

Our Patriarchal Heritage

Romans 11:16

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Let's imagine that all of us work in a factory whose owner is committed to producing modular housing for underdeveloped countries. OK? So we are all working in this factory, and the owner is committed to that one purpose of producing modular housing - housing that could be taken to India and just erected on the spot. He's committed to producing modular housing for underdeveloped countries.

So all of us when we're hired by him go into his office. The director of personnel interviews us, finds out what our abilities are, and finds out what our interests are, and the things we're good at. Then we're sent to undertake our respective responsibilities in the factory.

Now, think of what kind of chaos would result! Imagine you were in the metal-working shop and you said to yourself, "Well! I'm fed up with filling these work orders that come down from the boss. I think what this factory needs is big model lollipops made in metal. I think that is what I'll start doing. I'll forget this work-order business and I'll make big model lollipops in metal."

Or you were in the wood shop and you said to yourself, "Well, I'm fed up making these roofs. I think I'll just burn the work orders and make walls. I'm tired of making roofs anyway! I'm going to make a whole lot of walls, whatever they have asked me to make." Or, say you're the truck driver and you say to yourself, "Forget this dumb guy with his modular housing for underdeveloped countries. I'm going to use this truck here and start my own delivery business on the side." Well, you can imagine the chaos in the factory.

That's what's happening in this factory earth. That's right. That's what's happening in this factory earth. This is just one little part of a great development project that our Maker has created. And yet it's falling apart in all directions because we who have been put in it to do certain jobs have a totally irrational attitude towards our Maker about the things he wants us to do. We have! We have the kind of irrational attitude that we would have if we acted that way in that factory. Because of that, the whole thing is falling apart in all directions.

Yet the incredible thing is that this mad way is operating here on earth. Somebody who is supposed to drive a truck starts his own business on the side, instead of doing what the Maker intended him to do with his truck. Or somebody here who was meant to bend metal in the metal-working shop has given up doing what the Creator meant him to do, and is doing his own thing making something like model lollipops. Or the person here who was meant to cut wood for the Maker for a certain purpose he had in mind, has given up that and is just doing what he chooses to do – just doing his own thing. That whole way of life has actually become the norm.

It's incredible, loved ones, but it has! That has become the norm for our life here on earth. That is what people regard as the normal way to live -- do your own thing, run your own business on the side, make your own way as best you can -- as if there is no unitary purpose at all – so that actually the normal way to live (which we all can guess from the factory illustration) has begun to be regarded as the abnormal, as the strange and restrictive way. That normal way is called "holy".

"Holy" in Hebrew actually means "healthy" • It means healthy in the sense of holistic, a complete

and appropriate, proper way to live -- in the light of all the factors of the situation. It means a complete way to interact with the set of environmental factors that you face. In practical outworking it means you do what you do with any authority figure who has the right to direct you. You say to the Creator, "What did you put me here to do? All right. That's what I'm going to give myself to." That's what it means to be holy. You set yourself apart for the Creator for the purpose he sent you here to fulfill. It's as sensible and childlike and commonsensical as that.

That positive setting yourself apart to the Maker for the purpose that he sent you here to fulfill also has a negative setting apart. So holiness also means setting yourself apart from using the truck for running your own private delivery business. It means setting yourself apart from your own private preferences and your own private purposes.

Loved ones, honestly, that's what it means to be holy. It isn't to be strange or to be far out or to be caught in fads of some kind. It isn't to be "pie in the sky" or narrow-minded or unhappy or ascetic. To be holy really means to be wholly involved in the big picture -- that there is a Maker of the universe, that he has created you to do a certain thing in this part of his universe -- and you give yourself to that. That's what it means to be holy.

Down through the centuries there has been a holy stream or a holy bloodline in this human family. And there has been an unholy stream or an unholy bloodline in this family. Those two streams cut across all our political divisions and all our religious divisions.

In other words, right down through the years there has been a group of people who have done what their Creator put them here to do, and there's been another group that have done their own thing. You find it in each race. You find it, if you'd like to look at it, in Ezekiel Chapter 20. There it says it is present in Judaism. There's a holy line and there's an unholy line. There are obedient Jews and there are disobedient Jews.

