of the field. It is because they know that even such insignificant creatures are the works of God. These people value all things around them and look at all living things with admiration. This ability to *kyungtan*, or to admire, is given to those who realize the mystery of God's creation and know how to look at themselves beautifully.

Admiration is also a gift to those who enjoy their life really slowly. There is no room for amazement when you rush from one thing to the next. During my morning prayers, for many years, I have been trying to walk slowly and practice *Haechal*. *Haechal* is a Korean word which means "do something else while one is at work." We all need some time away from work so that we can walk slowly. Also, while we are walking slowly, we have to listen to the sounds of all things around us. When we walk really slowly, we start to hear the sounds of flowers and birds.

I walk through the gardens of California in January, said hello to the roses still blooming in the winter, and listened to the little buds' voices. And then I admire, or *kyungtan*. I feel God speaking to me in the midst of all the voices of creation. Even insignificant wild flowers come to me with meaning when I call them by name. We live such a busy life that we don't have time to *haechal*, or to reflect. When we are used to the speed of 55 miles per hour, the walking pace is frustrating. After coming to Rochester, I see a lot of creatures on the road that have been hit by cars. It's really sad to see the creatures being left on the road and trampled on. Cars have given

humans speed as a gift, but too many things have been sacrificed for that speed. The speed has robbed us of our sense of wonder and admiration. This is probably the biggest loss because of the speed. Only when we walk slowly, stare at things, and listen to the surroundings, we will be able to develop our sense of wonder and admiration.

4.

What did Adam do in the Garden of Eden? He called the names of animals and plants that approached him. It was not what God commanded. Adam was probably amazed at the animals and plants and naturally called them by name. Doesn't calling someone by name mean you consider that person a significant being? So, we can see that the first words a human uttered were admiration for other creatures.

Also, Adam marveled at the woman filled with his own flesh and bones. "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). One pastor said that the first sentence that was spit out of a human mouth was a poetic verse. Adam's first word was a word of admiration and thrill at the woman's existence. God also marveled at the things He had created. "Hmm~ It's very nice to see." Could it be that God sent His only begotten Son to this earth because He so much valued us, who were made in His image?

Only those who know how to marvel at and admire things can truly give thanks to God. It is a great blessing to realize that God created us. The Hebrew word for creation is "bara." The Hebrew word "barak," which means blessing, comes from this word "bara." Creation is a blessing. It is a blessing to realize that we are created by God. It is a blessing that we exist in this world. The very fact that we are breathing and being here today is a blessing and a mystery. We didn't somehow end up in this small city called Rochester, but God placed us here. How mysterious and blessed it is that you and I can meet each other in Rochester? It is surprising and thankful that there is a Korean church here. It is marvelous that we can worship together every Sunday.

5.

When you confess that God created the world, do not forget that you were included in that creation. Just as my existence is God's masterpiece, everyone in the world is God's masterpiece. Through faith in God's creation, we are connected to everything in the world. Just as my life is precious, so are the lives of others. Just as my life is precious, every wild grass is precious. Wild grass is more precious and beautiful than Solomon's clothing, because the grass is God's work and God is still taking care of it. The birds of the air don't just fly aimlessly across the sky. They are under the care of God the Creator.

Those who believe in God's creation find inspiration in the birds of the air and the flowers of the fields. They relieve our anxiety because they make us wonder, "God feeds and clothes even them, how would He leave us alone?" The love of money eventually drives us to worry. It shifts the focus away from our lives to the accessories of life, such as clothes and food.

Today is also a Thanksgiving service. We look back on our year with gratitude and give our full thanks to God. None of the crops we harvested this year were possible without God's protection. It is God's grace that we are breathing here and now. It is a great blessing that we were created to be here now. While enjoying these blessings, what more should we hope for and what more should we desire? There is nothing more precious than life. Faith in God is following the story of the body and life. Faith in God the Creator completes our life. It is this faith that makes our lives thrive and flourish.

Through today's service, which is both Advent and Thanksgiving service, God is asking you. What stories have you been a part of? What kind of story do you want to live as a part of? Do you want to live as part of a story where you crave clothes and food, not your life? Or do you want to go out with faith toward God the Creator who fully takes care of your body and life? This is a fundamental conflict in our lives, and at the same time, it is also a question that requires the determination of those who want to live by faith. The image of God is not expressed through clothes. It is manifested by the humanity and character embodied in life that makes other lives beautiful.

What values do we pursue in our stories? Ask yourself. What is more important, life or clothing? What are you chasing? If you want to follow Christ, you must answer this question. Will you follow money and make mammon the owner of your life? Or will you follow God, let Him become your master, and lead a life of wonder and gratitude with your neighbors and all things around you? There is no middle ground between the two paths. What would you choose?