

“Living a Hidden Life”
Pastor John Bronson

John 14:18-31

November 18, 2012

Order of Worship for 10/18/12, title, “Living a Hidden Life”, text, John 14:18-31

Opening Song

Invocation: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Welcome and Announcements
Ministry Moment

Church Family Thanksgiving Feast
4:00 pm

(Sunday Evening in the Word is cancelled for the Feast!)

Opening Song:

“You Are Holy”

Overhead

Invocation:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Welcome and Announcements

Special Music:

Hosanna

“I am a Promise” & “Go Light Your World”

Ministry Moment:

Angel Tree, Tim Giordano

Preparing the Heart in Song:

“Shout to the Lord”

Overhead

“Everlasting God”

Overhead

“Great is Thy Faithfulness”

Song # 139

Offering and Offertory

Message: “Living a Hidden Life”

John 14:18-31

Pastor John Bronson

Response to the Word:

“Forever”

Overhead

Parting Word of Grace

Church Family Thanksgiving Feast—4 pm

Sunday Evening in the Word:

Cancelled for the Feast!

‘The Prayer Closet’

November 11, 2012

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

1. **National and District Evangelical Free Church Offices:** the Lord will lead them to a deep love for His Word and people; the Spirit will daily give them renewed strength and vision for the work; the Western District will be led to the person the Lord has prepared to be the new Superintendent
2. **President Obama:** the Lord will protect him and his family from all evil and will press home to him the awesome responsibility and opportunity he has to put the nations fiscal house in order and restore its moral foundations
3. **Oroville Christian School:** that the Lord will protect and provide for the school, will add new students to the classrooms, and will lead the Board to clarity regarding where He wants the school to go over the next few years
4. **Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week:** Tim Hammonds, Air Force (son of Tom & Cindy): now training men under him, taking college courses and he an Megan ar legal guardians of Megan’ syounger brother. He has a lot weighing on him and is feeling the pressure. Pray he looks to the Lord for strength and peace
5. **Young Adult of the Week:** Lottie Conley at California State University Chico (daughter of Dave & Barbara): really struggling in material science, please pry her understanding of the subject and grade improves this semester

We are in the study of John’s Gospel. I have entitled the message for today “Living a Hidden Life.” The text is John 14:18-31. What we will focus on is that Jesus when speaking to His men makes this comment: “*I will not leave you as orphans.*” How many of us in this room are orphans? When you read the Old Testament in particular you recognize that God has a very special concern for certain categories of people. One of them is widows. Another are sojourners, the stranger; the person who arrives on the scene and is unconnected. Very much like the stranger is the orphan, the abandoned child. I appreciated having Angel Tree this morning, because what we recognize is that very often even though a child [is] of parents either one or both [of whom are in prison], and increasingly it is the mom and not just the dad who is in prison, that that child may still have a living parent, but sometimes they feel themselves extremely cut off, isolated by the immense amount of turmoil and instability, suspicion and hostility which surrounds them.

On the Deacons’ table in addition to [an article about] celebrating Thanksgiving I also had the secretary copy off a number of copies of a BreakPoint article. The title is “Ending Gendercide”. The thrust of the article is this: we all are aware of abortion as being a huge stain against our nation. We need to understand that in addition to it being just an awful thing, on a consistent basis girls are aborted more than men. And what is true in our country is a small reality compared to the consistency with which women, girls, females are aborted around the world. Personally I find it deeply ironic that our liberal women in our society seem to think that abortion is all tied up with the well-being of the female when it is females who are overwhelmingly slaughtered.

Orphans: what does it mean to be an orphan? I would like us to begin by just reading through that passage, John 14:18-24, and then we are going to verse 18 in particular. Join me in reading.

“I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.’”

In the verses just preceding this, in the section leading down to verse 18, Jesus told the disciples that the Spirit would be with them. So they could anticipate that. Now He tells them that He will be with them and will not leave them as orphans. It is essential for us to understand what it means to be an orphan. The significant thing about this statement is not that Jesus says, “I will be with you in addition to the Spirit”; it is the way He describes His disciples. What is an orphan? Beloved an orphan is not simply a person alone: we would understand that immediately. Rather, [an orphan] is a person who is unconnected. An orphan is a person who does not have a recognized source of identity. There is for this person no clear family tie. An orphan is perhaps someone who can be adopted. I think each of those observations are essential for our self-understanding as we are before God.

