

January 26 2014

Scripture Lessons ~ I Corinthians 1:10-18

Matthew 4:12-23

Sermon *Check Your Attitude at the Door*

Many of years ago I took a wonderful trip almost 3 weeks of vacation to visit college friends in Alaska, it is actually the last time I visited Alaska. Terry just moved from Alaska, and others of you have Alaska connections, so you know what I am talking about. My friend John was a lot more of an outdoorsman than I had ever hoped to be. He had really taken to life in Alaska including the salmon fishing. As much as I had my doubts he set us up for a charter trip on the Kenai River, not too far from Anchorage to fish for king salmon. The fish that were running when I was there in late August, were those same fish the king salmon. I hadn't fished since I was a little child and we did that kind of fishing with a hook and a worm and a bobber. But this was a \$100+ trip at that time, which involved great big long poles, strange looking lures that required trolling up and down, up and down the Kenai River. John and I were out all morning and that was supposed to be the prime time for catching those monsters, but there were no fish biting at the time. The charter was only good until noon, but as that time approached, the guide was feeling very sheepish about the fact that we had not caught a thing, so he agreed to troll until 1pm because you paid him whether you caught a fish or not. And by golly it wasn't quite one o'clock in the afternoon when bang a big king took my bait and took me for an adventure that I will never forget. To make a long story short the trip resulted in my reeling in a 40 pound king salmon. Which at that time you could put in a cooler and haul home for free. You probably have to pay now. But it wasn't brought in without a lot of hard work. And not knowing whether I would catch anything or not that day. That is the life of a fisherman. The life of not yet disciples, Andrew and Peter, James and John. It is a hard life. It's a kind of iffy life, it can be lucrative if you know where and when and how to cast your nets into the water. It is a

tenuous life if you don't know what you are doing, and here in Matthews's gospel we find Jesus calling these men who knew what it was to take a risk. To take yet another risk, to risk by chucking everything they knew, and following a pipe dream. Following a vision for life as God meant life to be lived. And a new vocation, fishing for people with the only bait being the promise of a better way of life.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul calls this new vocation pure foolishness, as he describes for the Corinthians something of what such a life means in verse 18 of the passage. The very power of God Paul says to those wise of us to understand its meaning and pure foolishness who can't see past the nose on our faces. Of course all of this arises as Paul seeks to arbitrate yet another stupid, stupid church fight, one in which the Corinthians are arguing about the proper method and formula for the wording in the sacrament of baptism.

Paul is so fit to be tied, he is so angry about the fight that in exasperation he kind of screams the page in verse 14. "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name". Any of this sound familiar from the past, any of this sound familiar from today? Anybody realize the last time you or I fought, fought over something in church, home or at work, even politics, what real foolishness that fight turned out to be. Was this scenario in Corinthians the new life to which Jesus had called Peter and Andrew and James and John? I think you know the answer to that question, as well as I know the answer to that question, as well as St. Paul knew the answer to that question, as he gently but firmly chastises the members of the Corinthians church, by saying these words in verse 10, now I appeal to you brothers and sisters in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions amongst you, that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.

Which brings us back to the fisherman, and by way of comparison these faithful folks that were standing up here before us a little bit earlier who have agreed to volunteer their time and their effort to serve as committee chair and council members here in our church.

Jesus didn't twist any arms to get people to follow him, he simply presented a vision to live life as God called us to live, with hope and love and joy, peace and faith. A life that the fisherman would share with others, as they did the work of fishing for other people before them. And then again Jesus simply said follow me, and Matthew writes immediately they left their nets and they followed him without hesitations, no if and not ands or buts, and likewise the faithful folks that we were able to share with a little while ago, at least to my knowledge didn't have their arms twisted behind their backs to come up here to be installed in their positions and in volunteering here at the church. Instead they too are living out Jesus' vision, and sharing it with others as many of the rest of us do on a daily basis as the rank and file members of this Newport United Church of Christ. Which begs a couple of questions before we close our time together on this topic? First of all does this mean that St. Paul didn't believe that the things that the Corinthian's were arguing about were important? Absolutely not, what he was saying was this "that Christian people need to check our attitudes at the door" Sometimes we need to bridle our tongue, sometimes we have to have a keen sense of the broader picture of what is really important in life before we make an issue of something and what about the fisherman, and for that matter, our committees and council members, me as a pastor, other folks that are volunteers in the church? Does this mean that only us are to be seen as the responsible ones for living and sharing Jesus' message and therefore sometimes the water carriers on behalf of other people in the congregation. I don't even have to remind you of my answer to that, do you remember what I first told you when I first moved here? That I am the only one that gets paid to be good, the rest of you are good for nothing. Right? No, my point here is that we are in this together we are equal partners in the vision, we trade hats from time to time, we always do so hoping to focus on the same thing and the same vision, that we all put our nets, and all put our baggage aside to answer the call, the call to focus in on what is important in life and immediately as Matthew so fondly puts it follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. I hope that is what our focus is as we continue into the year 2014 as a church family. And together we say, Amen.

