

March 8 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 19, no. 68

I Corinthians 1:18-25

John 2:13-22

Sermon *Let's make a Deal*

Once on a summer sunny afternoon a man was walking along the side of the edge of a cliff. He was admiring the beautiful scenery below; however, he was not paying a lot of attention to where he was going. He was enjoying the wonderful view. He was as my grandfather used to say, "Driving where he was looking instead of where he was actually going." And as a result the man when coming a bit too close to the edge slipped on a loose piece of dirt fell and headlong over the side of the cliff. Fortunately for him a small bush protruded from the cliff wall and as he was falling past he was able to grab hold of that branch and hang on for dear life and not fall and kill himself. The branch was not sturdy though and he knew he could not hold on to it forever. The man frantically called out "Is anybody up there?" No answer. Again he tried but still there was silence and so in one last desperate attempt he yelled at the top of his voice, "Is anybody up there?" And finally a voice called back saying "This is God "What do you want?" The man cried, "Please help me." He thought it was obvious. And God said, "I will help you but first I need to ask you a question, "Do you have faith?" "Yes", said the man confident that he would be saved "Are you sure" asked God. "Yes" cried the man, a bit disturbed that he was being asked the question again. "Alright then," said God, "But do as I say." "Let go!" The man paused for a couple of moment quietly and then yelled with all his might, "Is there anybody else up there?"

In my heyday, it was, *Let's Make a Deal* with host Monty Hall and now a day's its *A Deal or No Deal* with Howy Mandale. But the point is the same on either of those shows, you are tempted to make a trade or deal with something that you have for something that you think is a better deal. Sometimes you win and sometimes you lose.

In today's lesson prompts a similar quandary, I think. Is our Christian Faith the means by which we seek to draw near to Jesus, draw near to God, and God's loving will for our lives or is it merely a hedging of bets which guarantee us that we have wheels and deals to get the best possible position we can in God's good graces? After all everything else we have is insured; we insure our house, our cars, even our health, even our lives are insured. Why not look at the Christian faith as a way to hedge our bets and a little bit equity in something that is bound to pay off at some point. Its fire insurance, if you like. Although it may not seem crystal clear at this point the question about wheeling and dealing with our Christian faith is at the very heart of the reason why Jesus acted so rashly in cleansing the temple in Jerusalem that day. According to John's Gospel account, Jesus made a whip of cords and drove out the money changers and he drove out the tellers and the sacrificial animals; he was rebelling against the abuses of the systems of his own Jewish faith with an action which is difficult for us to understand; given the fact that throughout the Gospels, Jesus is pretty much portrayed as a rather gentle sort of man. But something got Jesus riled up; something which was perverting the very heart of the Jewish faith in his time. I think that Jesus saw the whole system had become twisted and as a result, what God had arranged as a way for every day regular people to show their love and devotion to

God had been totally turned upon its head at its very core. As Micki shared with us this morning, we pick up the story at Passover time when thousands of Jewish pilgrims came from all over the Roman Empire to Jerusalem to worship at the great temple. Once in Jerusalem the pilgrims faced a couple of different problems. First of all they needed an acceptable animal sacrifice to offer at the temple. Secondly they needed a coin without the image of Caesar's face stamped on it to use to pay the temple tax. The coins with Caesar's image on them would be seen as unclean. Only unblemished animals and specifically minted temple coins could be used in this whole process; otherwise that long journey to the temple would be made for nothing. Unfortunately what started out as a way to address problem came to be a religious racket, money changers supplied Jewish coins and animal sellers kept an ample supply of sheep, doves and other animals on hand. And whether or not if the profit margin/commissions on these things were unreasonable doesn't really matter because money really isn't the essential issue, here anyway. The pilgrims though were being robbed not so much as their money as they were being denied an honest opportunity to have a loving relationship with God as God had outlined the ability to make that relationship.

Unfortunately the same practice of religion is not so far removed our own day you might think. We think all of this is behind us but many of us as Christians even in today's church, come to church, do good things, give our offering, and live the best possible Christian life expecting to get some sort of reward for punching the time clock as we come in the door All of these things are good things to do but if they are done under the assumption that we can somehow strike a bargain with God in the process we gotten things very mixed up indeed.

I am thinking that Jesus' true religion, true faith in God, the God of Jesus is not based upon wheeling, and it is not based dealing. True faith in God begins when we allow God to be with us in every part of our lives day by day during the good times and the bad times as well. And that is why St Paul in First Corinthians says, that the religion of the cross of Jesus seems so foolish to the world around them. It is not logically by the world's standards to change your life by losing it or to find a great deal of satisfaction in devoting yourself to the needs of others during the course of your life While our offerings, our service, our worship are ever so important ways to show our love for God in return for the love that God has shown to us. It cannot buy us what God really gives us in God's grand and faithful and steadfast love. We are encouraged this morning to cling to the cross of Jesus as I spoke to the boys and girls about a little bit earlier this morning. To cling to God's love for us and not to let our faith in God to become a house of trade. We are encouraged to rejoice in God's gift to us even when it sounds down right foolish to do so. In the face of let's make a deal society which surrounds us. The love shown on the cross took the place of animal sacrifices; it took the place of coin exchanges. God holds up the cross of Jesus before our eyes and says, "I love you so much that I sent my son and I gave until it hurts and that kind of love cannot be bought not with coins, not with animal sacrifices, not even with special acts of service where our intentions are the very best that they could possibly be. The cross is not is not fire insurance instead the cross means the days of wheeling and dealing with God are and love prevails love wins; in the end. St. Paul tell again us in First Corinthians for those who are called both Jews and Greeks Jesus is the power of God, Jesus is the wisdom of God, the foolishness of God is far wiser than human beings and the weakness of God is stronger than strength of human beings.

And together we say. AMEN