

March 1 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 3 & 4

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Matthew 7:1-5

Sermon *Cutting Each Other Some Slack*

When I was a senior in high school, I occasionally volunteered my time running errands and doing odd jobs for my pastor in the UCC Church where I grew up in Colfax. The UCC and the Methodist worked very closely together and I worked on a number of projects. So one day I was asked for the pastor to deliver some things to the Methodist Church while I was on my lunch hour from school. To make my delivery I had to park my car in one of the very narrow parking slots at the Methodist Church, which I did. As you know the Methodists are kind of chintzy, they wanted to save as much space as possible, well anyway, I won't go there as there are too many Methodists. Anyway I parked my car in this kind of narrow space and when I was finished, I came out of the church and hopped in the car and as I said before the parking space was very narrow and as I backed out, I cut the turn too close and I scrapped the chrome bumper of the car next to me. So here I was, I had just gotten my driving license and I don't have to tell you, I was in a kind of panic. First, I jumped out of the car to see how bad the damage was and as it turned out, as it was really a tiny scratch. But still I had visions that this would plague me the rest of my life. So I stood around, looking all over to see if I could find anybody to look at what I had done. The streets were empty but I knew that in a small town my mother would surely find out what I did, if I didn't do something about it. My conscience got the best of me, so I tried to track down the owner of the car. As it turned out he was one of the local plumbers just down on Main Street. When he arrived I offered to pay for the damage but strangely all he did was laugh at me. He thanked me for my honesty and said he had been there before and the damage was too minimum to bother with and he sent me on my way. And that was it but you know it wasn't it because of the way he handled that situation, it had a deep impression on me. That wise older man as I put it cut me some slack and he made the effort to understand my situation. He knew I was a scared kid and he could have taken advantage of me, but instead he just turned the other cheek and he went the other way.

The Gospel lesson for today tells us that Jesus asks, "Why do you see the speck in your brother's eye but you don't notice the log in your own eye?" In other words, why do you forget that you may have been there before when other people stumble, and other people fall in their lives and make some of the stupid mistakes

that you made? Why are you so quick to pounce, so quick to condemn, so anxious to find fault with others when you overlook the same kinds of things in your own life in essence.

In the reading inside cover of our bulletin for today reminds us Lent is the time for all Christians to examine their lives and the emphasis is on the word their which translates to my life. It is time for me to take stock of myself and see what Jesus' life and death and resurrection means to me in the light of these things. What do I have to do, to bring my life in line with the life and teachings of Jesus? What Lent is not, is a time to look at others and point the finger at their mistakes to see how they haven't lived up to what God wants for their lives. Some people might call of this as being prophetic at times and I suppose in some cases of situations that might well be. But more often and not as I see it, spinning itself out as in some churches today and in the media today, it appears to me to be new form of Pharisaism, a new form of relying on legalism and judgmentalism to earn our way into God's good graces instead of relying on the grace of God to pull us through. And there are also many of the admonishes to more faithful living was made by Jesus of more faithfully living appears to be aimed squarely at those within their own community of faith and not to anybody outside of the community. Yet if this is true, that means every bit of Christian devotional time each day ought to spend time in self examination and not just during the Lenten season by the way. Now of course this doesn't mean we are to be uncritical of what is happening in the world around us nor does it mean we should spend all day picking ourselves apart either; but think it does mean we should spend a lot more of the time already dedicated to what is used to criticizing others, should be in improving own walk with Jesus. If we could do this even to a tiny degree, think of the impact it would have on our own churches; the impact on the larger world around us. How much more genuine our example to others would be and how much more loving and graceful our church would become if we lived by the philosophy of, "There but for the grace of God go I." I will say it again, "There but for the grace of God go I."

I want to close today with a thought from the lesson, I once taught to a group of seniors on First Corinthians in one of those retirement communities. In First Corinthians 4 which Nina Pletsch shared with us this morning, St. Paul refers to Christians as stewards of God's mystery and the lesson said in the commentary on that passage that be a steward of God's mystery we are to be the best we can with what God has given us. To be steward of God's mystery is to be best we can with what God has given us. I guess that is what I want to encourage all of us to do during this Lenten season as well. The best we can with the that things we have. Please let us not be too quick to ignore the short comings of our own lives in favor of placing those of our neighbors under a microscope for everybody to see

instead during Lent specially let's take a look at our own lives and above all else,
let's cut each other a little slack. And together we say AMEN