

A few weeks ago we went to the Virginia Museum to see an exhibition on mummies. The mummy on tour was named Nesperrenub. He was a temple priest in ancient Egypt who died almost 3000 years ago. It was an interesting exhibit, but in some ways if you've seen one mummy you've seen them all. One detail about the life and death of Nesperrenub did stand out, however. As he was prepared for his journey into the afterlife, the embalmers placed several charms and pendants inside his linen wrapping. One pendant was placed right over Nesperrenub's heart.

The pendant had a specific purpose. According to Egyptian religion, when Nesperrenub died, he would go before the gods to be judged. His life was to be placed on a scale. On one side of the scale a feather was placed, representing goodness and integrity and honor. Nesperrenub's life was on the other side of the scale. If the wrongdoing and badness of his life outweighed the feather of righteousness, he would not be admitted into the afterlife.

Well, the Egyptians took precautions for that judgment, even for a temple priest. The pendant placed over the priest's heart was designed to hide and suppress all the deeds of the heart from coming out at the time of judgment. Apparently, they knew, with the prophet Jeremiah, who lived several generations after Nesperrenub, that “*the heart is deceitful above all things.*” Or if not deceitful, the heart had just too much in it for the gods to handle. Nesperrenub's unruly human nature was just too much for the gods to deal with, so he needed a pendant to lock up the secret sins of his heart.

The idea of judgment is square in the middle of Advent. This morning we confess that we are “*sorely hindered by our sins.*” In this morning's reading from 1 Thessalonians, Paul counsels us on living life in view of the coming day of judgment: pray without ceasing, give thanks, abstain from evil, hold fast to what is good.

Wouldn't life be good if we could do those things all the time? Praying, giving thanks, avoiding wrong, doing right. But of course we can't and we don't. Many of us have ceased to pray, rather than pray without cease. Instead of giving thanks for what we have, we complain about what we don't have. Sometimes we will do the wrong and consciously avoid the right. This is what it means to be “*sorely hindered by our sins.*”

Another way to say this is that sometimes, maybe even most of the time, our hearts are too much for us. We can't suppress or deny or control what is in there. This time of year people warn us about the excesses of the holiday season. Don't eat too much, don't drink too much, don't spend too much, don't want too much.

Guess what? There are a lot of reasons we eat, drink, spend, and want too much. One is, as the old saying goes, I eat too much because I'm unhappy, and I'm unhappy because I eat too much.

Too muchness flows naturally out of our hearts. Or as our hometown hero Dave Matthews' sings, *"I'm no crazy creep, I've got it coming to me because I'm not satisfied / The hunger keeps on growing / I eat too much / I drink too much / I want too much / Too much."*

Jesus' list of what flows out our hearts is really too much take in: evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, and deceit. He actually lists 5 more things, but I thought they were just too much to list, too much to listen to. You'd need a big pendant to keep all that battened down.

Psychoanalyst Alan Phillips describes the too muchness of our lives. *"We are too much for ourselves—in our hungers and our desires, in our griefs and our commitments, in our loves and our hates.... If we start off by being, at least some of the time, too much for other people, and become, in adolescence, definitively too much for people.... and then become adults who are unavoidably too much for ourselves, what is to be done? Well, one thing that can be done is to find someone we are not too much for, and this, when it isn't an institution or a leader, sometimes has to be a god."*

Well, you may be too much for your friends or your husband or your parents or even yourself. But you are definitely not too much for God. And you don't even have to worry about hiding what flows out of your heart. He is the God from to whom all hearts are open and from whom no secrets are hid. Give Him everything you've got and you still won't be too much for Him.

Why? As we read in our epistle today, God will sanctify you *entirely*. Entirely – all too much of you. And by sanctify, we mean accept you, receive you, find every inch of you *"sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."* And why will He do this? Because you've abstained from evil or prayed ceaselessly? No. Because you are faithful? No. He will do this because, as the scripture says, *"the one who calls you is faithful, and He will do this."*

You're going to be OK, because God can handle all of you and God is faithful. Mike Krzyzewski, the great Duke basketball coach reassured his team last week before a big game. He was concerned that his young players would be too afraid to take shots because if they missed the shot, they would disappoint their coach. In short, they were afraid to be judged on their performance. Coach K told them that the shots they took that night, wouldn't be their shots. *"I told them they were my shots, and that I wanted them to take them,"* he said. *"That they should shoot whenever they felt a shot, and I'd live with the result."*

On the cross Jesus has already lived and died with the result of our sorely hindering sins. By just trusting Him we are already sound and blameless in God's eyes. No heart pendant necessary. Nothing and no one is too much for our faithful God.

What might this look like in life, when you're perfectly aware of your too muchness but you are shielded from judgment by one who is faithful? Let's say you are 10 years old. You go to spend 2 weeks in the summer with your aunt and uncle who live on the Eastern Shore in an old house on the water. You like to go there because you escape the city and you fish and play and explore the fields with your cousins.

You also like your aunt and uncle. Your aunt, whose name is Mary, is tenderhearted. She has every kind of animal you can imagine. She loves all animals, but her special animal is a beautiful Irish Setter named Lady.

One day you decide to ride your bike up the mile long driveway to the road and back. You ask if you can take Lady with you. Your aunt Mary is concerned, but let's you take Lady as long as you turn around well before you come to the road. You agree. But then you start riding and Lady is running beside you with her lanky limbs and flowing red coat and you just ride. You and Lady come to the road, but Lady doesn't stop. A car comes out of nowhere and hits Lady and then Lady is in the middle of the road, lying there not moving. Lady is dead.

You get scared. You start to panic. You don't know what to do. You want to run away but you're in the country and there is nowhere to go. You think you are going to be sick to your stomach. You start crying and tear back down the mile long driveway, not knowing what you will say to your Aunt Mary.

Aunt Mary sees you coming back, without Lady. You somehow manage to blurt out what happened. Aunt Mary starts crying but she is crying with you and she hugs you and you still remember to this day the smell of her apron. She tells you it is going to be o.k. and that she loves you.

Along with the burning shame and gut wrenching sadness of Lady's death, you are worried for the rest of the visit about what your parents are going to say. When they arrive, Aunt Mary tells them about Lady's death, but she doesn't go into the details that include you. She protects you. She is faithful to you.

*May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.*

Amen.