It might be that Jesus used this word there in the Upper Room in a kind of sentimental way to describe a feeling of disorientation as well as person loss as happens when a parent or some other significant authority figure or leader is removed. Such a loss can be deeply disorienting and lead to a personal crisis. This could describe a person who is experiencing a loss of connectedness, a loss of identity in the sense of separation from the traditions and perhaps the customs and the protecting and providing authorities by which our world tends to be defined and held together. A child needs those, so perhaps [Jesus] is saying, there will be a certain amount of destabilization in their lives. We ask the questions, “Who is in charge? Who sets the boundaries within which we are to operate and points out the direction that we are to pursue? Who sustains the traditions by which we are to live? Who points out the

directions? Who sustains and maintains the values? Who is the protector in the midst of a potentially unfriendly world? Who will nurture and care for this child?

Can you imagine what it was like to be with Jesus for three years? Jesus was clearly a strong leader. Jesus was clearly a strong nurturing presence. Jesus was clearly someone who knew who He was and He knew the direction in which He was taking His men. He was dynamic, powerful, compassionate, [and] caring. What would it be like if He was suddenly gone? What would it be like if He was suddenly removed?

There is possibly a deeper significance to Jesus’ words. Jesus’ ministry has revealed the spiritual bankruptcy of Judaism. He has laid bare the hypocrisy of both the temple priests and the leading scribes and Pharisees. Beyond this Jesus has indicated to His men that a fundamental change is about to occur in the way the plan of salvation [and] the covenant people of God unfolds. We know this change as the shift from the Old to the New Testament. It is the shift from the people of God as the nation of Israel to the people of God as the church, the Body of Christ. You and I can scarcely imagine what it meant for those Jews to face this change. We gain a glimpse of it perhaps, when we read of the difficulty that the Apostle Peter has in accepting the fact that now it is ok for him as a Jew to eat with Gentiles, or to go into a Gentile’s house. You couldn’t do that before under the Law.

I thought about this. I was born as a Presbyterian. I was raised as a Presbyterian. I went to church and I learned about God as Presbyterians learned about God. Beyond that, being the particular kind of person I am, I read lots of history and I knew, and I know now, that the government of the United States in its founding principles and its structure is a remarkable duplication of Presbyterian governance. I was well aware of the fact that the Presbyterian Church was apostate. But I loved the Presbyterian Church. When I received a call from God that I was going to become a pastor, my intention was to become a pastor within the Presbyterian Church to preach and to teach the Word of God and to see if by His grace a great renewal and a recapturing of that body of believers could happen. When I was in seminary I attended a General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. At that General Assembly they voted, and this was the vote: regardless of your personal conscience, you will teach and preach what the Presbyterian Church tells you. I listened. I prayed. When I went home I told my wife, “I cannot now be a Presbyterian.” I grieved for two years. Why would I grieve? Because the body of traditions, the order of life, the customs, and those people whom I admired and respected reaching back through time had all been betrayed. A terrible death had occurred and my soul was wounded. (Either fortunately or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, the Evangelical Free Church School which I was attending and the men who lived there eagerly said, “Great! Why don’t you become a Free Church pastor?” and I have been inflicting trouble on you all ever sense!)

Let me give you another way of doing this. How many of you are feeling as if you and I are becoming orphans in our nation? Part of the reality that we are dealing with, part of the emotional struggle that at least I feel is that I have a recognition that what was once a Christian nation is not. That the traditions which defined us, that the values which supported us, that the truths which guided us are now being thrown aside. It is not that I have left my nation, it is that my nation is leaving me. Consequently it becomes a matter of personal concern: how do I answer the question, “Who am I?” There is, of course, a sense, is there not, in which I am an orphan.

I did all of that because I believe it and also so we can walk back to John 14 and say to ourselves, “Why would Jesus use the word “orphan” in speaking to His disciples? Did He know something about what was happening and was going to happen in their lives? Most assuredly He did. Jesus’ promise that He will not leave His disciples as orphans is a promise that He will continue to be with them through all of the changes that they are about to experience. How powerful are the grip of old ways? How powerful are they imprinted upon us, upon our identity, upon them and upon their identity? Now suddenly this people who have all of their lives been separated from the Gentiles by all manner of rules and regulations, rules and regulations by which they said, “I am a Jew, I am of the Covenant People of God.” We gain, perhaps, some sense of the difficulty when we read Galatians 2:11-14. In that

section Peter the Apostle, already filled with the Holy Spirit, already an evangelist on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ, already having travelled from place to place preaching and teaching about the new covenant: he encounters a group of converted Jews who say, “I think we need to keep the Laws.” And he does! He falls right back into the old ways.

