

August 2 2015

Scriptures Lessons~

Psalm 78:14-29

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15

Ephesians 2:11-22

Sermon: *Shalom*

I don't have to tell you, that peace, is something after which we all seek. St Paul in fact preaches peace in our passage from Ephesians today and mentions peace four different times. Although, Paul writes in Greek he was nevertheless Jewish and had a very Jewish conception of peace in mind when he wrote. For those people in Israel peace was the absence of war. People weren't fighting with each other; instead it was like the word Shalom, a greeting, yes, sort of like, aloha, a multi-purpose greeting. A greeting that carries with it a sense of wholeness and total well-being; a sense of every part of life somehow working in the sense of harmony; a general attitude of satisfaction with one's situation in life and not something necessarily an outward state but an inward attitude toward life. And we also talked about the fact that the source of these feelings for St. Paul was, of course, God.

Now given this definition of peace and its source, it is pretty interesting to see what many of us in the modern world seek after for peace; some of us seek after peace in an actual peace movement; health and fitness; peace is to be in the bosom of our friends and family; sometimes we like to stick our heads in the sand and approach peace from the point of view of blissful ignorance toward the world; some of us find peace in our work; some of us practice some eastern religions or popular psychology; some of us resort to drugs or alcohol for peace; some seek peace in knowledge or education; we seek peace in fame or prosperity or security; some of us find peace in spending money; that is a dangerous thing; some of us find it in eating; some of us find it in distinctive forms of entertainment; such as war games like my kids loved, strange as it seems; TV movies and sports, and of course I could go on and on to describe the different places that we seek after peace.

I am here to tell you that most of those things are not bad things, in fact some of them are useful and some are a whole lot of fun to take part in; while others

are downright harmful at times in our lives but all of these things miss the point of what St. Paul is saying here. He was teaching the Greek Christians about their situation before they followed Jesus. St Paul goes on and tells them that real peace, lasting peace, for them is to be followers of Jesus and the way it comes and from the source that they know every, every well. If they want to be at peace; if they want to have shalom with themselves inside and with others outside of themselves or with God, only the life and teachings of Jesus can provide that way and even for us as followers of Jesus.

Today Holy Communion can be an object lesson which points us toward this peace, for this presence of Jesus in the midst of our lives and the means with which the kind of peace we seek can fill our lives. Through the broken bread we can experience forgiving and being forgiven and a restored sense of self-worth as God's children. Through the Cup of Blessing us can continue down that journey, that pathway with our relationship with God and our relationship with others, which can eventually perhaps somehow be restored. As we take the sacraments together today let us, as St Paul puts it, become fellow citizens, fellow citizens of the household of God; which is a small microcosm of what the household of God is and build this peace not on the transient things of the world that is around us but on Jesus who is the cornerstone of our faith.

You know in some worship services like this and you may have visited them, there is a formal time called the, "Passing of the Peace." A time when we can symbolically show this reconciliation which Jesus came in the world to share between us and others and between us and God. While here in Newport UCC, we tend to have less formal ways, the point is the same. As we receive the peace of Jesus in the sacraments we are asked then to share that peace and pass that peace on to other people around us. So today we are encouraged to share the peace of God with others as we ourselves encounter them on our walk with Jesus in this week just ahead. So pass the peace, pass the peace of Jesus. And together we say AMEN.