

August 26 2012

Scripture Lessons

Isaiah 55:1-13

Ephesians 6:10-20

Sermon *Highly Valued By God*

I'm not telling you anything that you already know when I say everybody in this world views life through his or her own frame of reference. Your reaction to me, your reaction to each other, is filtered through who you are, and what has been your experience in life up to this point. Education or work experience, your family experiences, your interests or disinterests causes us to view reality though, so to speak, our own set of colored glasses.

Each of us then has a unique frame of reference and it is never easy to alter that frame of reference. Some of you may have read this book, Steven Covey's best seller book, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People." He published three rough sketches. You might have seen this little optical illusion; I guess I would call it. One sketch is a profile of an attractive woman; one is another of a sort of large older woman, as tactfully as I can put it, and a third is a kind of composite of the two different drawings. Covey said he first saw the pictures in a class that he was taking at Harvard Business School where half of the class is shown the first sketch, while the other half was shown the second sketch and then the whole class was then presented with the third composite sketch which was composed of a components of both of the sketches.

Interesting enough, those who had first seen the sketch of the attractive woman saw her again in the composite; while those students who had started out looking at sketch of the older woman saw her image in the picture. When the professor called on the class members to describe the things that they saw in the picture, an argument started to raise because the various students were viewing the composite sketch from their different frame of reference, because it was almost impossible for them to see in that composite sketch the picture that they were not already shown. It had not been their experience to have seen it.

Each one brought to their viewing of the picture what their past experiences had been. And sometimes to our detriment or to our benefit, sometimes we do the same thing in life. The thing about this whole sketch situation, I think, it is really

difficult for us to see a new point of view. Most of us like our view of reality and we are comfortable with that view of reality. We have adjusted to it, and if it differs to the reality of others; it is really clear that the other person must be either wrong or they are not seeing the real world as we are. To change the person's point of view can be arduous or even painful but you know what, it can be done.

The Biblical witness says it has been done in the past. As for a matter of fact, I think, the Bible tells us, and it must be done on a regular basis. If your frame of reference is then always highly valued among your peers, you might want to be careful. If your opinions are always supported by the world around you, I think you better be on the alert. And if you find everybody nodding in agreement when you pontificate on a social issue at your next social gathering maybe it is time for you to frame of reference of faith reality check. And that's the issue I think, I want to raise today, in today's message.

How can we value in life what God values in life? How can we call into question the things that God calls into question? How can we live valuable lives for God? Our Old Testament lesson from the prophet Isaiah has, I think, some specific suggestions for us. As the passage that we read this morning starts with one word, Come. "Come," says Isaiah. Come implies some kind of movement from here to there; come, implies we should move physically or emotionally or spiritually from point A to point B. Come move from where you are to a new position. Don't be a stick in the mud all of your life. Be open to new ideas and new movements of the Holy Spirit. Be open to new life God has spoken and as our United Church of Christ reminded us a few years ago, we didn't need to be reminded, but it did.

God is still speaking, and will continue to speak to us because God is not dead. I think one of the challenges of the mature life is that we sometimes have a tendency to solidify our positions and our faith in a past mold that did work for us one time in the past. But that was then and that is now. So we are invited by God in this passage to come to now, to move to now, to the reality of now. I appreciate and value the past. I am not an historian and appreciate and value yesterday, but live now and be hopeful God says about the future.

A couple more words. Isaiah says, "come all of you." That means everybody, that means no exceptions. I think the human temptation is to count ourselves as an exception of every law and every rule. How many loved or dreaded the 55 miles an hour that we used to abide by several years ago? 55 miles an hour. Who loves 60 and 70 now? Now, 55 miles an hour was a good rule for

its purposes, that I suppose everybody, should have obeyed at that time except me, though. After all, I am a better driver than the rest of you. I have never had a ticket opps. I have better eye sight rest of you, I got better hearing, I have quicker reflexes and I am the one that is a hurry not you, so it wasn't good for me. It might have been good for you.

When I was growing up in college I attended Whitworth. I remember this particularly that stuck me. I went to the campus chapel worship service and the speaker, the chaplain at the time, began by saying that he was very glad to be with us but he noticed that all of us in the room were one color and one level in society. Which is not all bad, except he reminded us that in heaven there would be all kinds of people so it would be a good idea for us to get used to that now and not wait until we got to heaven. This thought stuck in my mind when I thought about this idea that Isaiah puts forth to not just to come but to come all of you, everybody that's in God's family.

Isaiah then says, "come all of you who are thirsty." Humanly all of us are thirsty. One universal item we need to survive is water, liquid, H₂O. Our body scientist tells us our bodies are 90% water. I guess I have to take their word for that because they ought to know what they are talking about. When people go on a starvation diet for some reason what is the one thing they can't do without? They can't do without liquid. It is water, and without it they will surely be harmed and eventually they will surely die.

But this is a different kind of thirst Isaiah says. Isaiah says, "listen to me, listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Come to me—hear me that your soul may live. Not that your body only may live but that your soul may live." A relationship with God is what keeps our souls alive. Every one of us, I think, is thirsting for meaning in life. Every person born must come to grips with his or her Creator in one way or another. That doesn't mean that every person is going to come to Jesus right away or to the church, but it does mean all of us are searching. Searching for the reason why we were born the reason; why things happen to us; the reason why others die; and sometimes we do not suffer; we do not starve. Come buy without money and without cost, says Isaiah Why spend money on what is not bread or labor on that which is not satisfy Isaiah says. The coin of God's realm is not the American dollar but is a desire; it is a yearning, a hunger, to discover our reason for being in this life.

Let me end with an interesting story. A pillar of the church died and went directly to the Pearly Gates. This is a Pearly Gates story. St Peter met the person and said, "You know, it takes a thousand points to get in and tell me something

about yourself. The man said confidently, “Well until I was 21, I never missed Sunday School, unless I was sick in bed, and I have a string of perfect attendance medals that reaches almost to the floor. How many remember those old perfect medals that you used to work for? St Peter said, “That is extremely good. Congratulations. I am going to give you one point for that and tell me something else about yourself.” The man said. “I am 75 years old I attend church regularly. I served on the board many times. I sang in the choir. I was the speaker one Layman’s Sunday one year.” St Peter said, “That is remarkable. That gives you two points. Tell me something else about yourself.” Well, the man, as you might expect, got concerned, “I tried to live a Christian life. I lived by the Golden Rule. I don’t believe I have an enemy in the world. I have obeyed the Ten Commandments. I was concerned about my neighbor. I always welcomed strangers in my midst.” And St Peter said, “Wonderful, wonderful that is another point. You now have three points. Tell me more about yourself.” And finally this time the man was desperate, he was exasperated, if the truth were known a little irritated and blurted out to St Peter, “Look at this rate the only way I going to get into heaven, is the grace of God.” And St Peter said, “Hey that is worth a thousand points and now you have a thousand three, would like to come in now.”

The problem was the man got the cart before the horse. Everything that he had done in his life was absolutely valuable but not nearly as valuable as knowing why he had had done those wonderful things. The reason was because of his love for God. What is highly valued by human beings is often not highly valued by God. Each of us. Each of us has a life. Each of us has a soul that is highly valued by God. What are we going to do with that life? What are we going to do with that soul? Isaiah says; seek the Lord while he might be found. Call upon God while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his ways and evil people their thoughts. Let that person turn to the Lord and God will have mercy. God will freely pardon each one of us

Together we say AMEN.