How easily can our habits of speech, how easily can our ways of thinking and feeling, how easily can old comforts and familiarities, how easily these can rise up from our past and lay hold of us, [especially] when we operate on automatic!

Obviously this relates not just to a converted Jew, and not just to a disoriented American, but to anyone who is saved out of the world. Suddenly you are brought into a different context. But how readily we can fall back. That is a question that this whole section in John’s Gospel brings to our minds, or it should. Should Gentiles, people like us, anticipate a similar experience? Should Christians, in other words, should Christian converts expect to feel like orphans in the world as a result of coming to faith in Jesus Christ? You know the answer is yes. But let me give it to you in Jesus’ own words. If you look in Luke 12:49-53, though I am not going to read that section; I am going to read from Matthew 10:34-39 and also 12:46-50. Listen, this is what Jesus said:

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. (What has He just described? Orphans! Breaking the ties between children and parents! That is what He has just described.) “And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” “While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’”

We read those words: do we understand what Jesus is saying? Do we understand how profound that statement is about the nexus, the network of relationships into which we emotionally bring ourselves and from which we define who we are? I wonder who of us does not know the reality of this tension. How many of us struggle with this. We know that the gospel is a ministry of healing. We also know it is a ministry of wounding. And very often the healing comes after the wounding. God calls us away from some at the same time that He calls us to draw near to others. If you were to read James 4:4-5, this is what it says: *“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Or do you suppose that it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, ‘He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?’”* Then James goes on to say in verses 7-8, *“Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”* This is an echo of Matthew 6:24 in which He says, *“You cannot serve God and mammon.”*

In most discussions I have been involved in when we talk about Matthew 6 and not being anxious and that we cannot serve God and mammon, what we tend to think of is the whole struggle that we have with material goods. Certainly at the threshold of the Christmas season we think, “O man, here we go again, buying stuff we don’t need, sending to people we don’t like very much and hoping they’ll give us something too! Ah, what a great time!” We don’t really do that! Nini and I have agreed that she is going to give me food and I am going to eat it! It is a problem and most of us know that. But when we deal soberly with this whole business of gathering together – how many are going to get together with family and friends over Thanksgiving or Christmas? Aren’t they fun? I will be conducting a funeral in a few days for someone no one here knows. It is always interesting. All these people come together. Often times they have not talked to each other for years! I’m the guy who is supposed to make it all work.

“Happy to be here and glad to be together!” But the reality is oftentimes in those gatherings it is tense. Why? There are issues.

And there are issues when we close in faith with Christ. What are the issues? It is simple. Do we have the same dreams now? Do we celebrate the same victories? Do we admire the same heroes and values? Beloved, coming to Jesus Christ according to the Word of God should be an earthquake in your life. Do we sometimes sense that as a result of coming to faith now a gap begins to open between us and the unsaved in our families and amongst our friends? We know that we are to love our neighbors, but loving our neighbor does not mean that we agree with them or go along with them. It has been my experience that friends and family members be at times more perceptive and sensitive than I am in recognizing that at some fundamental level we are now separated from each other. May I say that the sense of that separation will certainly at times evoke discomfort and even resentment.

My business as God’s servant is to lay out the truth, because the truth is what helps us to understand what happens as we come under the hand of God. This is some of what happens. Under the impact of this I fear that there are some who, feeling that discomfort, feeling that gap, that distance, decide it is not worth it. “I’m giving this up; I am going back to the old places and the old ways where I was comfortable.”

All of this has to do with recognizing that this is part of the reason why Jesus said to His men, “orphans”. “I will be with you because you are orphans, and you need the comfort and strength that My being with you will bring.” The intent of God is that faith in Jesus Christ brings us a new identity. If you were to go and read Colossians 3:1-4, this is what it says. Let the word speak to you directly through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your heart: *“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”* (emphasis added).

Living in this way I believe we will have the same questions as the [first] disciples had: “How is this going to work?” Notice the dilemma that the disciples face. Three times already by this point in the Gospel, three times Jesus has said to them, “I am going to die, I am going to leave, and you cannot go where I am.” What we need to do to get emotionally get inside of that is to imagine yourself at the age of fourteen or fifteen, one parent is already dead and the other parent is looking at you and saying, “Now I want you to understand, in three weeks I am going to die and you are on your own.” What would that do? They do not understand how it is going to work. Reading these statements by Jesus, if you were a disciple in that Upper Room, it is hard to imagine what they understood. Jesus makes this comment in John 14:19, *“Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father and you me, and I in you.”* Jesus goes on talking after that, but I think the men stopped listening at that point. I think that because of what [Judas, not Iscariot] asks immediately after Jesus finally stops talking. He says, “How is this going to work?” Jesus, how can you be with us and not with us? Jesus used the word “manifest”: I will manifest myself to you; the Father will manifest to you. What does that mean? To be manifest is to be obvious, made clearly present or visible. But how can Jesus be manifest and nobody else see Him?