Ezekiel 20:36: "'As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, says the Lord God. I will make you pass under the rod, and I will let you go in by number. I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

But maybe for our purposes, loved ones, it's important to see that even in Christianity, even among those who call themselves Christian, there is this obedient and this disobedient dynasty. I Corinthians 3:1: "But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men?"

Loved ones, that's what Paul is stating in the verse that we're studying today. Romans 11:16b: "And if the root is holy, so are the branches."

In Protestantism, in Catholicism, in Judaism, in Lutheranism, in Presbyterianism, in Methodism, in the Baptist church and in the Assemblies of God, there are these two streams -- a stream of a holy people who do live in the light of what God wants them to do with their lives. And there's another stream that pretend to do that but don't actually do it. Paul is saying, "Look, if the root's holy -- if you come from a holy root -- then the branches are holy. But you can't have unholy branches

and a holy root, and you can't have an unholy root and holy branches." In other words, you can't fiddle in the middle somewhere.

We like to think you can. We like to think that somehow, "Oh, well, there are half-holy people. I'm kind of one of those. Sometimes three quarters holy, sometimes quarter-holy, sometimes 19 percent. And there are half-unholy people. So most of us are kind of half holy and half unholy."

Do you see that God's dear Word doesn't play around with that? God says, "Listen! If the root's holy the branches are holy. It's either-or. You're either holy -- you live your whole life dedicated to me to fulfill what I've put you there to do -- or you don't. That's what holiness is! You can make some other word up to describe yourself, but don't massacre my language. Holy and unholy are mutually exclusive."

Loved ones, that's true. All of us are kind of anxious to try to prove that we belong to that holy family. So we'll do anything. We'll join the Lions Club. We'll identify ourselves with the Christians. We'll identify ourselves with the Gideons. We'll try to get a church that seems really orthodox or really evangelical and we'll identify ourselves with that. We'll do anything to somehow prove that we are in that holy stream.

But loved ones, you'll know by your spirit. The name doesn't matter at all. Actually, in a strange way maybe when we get to heaven we'll find maybe even Jew or Gentile doesn't matter. Maybe we'll find that other names don't matter. But certainly within the realm that most of us understand Christianity to be, the name doesn't matter. It's is the spirit – it's the attitude inside your heart. If the root is holy, then the branches are holy.

Now what was the root? The root involved those first men that God ever approached to do a certain job for him. You'll find the first one in Joshua 24:2-3: "And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "Your fathers lived of old beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac; and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau.""

God from that time on was known as the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob. Those men lived in the way we've described you would live if you belonged to a company that ran that factory. They lived to do what God sent them to do. Those dear patriarchs are the root. It was those patriarchs that Jesus himself said he knew. You remember that piece that we read in an earlier talk. He said, "I knew Abraham, and Abraham rejoiced to see my day." Those men had the spirit of God's Son residing in them. They simply lived to do what God gave them their lives to do. They were the holy root. If we belong to that root, we are holy also.

It's true in a deeper way, because you're holy personally because of the root that is inside you. In other words, you're holy if your heart is holy.

Is your heart really committed to your Maker? Do you really live to please him? Do you really care more about what he sent you here to do than anything else in your whole life? Do you? Quietly as you read or hear this, and the same question I ask to me up here: Is your heart really committed to doing what your Maker has sent you here to do -- whatever it costs you? Is that your heart attitude?

If that root inside you is holy, if it's wholly given to doing what God has sent you here to do, then the branches -- your outward behavior, your actions and your words -- they'll be holy, too. Loved ones, that is the crux of it. Being a victorious child of God is not a complex thing. It goes right back to the very basic fact that God has sent you here to do a certain thing in his world. Is that what you have given your whole life to?

How do you know? How do you know if the root is holy inside you? Look at the branches. That's it! Look at the branches in your life. Look at the outward actions and words that the root of your heart inside you bears.

You know some of us look at those branches and we're not very sure if we're holy -- because many of us are aware of our callous, cutting comments. Many of us are very aware of the irritability and the resentment that we feel at times even towards our friends. Many of us are very aware of the irritability we show at times to those that we live with.

