

February 12 2017

Scripture Lesson

Psalm 119:1-8

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Matthew 5:21-37

Sermon *Walk the Line*

When I first read the scripture from the lectionary, I was stumped on what to select for reading and then what to use for a basis of a sermon. The passage from Matthew isn't one that makes you feel all warm and fuzzy. It is quite graphic.

Who wants to hear about cutting off a hand, or ripping out an eyeball?

However I think sometimes we need to hear such strong words to make an impression. It is like a sermon about hellfire and damnation, it makes you think do I really want to do whatever it is that causes me to end up in hell or to have my eyeball ripped out. I think not. We could ask the question was Jesus giving these examples for us to follow literally if we weren't following his way. Most likely not, but remember the passage about Joseph when he found out that Mary was pregnant. He had the right to turn her in to the authorities because he thought she had committed adultery and could be punished accordingly. Maybe in Jesus's time, things were handled more harshly. In today's time, however, the words from Matthew couldn't be taken so literally. But it does give us food for thought.

We, as humans, are blessed with having free will. We are able to make choices on how our lives are lived out; we are able to make choices on our relationships with others, and with God. We are walking the line so to speak. If we stay on the line, then our lives are being lived as God would want us to live them. At times that line is nice and straight on even ground so it is easy to stay on the line, but it could be going up a slope or down an incline, or it could be on slippery ground, or it could not be nice and straight. So when the line isn't nice and straight on even ground those are the times when having that free will would tend to get us in trouble. There are the challenges that we come across every day. Anger is just one of them. We can easily become angry over the smallest things that tick us off. For me on Friday, it was the extra-long lines at the checkouts in Safeway. You may think that is a silly little thing and it is but if it causes you to become angry so that you are unkind to the person in front of you, to the checker, and even to someone that is walking in the door as you are walking out, that is not good. Then it carries forward to the traffic and that person who thinks they should go 40 miles an hour down the highway which is bare and dry. By the time you get home, you are fuming. Now know that I didn't say anything out loud to anyone but it was running through my mind. Would this be how Jesus handled the day? I think not.

I'm not saying that all anger is bad. Anger against an injustice would be good if it causes you to do something to correct that injustice but anger that is self-serving is not good. Does it serve a purpose that benefits anyone? No, it does not, not even for you if you are the one who is angry.

It would be the same for anything that makes us do things that are against what Jesus has taught us. We have that choice, that ability to reason, to be able to do what is right. We have to remember that the most important thing of all is to love God with all our hearts, with all our minds, and with all our souls. Then we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Would the anger felt when things aren't going the way you think they should be following God's commandments? I think not.

So, yes, this message so far has not been very warm and fuzzy but I think it still sometimes needs to be said. We all need at some time to step back and look at what kind of person we have been lately. Are we still walking that fine line between doing what Jesus would have us do or have we slipped off the line so to speak? We need to see how we are doing.

There is a warm and fuzzy ending to this message however. We also need to remember that no matter what we have done or not done, what we have thought or not thought, we can ask for forgiveness and it is granted. We have a chance for a do-over. God is there to help us right the wrongs we did and to move forward.

Here is another way to look at that which was written by the Rev. Roy Almquist from the Washington Memorial Chapel. He says that "The God born in a manger enters the messiness of life in all its dimensions, seeking to heal and save. This God offers a life deep and wide, where light shines into every nook and cranny." God is always there, we just need to be open to Him. Amen.