

Romans 8

26 In the same way, the Spirit comes to help our weakness. We don't know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans. 27 The one who searches hearts knows how the Spirit thinks, because he pleads for the saints, consistent with God's will. 28 We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 We know this because God knew them in advance, and he decided in advance that they would be conformed to the image of his Son. That way his Son would be the first of many brothers and sisters. 30 Those who God decided in advance would be conformed to his Son, he also called. Those whom he called, he also made righteous. Those whom he made righteous, he also glorified.

31 So what are we going to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He didn't spare his own Son but gave him up for us all. Won't he also freely give us all things with him?

33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect people? It is God who acquits them. 34 Who is going to convict them? It is Christ Jesus who died, even more, who was raised, and who also is at God's right side. It is Christ Jesus who also pleads our case for us.

35 Who will separate us from Christ's love? Will we be separated by trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written,

We are being put to death all day long for your sake.

We are treated like sheep for slaughter.[a]

37 But in all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us. 38 I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers 39 or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.

Psalms 119

129 Your laws are wonderful!

That's why I guard them.

130 Access to your words[d] gives light,
giving simple folk understanding.

131 I open my mouth up wide, panting,
because I long for your commandments.

132 Come back to me and have mercy on me;
that's only right for those who love your name.

133 Keep my steps steady by your word;
don't let any sin rule me.

134 Redeem me from the people who oppress me
so I can keep your precepts.

135 Shine your face on your servant,

and teach me your statutes.
136 Rivers of tears stream from my eyes
because your Instruction isn't being kept.

Matthew 13

31 He told another parable to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and planted in his field. 32 It's the smallest of all seeds. But when it's grown, it's the largest of all vegetable plants. It becomes a tree so that the birds in the sky come and nest in its branches."

33 He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast, which a woman took and hid in a bushel of wheat flour until the yeast had worked its way through all the dough."

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that somebody hid in a field, which someone else found and covered up. Full of joy, the finder sold everything and bought that field.

45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. 46 When he found one very precious pearl, he went and sold all that he owned and bought it.

47 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that people threw into the lake and gathered all kinds of fish. 48 When it was full, they pulled it to the shore, where they sat down and put the good fish together into containers. But the bad fish they threw away. 49 That's the way it will be at the end of the present age. The angels will go out and separate the evil people from the righteous people, 50 and will throw the evil ones into a burning furnace. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth.

51 "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked.

They said to him, "Yes."

52 Then he said to them, "Therefore, every legal expert who has been trained as a disciple for the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings old and new things out of their treasure chest."

Sermon

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer:
Amen.

When I say the word *sellout*, what first comes to mind? In my experience, many people think negatively of someone who gave up their friends, or their identity, or their integrity, all for a quick payday, or for favor in somebody else's eyes. A sellout, it seems, is someone who gave up their old life for a new life, but the people in their old life just don't understand. One of the most common conversations in my high school life was arguing about which bands were sellouts for changing their styles and which bands were just evolving as musicians. Was Gwen Stefani a sellout because she left No Doubt to pursue a solo career in pop music? Was Ice Cube a sellout for branching out from gangster rap to develop a career as an actor? In these situations, I think the

accusations are overblown. Gwen Stefani's become a cultural icon on The Voice, something that would have been impossible if she'd stayed in the limited exposure a punk/ska band gives (even though I love punk/ska fusion). Ice Cube's now a mogul that commands nearly \$10 Million per film, all while still being able spit a rhyme.

Of course, that's just the accusation of the sellout. Purists miss the old days when Cube would hang with Dr. Dre, Eazy E, Arabian Prince, MC Ren, and DJ Yella. Traditionalists want to hear Gwen's soaring vocals on Tragic Kingdom and want nothing to do with Hollaback Girl. In these people's eyes, the current version of the artist wasn't worth what they lost.

Jesus's parables today tell an incredibly opposite story about sellouts. Sellouts aren't to be viewed negatively, because when you sell out for the Kingdom of God, you put all that exists into proper perspective. The Kingdom of God is worth the greatest of

sellouts, no matter how ridiculous others think you're being when you rid yourself of everything that once defined you, that once consumed your time, your energy, your very being. God's Kingdom requires a sellout, insists that we give up all that we once held dear, that we reprioritize our lives in light of that new thing that God does in Christ Jesus. Sellouts for the Kingdom of God aren't something to fear, to lament, or to critique. They're something to celebrate, because they recognize that abundant life in God eclipses even the very best of life without God.

Of course, I've met precious few people that embody the behavior of these parables. Who truly liquidated all of their assets in order to acquire the fullness of God's kingdom? St. Francis comes to mind, one who gave up every last piece of his biological father's wealth to pursue our heavenly father's kingdom, even to the point of stripping naked in front of a cathedral. You see, these clothes were bought by his dad's money, and he wanted to show

his full separation from reliance on earthly treasure. But we've heard that story a lot, and there's another story, one we've heard less often, one that deserves to be told. It's about an African American Creole woman named Henriette DeLille. To understand Henriette's story, though, we need to understand the *plaçage* system.

Plaçage developed in colonial Louisiana, where among the white French settlers, men greatly outnumbered the women. This meant that younger and poorer white men were left without female European marriage prospects until later in life. So until they could secure a white woman to marry, they would take free women of color as consorts. While this provided these women with greater material comfort, there was no legal binding to this relationship, and so there was no long term protection for the woman of color or her children once the white man accumulated enough assets to attract a European woman and her family. While these white men

often supported the woman of color and their children after they married a white woman, though certainly to a lesser degree, and while some people of color saw this as an opportunity upward mobility, the system clearly played on a power dynamic that furthered the oppression of black people, treating black women as temporary tools and their children as secondary citizens.

