

Our bodies are locales--temples--for God's Spirit. Paul says (vs.19): *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?"* In ch. 3 of this letter, Paul affirms that the whole church of God was God's temple. Now he uses the same idea in the singular sense to apply to each Christian. Our bodies are not just remarkable outer shells of our persons. They are the place where God's Spirit dwells--*"bodies"* he says, *"which you have from God."* Our very persons, our very selves, by and with our bodies, are God's sanctuary. When Paul says this, he has in view the same significance of the Temple in Israel's life, in which the Temple was the sanctuary, the dwelling /living place of God among his people. But there's even more to it. Paul's teaching here about us as Christians harkens back to human beings in the midst of the first Creation. There the Creation itself was the Temple of God, and there was God with our ancient parents living, dwelling, and blessing them there. But here Paul means --because of the grace of God in the crucified and risen/reigning Jesus Christ and by His Spirit--WE are now the place of God's living, dwelling, and blessing in the world. This is our calling. We are to mediate God's presence as priests and to rule on behalf of God as his royal servants, serving God in God's mission for the world. Our task is nothing less than to represent God--like Jesus, to mediate God's goodness, God's grace, God's justice to this world. In other words, we treat each other as God in Christ has treated us.

I spoke of this last week in the sermon: That in reference to Jesus' teaching about his followers as salt and light in the world, so disciples--who Jesus says are "blessed" recipients of his kingdom--are of vital importance for the accomplishment of God's purpose in the world. By and with Jesus, they are the salt and light without which the world cannot survive and remains in darkness. As followers of Jesus, then, we belong to him, exactly what Paul says here in vs. 20: *"...you are not your own. You were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body."* We must remind ourselves of what special people we are, and to live out of that accordingly. *"Glorify God in your body,"* writes the apostle here to us all. And in another

letter, Paul instructs, *“present your bodies as living sacrifices to God,”* (Rom 12:1).

Yet, in this world we live in, that bombards us with so many other definitions and callings and images of who we are, and what we ought to be and do, it can be easy to forget God’s great intended purpose for us, both as God created us in the first place and announced again to us through our salvation in Jesus Christ. So, this morning--for the bulk of the sermon--I want to share with you a story I came across many years ago. I want you to hear how it speaks to us of just how important, special, and significant God wants us each to be, and what it means to realize the truth about ourselves and the grace of God which is the Gospel.

Epilogue: ***The Mirror of Truth***

Jesus said to them, “Come with me...” (Matt. 4:19)

Once Upon A Time, a tiny, newborn lion cub was lying with his mother in the jungle, resting in the warmth of the sun and his mother’s fur. Suddenly, without warning, a loud noise rang out among the trees and his mother jumped to her feet. Startled, the cub tumbled into a nearby brush, then watched as his mother fell to the ground and several other creatures, moving on only two legs, rushed in and seized her. Too frightened to move, he sat there, stunned, as the two-legged ones lifted his mother and disappeared into the forest.

A strange and fearful silence fell over the area, and for a whole day the little cub dared not move out from the brush where he hid. Finally, his stomach began to ache with hunger, and, seeing no movement in the area, he ventured out and walked unsteadily ahead, hoping to find something to eat.

After some time, he came to a clearing and peered out from behind a leafy bush. Before him, in the middle of a lush, green meadow, were many other creatures—on four legs, with white, curly-bush skins, their heads bent low as they seized the grass with their teeth and chewed it.

These creature are eating, and they seem very peaceful, the cub thought to himself. *May they’ll let me join them.*

As he stepped out into the meadow, one of the larger creatures came over to greet him. At once, the cub poured out the sad story of his mother, and how hungry he was.

“You’re welcome to stay and live with us,” the creature said. “We’re sheep, and we can teach you how to eat the grass.”

The tired and lonely little cub was so encouraged by such warm hospitality that he thanked the sheep, and set about putting his teeth to the grass. Soon he noticed that the sheep had teeth that were different from his own; he had to work very hard to grasp the grass and chew it. Nevertheless, he was a hardy little fellow, and would not give up. Before long he had learned how to squeeze his jaws—painful though it was—so that he could pinch the grass and get it into his mouth.

In fact, he became so fond of the sheep and so used to their company that he also learned how to open his mouth and make a “baaa-a-a” sound; he even managed to prance somewhat with his wide, soft feet as they did with their small, hard hooves.