Many of us are very aware of the selfishness that rankles inside us even when we're doing something for somebody else. Many of us are very aware of that bitter hostility and resentment that at times we feel lashing out towards those whom we think of as enemies. Many of us are very aware of the worry-anxiety that knots our stomachs at night when we worry about what people are thinking of us, or when we worry about how we're going to get through the next month. Many of us realize that the branches do have a look of unholiness about them.

Do you know what we do? We involve ourselves in branch surgery. That's right. We do! We involve ourselves in kind of happy-hour stuff, kind of attitude-adjustment time like the bars have from four to six. We engage ourselves in a little attitude adjustment.

We say, "Yeah, the branches don't look too healthy. They certainly don't look as if they are experiencing the power and the approval of the Creator of the universe because they're doing what he sent them here to do. They certainly don't. My actions and words don't look holy. Maybe what I need to do is adjust them a little."

So we involve ourselves in trying to think a little better about ourselves. We have a problem with self-esteem, so we start trying to look on the bright side of ourselves. Or we have trouble with our job situation, so we start trying to think positively about it.

We begin to use the mass of information that is available in the power of positive thinking literature of the day to try to somehow adjust our thoughts: "Let's think better about our family. That's what I'm going to do today. I'm going to think more positively about my dad. I am! I'm going to think more positively about him today. I'm going to try to use my imagination to make my job more interesting."

We involve ourselves in branch surgery. But loved ones, it is laborious, and it is as frustrating as trying to stick apple blossoms on the branches of an apple tree that has a dead or diseased root. It is! It is frustrating! You get the things stuck on and they don't look alive anyway, and half of them are falling off and you're picking them up and sticking them on again. It is as frustrating and laborious as that -- to try to carry out branch surgery in your life.

You see what God's Word tells us: "Look, if the root's holy the branches will be holy. If the root's unholy the branches will be unholy. Would you stop fiddling around with the branches and would you

get to some root surgery? That's what you need!"

You know in Latin the word for root gives us our English word "radical". That's what God is saying to us this morning. "You need radical surgery." Remember what it says in Romans: circumcision is a matter of the heart. It's an inward thing. It's not an outward thing in the flesh. It's an inward thing. What you need to do is have your heart circumcised. You need to have a holy heart.

Loved ones, that's the problem. Our discontentment about our job or our worry about our future comes from a basic refusal to let God direct what we are to do in our lives. That's it, honestly. We like to make it out to be all kinds of other things, but it is that. Our discontent about our present job, and about our future, comes from a basic refusal to let God determine what we're going to do in this life. It's a basic refusal to do what Abraham did.

Maybe you'd like to look at. It's way at the beginning of his history, though it's recounted there in Hebrews, looking back to the early books of the Old Testament. The writer of Hebrews quotes them.

It's in Hebrews 11:8: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go."

We actually refuse to do that. We refuse to obey God today and trust him for tomorrow. That is why many of us are antsy about our jobs. That's why many of us are dissatisfied with our jobs. We say, "It's not what I should have. It's not fulfilling me." Really, the discontentment is coming from a basic refusal to trust God with the present, to obey him in the present, and to believe that he has a job for you in this present life.

In other words, we're not prepared to experience the circumcision of our hearts. We're not prepared to let the Spirit of Christ rule our hearts. The Spirit of Christ, you remember, said, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine be done." We are so full of our own will and so determined that we must have every little ability fulfilled in our jobs, and we must have everything satisfactory to us that we are not prepared to let the Spirit of Christ take hold of us and allow God to carry us where he will.

Yet loved ones, that's what we promise in that covenant that we here in our church body make with God at the beginning of every year. I'd just remind you of the words of that covenant: "And now beloved, let us bind ourselves with willing bonds to our covenant God and let us take the yoke of Christ upon us. This taking of his yoke upon us means that we are heartily content that he appoint us our place and work and that he alone be our reward."

A holy heart is prepared to do that. A holy heart thanks God for the job that it has, and trusts him that he will lead us on into the next position, and that he will show us what job applications to make. But a holy heart is preoccupied with what God wants us to do here on earth.

