

September 14 2014

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalms 103

Genesis 50:15-21

Romans 14:1-12

Sermon *The State of Newport United Church of Christ*

I spent some time on Friday at the Women's Fellowship complimenting the Newport United Church of Christ on how organized we are for ministry. The office, the Council, the Committees and those who volunteer follow through so beautifully in their work, my job is made tremendously easier.

The same is true in the many ways our congregation has, what I would call, stabilized through the more than 3 years since I arrived. Our finances and our attendance are much more reliable, our building and property has been maintained and much improved. We have begun the process of revitalizing our work with our children and youth through continued good work in our Sunday School and our Vacation Bible School with the Lutherans and the addition of confirmation classes and our little budding youth group. Our outreach has continued to grow through our Missions Committee and our good relationship with our partner churches especially during the course of Lent and finally meaningful Bible Studies, musical offerings and meaningful worship has helped all of us to deepen our faith on a day to day basis.

But the question I put to the women of the church on Friday, is the same question I put to all of us today. So what, to what end, to what end. What is our purpose in organizing and what is our purpose in enhancing our ministry? What would God have us do with the abundance of our material and spiritual blessings? Well the most obvious answer is, that many of the things we do, create their own benefits by feeding us as members and friends of this church spiritually and hoping to meet the physical needs of our friends and our neighbors right here in this corner of the world and far beyond in many of the things that we do.

But the point I made with our women and I hope to make with you, if we don't go beyond, if we don't look for more and if we don't constantly have larger goals before ourselves our vision can become very cloudy and our work can close in on itself and become self-serving. I told the women that a helpful place to start is this; I think is the role of our Newport United Church of Christ fills in this larger community around us. I reminded them that sometimes jokingly and sometimes

seriously, we are known in this area “as the church that will let anybody in”. We are known as the church who will let anybody in, I like that-rightly so. The slogan our United Church of Christ has set before us a slogan and is the one that is so familiar to you, is “no matter who you are or where you are: you are welcome” “No matter who you are or where you are along life’s journey, you are welcome here.”

Some people think this slogan is too “loosey goosey” and some people think it needs to be tighten up; to be little bit more strict. But this is my contention, my contention is, Jesus wouldn’t have that slogan any other way. The slogan doesn’t mean we will never be challenged in our faith nor does the slogan mean that we will never change or grow in what we will do as followers of Jesus but it does mean just as in Jesus’ day there are a whole lot of hurting people out there who need to be reached by God’s love. People who have been rejected by a lot of other churches; people who have made significantly bad mistakes in their lives; people who don’t fit the mold of living that perfect life that people sometimes put on a pedestal for us to immolate and never, never making a mistake it seems; people who are successful but feel empty somewhat in that success; people who are very, very weary from being judged for the unique people that God created each of us to be

This church as you well know has a wide spectrum of people who call it home and who often agree to disagree on what I would consider the less important things in life, in favor of , I think, of the really important things that our faith teaches us like; the centrality of God’s love and our love for others ; the essential nature of forgiveness and mercy in our lives of faith; our mission to be joyful; kind and generous in the world around us and amongst one another; and then we ought to pray and have hope to never give up on life and on and on.

But you know what? There’s room for a lot more to be a part of this church family. Which brings me back to my original question: What are we here for? And the answer is, I think, that unless we continue to grow ; unless we continue to grow in love and truly be that place in the community that “place that let’s anybody in” we will cease to be the Newport United church of Christ that God calls us to be. We will cease to be the Newport United Church of Christ that so many of you over the years have built together. I hope that resonates to you as we work together this fall and I hope it resonates to you as we move forward in the future

Together we say AMEN