Several years passed, and though he could never manage to eat, speak, or walk quite as the sheep did, the lion cub still enjoyed being one of their family. In time, he even forgot his mother and the terror of his first days alive.

And then one bright and sunny day, while the lion was grazing peacefully with his sheep family in the meadow, a loud and terrifying shriek suddenly burst forth from the mother sheep. Startled, he and the others stopped their grazing and looked up in alarm. “Quick! Everyone into the forest at once!” the mother sheep shouted. And without thinking, all the others turned and followed her as she darted into the thicket.

The young lion naturally turned to follow the sheep—but as he did, a strange impulse stopped him. *What, he wondered, was everyone so frightened of?* As he stood alone in the meadow, the mother sheep screamed at him one last time: “Come with us immediately!” Again the lion turned—but again, he stopped. “It’s too late!” the mother sheep shouted. “We must leave you behind!” And she disappeared into the woods.

Alone and uncertain in the stillness of the warm afternoon, the lion puzzled over this strange turn of events. Shrugging his shoulders, he turned away from the forest where the sheep had run, and was about to bend down for another tear at the grass when suddenly his head jerked upright. A cold shiver of terror raced through his body as there, heading straight toward him—unhurried but deliberate—came a huge and mighty creature unlike any he had ever seen.

Its feet were like huge, padded tree stumps; its teeth were long and sharp. *How in the world, the lion wondered, did this creature eat? Surely, such teeth could not chew grass!* Behind the creature stretched a long, thick tail with a large tuft of hair at the end.

What seized the young lion’s attention, however, was the huge bush of hair surrounding the creature’s head and waving majestically in the afternoon breeze.

With its dark eyes riveted to his own, the creature lumbered toward the trembling young lion. The mother sheep, he realized in a moment of horror, was right. It was too late.

Yet he was struck by a strange inner sense that held him there, even in his terror: he did not really want to run away from the creature. Indeed, he couldn’t take his eyes off it.

And then, at last, the creature stood before him. The young lion's legs were shaking as his wide eyes beheld this awesome figure. "Follow me," the creature said, his deep voice rumbling like a stormy sky.

As the creature turned and walked away, the young lion hesitated. Where in the world would it take him? An impulse arose to look over his shoulder to where the sheep had disappeared in the woods, but he checked it. And then, he stepped forward, following.

For some time, the creature walked silently ahead. At first, the young lion tried to walk in its footsteps, but his sheep-prance kept him from doing so. Before long, though, he found himself leaping, stretching with surprising ease so that at times he even "caught" the creature's wide-spaced footprints. Still, he could only wonder at how much smaller his own feet were.

Leaping this way, the young lion was drawn up short—and stumbled clumsily—when the creature stopped and looked over its shoulder at him. "Come here, beside me," it said.

Struggling quickly to right himself, the young lion stepped beside the creature, who now stood before a small pond deep in the forest.

"Look down," the creature intoned, its rumbling voice echoing amid the trees.

The young lion looked down. There, on the surface of the water, he saw a small creature beside a large one. Tentatively, he shook his head—and the head of the smaller creature shook too, stirring thin tufts of hair behind its ears. Puzzled, he drew back. And then it struck him. It was his image. Hesitantly but deliberately, he leaned close to the water and looked again.

Then slowly, he turned and looked at the creature towering silently above him. —The creature into whose image he was meant to grow. After a moment, he turned again to the water and stared intently.

The forest hushed.

At last trembling, the young lion beheld the creature beside him. Lifting his head, he leaned back and thrust his sharp teeth at the treetops: and he "R-R-R-O-O-O-A-A-A-R-R-R-E-E-E-D-D-D!" A roar so great, it was, that the trees in the forest shook down to the ends of their roots. (The End.) Of course, the story speaks to who we are and whose we are. It's about who we are really about. And it tells us that it is as the prophet said years ago, "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have each one followed in our own way..." (Isaiah 53:6). But Jesus has come so that we may re-find, re-discover, and re-store who we are and whose we are. "Follow me." "Come here, beside me." These are his ever beckoning words, the words of Jesus, who is himself the "Lion of the tribe of Judah...who has won the victory," (Rev 5:5), and who has won over victory, too. He shows us our true image—our image as it was in the beginning, our image it is meant to be now, and our image which we know in Him alone, Him who is the "very image of God," (Eph4:24; Col 3:10). Therefore, "Glorify God in your body." Amen.

