

October 6 2013

Scripture Lessons ~ Lamentations 3:19-26

Luke 17:5-10

Sermon *Just Doing What Was Asked of Us*

Most of you know that you helped me celebrate a while back that I graduated from seminary over twenty-five years ago. During school I was a student pastor at a church in Denver, Pennsylvania called Peak United Church of Christ for all three years of my Seminary training. It was an experience that really made seminary for me. It was a wonderful experience. The people treated me as almost as if I was family and truly thought as their mission to sort of familiarize the new guy with the area of Pennsylvania that we were living in and support me as a person and do their part in helping me get to practical training that was necessary for me to become a pastor. It was a wonderful three years.

And at the end of those three years the members got together and gave me combination roast and going away party that I still will never, never forget. They not only served a wonderful Pennsylvania Dutch meal for the entire congregation but they put on the craziest program that I have ever seen in my life. To this day nobody has matched it. It had songs. It had skits. Some of the things were in English and some of them were in Pennsylvania Dutch. Men dressed as women. Woman dressed as men. Some of it was funny and some of it was crazy. Some it was sarcastic and a lot of it was heartfelt and sort of bittersweet because we knew we had to part.

It really made me feel good about the three years that we had spent together doing ministry and by them teaching me and me teaching them. But my mentor pastor, the pastor of the congregation, was sitting right next to me during the whole program. He whispered something in my ear that night which I also have never forgotten to this day. It was something kind of sad but also something pretty practical as well. He said, "Russ have a Ball! Enjoy this night because you are never going to see another celebration like this in the rest of your life When you leave the parishes in the future, some will be so mad because you are leaving because they liked you so much or so glad to get rid of you so much that you will never see anything like this again for the rest of your life.

Wow! What a weird statement. In essence what he was saying we have to wait often times until we leave a position or situation before we know how much people really appreciate us and cared for us. I think that is true in so many situations in job or volunteering. Even amongst many of us in the congregation today, rather than show our appreciation when it is due or give our thanks when it

is appropriate, we often wait until we part company before we show our affection or appreciation; even if we show that affection or appreciation or at all. And you know as well as I that happens in families and amongst friends as well. I have even gotten to the point when I read my hometown paper, The Gazette, week in and week out, and see the retirements of former teachers, or people who had an effect on me during my younger years, I will actually stop and send them a note how much I appreciated what they did for me. Half the time they will write back in shock because someone actually something they did for them long, long ago.

You know there is another way to look at this and that other way of looking at it is can be seen in the Gospel lesson from Luke which was read this morning. Jesus makes this alternate point in a rather strange way in this little meaty parable about slave and master.

First, before we even look at it at the text, it's worth saying Jesus says nothing about the evils of slavery in this passage whatsoever. Keep that in mind. Jesus just assumed that slavery existed and he uses it as an example. That in fact passages like this often gave religious people justification for slavery up and through the time of the Civil war. But it is also a reminder today for us as to how important it is to for us to interpret scripture in light of our experience, in the light of faithful scholarship. As scripture can be culturally bound in detail while it still imparts to us important and profound truth. Back down and off the soap box.

That said, Jesus says this very simple statement. Slaves are meant to be slaves, masters are meant to be masters. You wouldn't ask a slave to sit at your table and then serve you, but rather you would ask the slave to his or her job and then to be take time and be free to take nourishment afterwards. Likewise you wouldn't you wouldn't thank the slave for doing his or her job for doing what was asked of the slave, rather there are things that a slave are meant to do. Any thanks or reward that comes with that task is just gravy, just a bonus on top of everything that is done.

All this seems to fly in the face of what I said earlier about showing appreciation to people while you can or it might be too late. But I am not sure about that. You all know me as a person who likes to say thanks. I like to thank you and show appreciation in my ministry to people for the wonderful things that they do. But I think that what Jesus is saying here is if that is why we do the good, if that is why we engage in ministry if that is why we love God, we love our neighbor or thank for kudos or rewards for the strokes that we get as folks We know we are doing all these things for exactly the wrong reasons.

How many times have you heard people say or even you yourself say to yourself or others, "I'm done doing this or volunteer job. Nobody appreciates what I am doing anyway. Why the pastor thanks him/her but he didn't thank me for what I did or I am not putting myself out or giving to that much to that project

anymore because there is nothing in it for me anyway.” Which Jesus says this morning in the parable we have only done what we ought to have done we have only done what was asked of us by the master, by God. As much as leaders like pastors committee chairs, council members are asked to motivate, inspire the troops in the congregation. Faith in Jesus. Faith in our creator reminds us, we are to be self-motivated adults in the work in the work that we are called to do as Christians. It should be so second nature that it should flow seamlessly from home, to school, to work to church and back again. And so as followers of Jesus we are asked by Jesus by faith not to ask ourselves why we ought to do that if there is nothing in it for us rather why shouldn't we do that task because it is just a part of who we are and what it means for us to be followers of Jesus. What it means for us to be children of God.

So on this World Wide Communion Sunday as we focus on what it means to be a part of the world wide community of faith all around us, we are called as followers of Jesus to be about the work of God in the world around us. Not because I told you I told you to do it; not because George told you to do it; not because Micki and Diaconate asked you to do it but because we as Luke tells us, we are just doing what was asked of us by God. Just doing what was asked of us by God. And together we say Amen.