Jesus’ words make sense to us now because of course we know about the giving of the Holy Spirit. But we can fool ourselves just at this point with very unhappy consequences. In these verses, here in verse 19 in particular, Jesus is not giving us what we might call propositional or doctrinal teaching that explains something. Rather what Jesus is indicating is what will be and needs to be the experiential reality in the life of anyone who is a believer. His words come to us in the shape of a question. This is the question: Is the living presence of Jesus manifest in our lives? That is what Jesus says. Jesus says, “Because I live you will live, and in that day you will know that I am in the

Father, the Father is in me and we are in you.” How are you going to know? Because you know, because you recognize the active presence and power of God in your life. That is how you know.

An important Biblical truth and practice has been rediscovered in the past 30 years. This has to do with a father’s blessing of his children. The patriarch Jacob blessed his sons and Moses in a sense did the same at the end of his life. The absence of such a blessing tends to leave the child disoriented, uncertain of who they are or how they stand in the world, not knowing if they have “made the grade”, as it were, for entering into adulthood and taking on the challenges of life. The blessing is designed to confirm that child’s identity. “You are a son or a daughter of this family. You stand in the stream of traditions that are in this family. The blessings of God that have come down from the generations pass now through me the father to you, the child, and that wonderful river and stream of life goes on, rushing through to new generations beyond. The child who has been blessed in this way recognizes themselves as a full member of the family and an adult. They are ready now to move on and hit the challenges of life, to discover new things and create new things and themselves be a blessing in the world. They are empowered. Now I want to give you a contrast. Do you know what we are taught by our culture and by our schools? This is what we are taught over the media, entertainment, and almost every other source of authority in our culture. The liberal, rationalist, and secular notion of personal freedom argues that personal freedom is found in minimizing all ties and bonds, giving the individual maximum liberty. But the reality is that this leaves a person weak, uncertain, disoriented and generally scarcely able to restrain the power of internal appetites or resist the influence of others over them, precisely because they lack a clear personal identity. We are a nation devouring itself: but not the church. For you and I are reborn to a new identity in Christ. It is the blessings of God which are passed to us through His Son. We receive that identity, those values, those traditions, those customs, those truths which define who we are and give to us the direction in which we are to go, if. . . . As men and women, young men, young women and children we do exactly as Paul says to the Colossians: seek the things that are above and recognize that your life is hidden in Christ in the heavenlies. Therefore no power upon the face of the earth is capable of holding on to you and dragging you away. For He holds you and He never lets go.

Please pray with me: Father as we listen to the words of Paul and of Jesus, grant that by the power of Your Holy Spirit we might understand Your purpose and calling in our lives and receive the blessing of the new identity that is ours in Christ, that Father in this world we are orphans, but our lives are not lived in this world. They are hidden with Christ in the heavenlies, and we now are channels of Your blessings and truths to a world that lies in darkness. We pray this giving thanks in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. The message indicated that an orphan is one who “does not recognize or identify anyone present as the source of their identity.” What do you see as the predominant sources of personal identity in people’s lives today? How might the loss (rejection) of traditional values and beliefs, practices and customs leave one as an orphan?

2. Do Luke 12:49-53 or Matthew 10:34-39 and 12:46-50 relate to or describe your experience?

3. James 4:4-5 compares friendship with the world with enmity toward God. How would you describe friendship with the world? What would be friendship with God?

4. How can we love our neighbor without being friends of the world, especially if our neighbor is a “worldly” person, that is, unsaved?

5. In Colossians 3:1-4 Paul tells them to “seek the things that are above, where Christ is...” To what things is Paul referring and how might one seek them?

6. What do you find most difficult to “leave behind” of a worldly identity

7. Can you tell others some of your experiences of the Spirit indwelling and leading you or, in the words of the sermon, “Is the living presence of Jesus manifest in [your] life?”

8. Do you feel as if, or can you remember that your parents (father) has blessed you?

9. What “identity” choices have you had to make as you have committed to be a Christian?

10. Do you think of yourself as an adopted child of God?