Henriette's mother Marie-Josèphe met her father in the plaçage system, and so Marie-Josèphe prepared Henriette for plaçage as well.

But instead, Henriette became a vocal opponent. She saw through the veneer to the rotten core of this system, both because plaçage promulgated racial prejudice and because it violated God's intent for marital faithfulness. As a budding theologian and social critic, she wanted to further devote her life to God and sought to become a nun; however, since she identified as a person of color, the Ursuline and Carmelite orders refused her

entrance. They were open only to white women at the time.

Nevertheless, she persisted. Henriette had found the treasure of God's kingdom hidden in the field of New Orleans. So, when her mother died and her estate was given to Henriette, she sold everything and developed a new holy order, one not defined by race but by commitment to living Christ's Life together called Sisters of the Holy Family.

Henriette could have had a comfortable life, at least in comparison to other mid 19th century African Americans, but it would have been haunted by the knowledge that she was being taken advantage of, used as a tool for the temporary pleasure of a white man who didn't see her worthy of marriage. So she sold that life and instead dug for the Kingdom of God. When the digging got difficult - as she hit rocks of racism and prejudice within the church, her supposed sisters in Christ - she still would not relent. Instead, she mined around the obstacles that obscured the treasure of

God's truth. She developed a community where women could escape the abusiveness of plaçage and advocate against its social and theological sinfulness. She created a prophetic community that offered the clarion call that all people, not just white people, were worthy of service to God.

When you give up all you have in order to embrace God's Kingdom, you also reveal the limitations of the life you once led. You can more clearly see the sinfulness we once accepted as standard. You sell out a lifestyle shaped by limitations and sinfulness to enter an unlimited kingdom of righteousness. That's the kind of massive turnaround called for by the discovery of God's kingdom.

The Lord, then, puts this question before us, just as Jesus put the question before Henriette DeLille: "What is my kingdom worth to you?" Of course, the parable says the finder sold everything in order to purchase the field and secure the treasure. But I think it's

safe to say that some things are much more difficult to give up, which is why so many of us, myself included, have yet to fully and truly sell out. That food processor that you got as a wedding gift but haven't used since the Bush administration? Easy to give up. Our phones and other tech gadgets? Much more difficult. Grandma's jewelry? Grandpa's war medals? The family homestead? More than things, though, what about our behaviors that treat service industry workers like lower class citizens? Our economic systems that keep us well fed while neighbors starve? What do we hold on to - perhaps because we think it's unrelated to God's Kingdom or because we're so addicted to it that we refuse to let go of it (even though we know it's not truly life giving) or because we've convinced ourselves that its sinful nature is just normal and therefore acceptable - what do we hold on to rather than sell out for the Kingdom of God?

Yet, the question might be asked another way: “What about God’s kingdom inspires you to sacrifice everything?” That’s an equally important question, and one that flips the expectation. It’s not about what you’re willing to give up. It’s about seeing the comparative worthlessness of all that we have when compared with the wonders of God’s presence. What’s something that you’ve uncovered about God’s Kingdom, something so true it’s enchanting? Something so personal that it’s captivating?

For Henriette DeLille, it was the promise of sacramental marriage based on integrity and equality, mutual appreciation and appreciation, where love and racial equality weren’t trampled on by greed and lust. For you? I can’t say. For me, the reason I’m trying to learn to sellout for God’s Kingdom? It’s the promise of a day when there’s no more war. Seriously. That's one of the enchanting promises that secures my devotion. For most of my life, my grandpa Dale wouldn’t mention a word about his service

during WWII. Not a peep. He saw such horror that he wouldn't utter it until, later in life, he began to open up about his appreciation for those that he served with, because together they faced those horrors. In a different way, my father, who served during the Vietnam war in the Medical Service Corps, where they helped supply aid and bind of the wounds of the injured, refuses to refer to himself as a Vietnam veteran because we've placed a higher value on the violence of war than the others who contributed to healing in the cause. Because too many times in my life I've had to hear about my Green Beret brother's upcoming "work trips," short on details but large on risk that he or someone he loves won't return. The Kingdom of God, the treasure I found in a field one day as I was studying scripture, is God's promise in Isaiah of turning swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, that our human penchant for war will one day sell out to divine development of peace. Why? Because every human being

is created in God's image and so no image of God should be killing other images. Because violence has so deeply shaped my family. Because down by the riverside, that great river that flows through the center of God's city, we ain't gonna study war no more. Mother's won't lose their sons and fathers won't lose their daughters and parents won't lose their children to the violence between nations because we will become what no country has ever truly been: one people, under God. That promise of liberation, my grandfather from his tears and my father from that short-sold identity and my brother from the risk? I want to live life by that riverside.

I'm still learning what it means to sellout for God's Kingdom. I haven't done it all yet, and what I have done, I haven't always done well. But as we continue this journey of faith, we will find things that, through their beauty, compel us to give up all that we have, to rid our lives of all rulers that seek our attention, in order to focus

entirely on God's Kingdom. What won't we study in order to learn the freedom and peace of God's Kingdom? If we truly want the kingdom of God, then eventually, we must sacrifice it all. If we want the Gospel to rule in our lives, there simply can be no other distractions. We've got to move out of those areas defined by the old world and purchase that field, down by the riverside, where the treasure of heaven awaits us all. Amen.