Loved ones, it's the same with any other place in our lives where we're bearing thorns instead of fruit. Whether it's trouble we have with a personal relationship that isn't right and we want it to be different, or whether it's a problem with our own self-esteem -- the trouble with the branches is always because the root is wrong. We have basically an unholy attitude towards our God.

Let me just give you a plain example that you can imagine yourself. The owner of the factory comes into the metal-working shop, and he sees you there, and you're sitting there just looking into the air. And all the metal is sitting there, and you're just looking.

And the owner says, "What's wrong with you?" and you say, "Nothing!" He says, "Okay, let's get with it then, if it's nothing. But what's wrong with you?" You say, "I'm having trouble with my self-esteem." Well, you know he'd say "Look, you'll have less trouble with your self-esteem if you start bending this metal. Then at least you'll know you are doing what I've put you here to do,"

Loved ones, honestly, it's like that, truly. A lot of us have trouble with our self-esteem. A lot of us have trouble with personal relationships, because we aren't actually occupying our hearts with what God has put us here to do. We're being preoccupied with all kinds of other gifts that he has given us and they're taking the place of God's will in our lives.

God gave Abraham Isaac so that he could fulfill the promise that he made to Abraham that he would have many descendants. You can see how reasonable it was for Abraham to question it when God commanded him to kill Isaac. "Kill Isaac? Kill the very person by which you plan to fulfill your promise to me?"

That's what we do, loved ones. We take some good gift that God has given us, and some gift that we think will be useful to fulfill his will, and that gift becomes too big in our own hearts. Maybe it's a dear wife or maybe it's a dear girlfriend or boyfriend. Maybe it's our house or our job or our reputation with our friends. But that Isaac grows and grows in our minds until it becomes more important to us than doing what God put us here to do. Then there is only one answer, and that's put the knife to your Isaac and get back into the mainstream of your life, and the mainstream of our creation.

Loved ones, God loves you and he has put you here to do something in this world that none of the rest of us can do. That's true! That's part of why he made you. Now you will find your life balanced and healthy and holy when you get about that -- whatever it is.

Really, at the moment it's the jobs we're in. Even if they're not perfect, God knows it and he's not sweating it out saying, "How will I get him moved? How will I get him moved?" He's not! The Father is in perfect peace. He knows there's a better place for you. He knows there's a more suitable place. But he's satisfied at this moment that he has it all worked out and it will come about right.

It's the same with the whole personal relationship thing. God isn't up there, sweating and saying, "How will I get so-and-so married to so-and-so? I'll never get them to meet! I never will! Because she's going in this direction and he's going in that direction!" He isn't saying that.

You know the Father is unchanging, and he's in complete peace with Jesus and they're enjoying each other, and there's rest and contentment. Why? Because he has it all organized. He has it all planned. All we have to do is do what he's given us to do with our whole hearts this moment, and rejoice. A holy heart is one that is preoccupied with what the Creator has sent you here to do.

Loved ones, every one of us is equal in that way. Each of us here is here for a special purpose that God has in mind. I would encourage you to find it out, and to set your whole mind on that, and to put a knife to any Isaac that has got in the way. Then you'll find there will sweep into you the Holy Spirit of God's life, and that Holy Spirit will begin to bear the fruit of the Spirit in your life--love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and temperance. That is what God will do to you if you will get about the business for which he has put you here.

Let us pray. Dear Father, we confess that we have done a lot of trying to run our own business here, instead of trying to take care of your own business. Lord, we remember Jesus' words: "Did you not know I'd be about my Father's business?"

Father, we confess that we've been distracted into all kinds of other people's business, and into our own business. But Father, we do see that you do not do things by chance, and you have put each one of us here to something for you that no one else can do. And Father, a holy heart is one that is preoccupied with that above everything else.

Lord, we would ask you by your Holy Spirit to circumcise our hearts, and to show us the difference between the things that don't matter, and the one thing that does matter. We would pray, Lord Jesus, that your Spirit would come into us this morning – that Spirit that said, "Not my will, but thine be done." And that we would begin to rest in that peace, so that the root may be holy in our lives, and the branches may be holy also.

We ask that you would begin that this very day, our Father, so that we would be like you, and may fulfill what you have put us here to do, in Jesus' name. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be which each one of us, now and evermore. Amen.