

Sunday, February 19, 2017

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18

I Cor. 3:10-11, 16-23

Matthew 5:38-48

Strength for the Journey

Many of you enjoy travelling by vehicle when the weather is clear and the roads are snow free. But what happens when you come across situations where there is construction, or detours or even road closures, what do you do especially if you do not know the area? With technology today we can have options lined up for us but what about in those areas where there isn't even GPS or WI-FI to help you through? You just end up just sitting and waiting for you are lost as to what to do until another vehicle comes along. And the trip suddenly becomes more stressful, longer and you wonder when you will arrive at your destination.

Some people look at their lives as a straight line and would draw their lifeline this way-(straight across) with no little glitches at all. Yet others might start their timeline as being straight across but then bumps appear on the line where there have been times of crisis, change- loss or gain, and this is when the line jumps up and down several times until such a time when the life line comes into focus and maybe even curves, or goes in a different direction. But what brings your life back to where it should be? How do we discern where life should be? Maybe one's life line is really supposed to be on two planes—your plan and God's plan and maybe at some point those two lines will cross again. But where is your life-line right now—God's plan, your plan or somewhere in between because your life has taken a new direction—for the good?

As you reflect on your lifeline think about this for a moment—were you alone in those moments of crisis? Or were you with loving family members or maybe you were having a crisis because of a family member? These are all possibilities of what might happen as we continue to journey in this life- not knowing what lies around the corner in time or in reality. And when we reflect on our life, we need to think about where our faith in God is- or should be for God never walked away from us even when our life changed paths.

For the last few weeks we have been focusing on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and have discovered that Jesus' teachings shared on the hillside long ago are still very relevant to how we live day to day. But Jesus' didn't start with teachings that were all new—he looked to the OT scriptures and used the laws of God as a basis for what he wanted the people sitting on the hillside to do. God's laws were received when the people of Israel were wandering and preparing to move into the Promised Land.

There were generations now living who have never known what having a home meant. For many years they travelled through rough dry hot country as well as plain, flooded and cooler countries until they reached the land God had promised them. Generations had been lost and begun anew. Families told stories of the ones who died and were buried during the journey of hope. And God told Moses about what these people were to do and how to live. Not only were there the Ten Commandments of Exodus, but many subsequent laws some of which we have shared in these last weeks as well. Today's reading from Leviticus are various laws about living with others and to be holy like God is holy.

Looking at your time line for recent days or weeks—have you been 'holy' like God is holy? What does this mean? Holy often refers to something about God and the stories about God's people. And sometimes there can be moments of holy humour as well. ...

Who is the greatest babysitter in the Bible? David== he rocked Goliath to a very deep sleep. What kind of motor vehicles are in the Bible? God drove Adam and Eve out of the garden in a Fury. David's Triumph was heard throughout the land. And the Apostles liked their Honda as they were all in one accord. And one more—What kind of man was Boaz before he married? Ruthless.

To understand these jokes one needs to have a bit of biblical knowledge about the people mentioned—David and Goliath; Adam and Eve, David, the Apostles of Jesus and the story of Ruth and Boaz. And if and when we can laugh at these questions about biblical characters we learn more about their faith and the kind of relationship they each had as they lived their lives following God's laws and the teachings of Jesus.

What does it mean to be holy? If we walk according to the laws of God because they are understood, followed and shared with others we are trying to live a holy life. And we should try to live this holy life because God gives us the strength to do so. We read in Hebrews 12:14 that we are to "pursue holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." We are to seek holy living as we go from day to day. And we are to do even more for others in order to be holy.

Jesus tells us in today's reading from Sermon on the Mount how to live a holy life. He not only asks us to love our neighbours, but to love and pray for our enemies. Not only by offering the other cheek or giving the second cloak, or by going the extra mile we are to break patterns of power where power is held over others. This enables power to be shared and held mutually. This enables relationship to be stronger than judgement, compassion to be more important than guilt. This new law is the law of community and love.

And this is difficult. For of course when you are in a disagreement with someone you want to be sure to get your point across in a strong way, but what if you let the other speak fully and hear what is

actually shared then state your idea. Isn't this better than pointing a finger of power over them? What about who you greet? Do you only say hello to those you know as you walk down the street or in a mall? Wouldn't it be amazing for everyone here to say hello to someone they do not know and watch for a reaction in the mall? Maybe we should start here in this church—challenging you to say hello to someone you know of, but not spoken to before? Wouldn't it be a good thing to know who is there as well?

Jesus said, if someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. How often do you sit and talk with someone today. Time often decides what we can do with each other. We are tied to our watches. If you were to go the extra mile it means doing more than what is expected of you. We like this when it comes to customer service in stores, garages and service in general. Why? Because the person who did a little more for you made you feel important, that you mattered. This is what Jesus asks us to do.

In Jesus' time, to walk an extra mile took a lot of time, effort and an understanding of support from one person to another. If you were traveling and your companion stayed with you longer than necessary this meant you would be safer on the road and you would not be alone potentially prey to animals or robbers. You were often seen as a caring and compassionate person whose choices went beyond oneself. This is what it means to be holy- doing what God asks to do and more.

Holiness exists in our hearts, minds and wills and can easily be destroyed. We can choose to be holy and follow God's laws and Christ's teachings or we can give in to our desires, our emotions and attitudes. We can also reflect on our judgments and reasoning, our relationships, what we have state as well as discerned the past and our memories throughout our life. Even our use of social media all play into what can make us holy or not. But what do we do to keep us walking with Jesus in holiness? How do we receive strength for this journey we call life?

We need to let the Spirit guide us and empowering us. We need to decide each day to be holy- to give it to God. To be aware of temptations when they come and to guard your heart. To be aware of your thoughts and live a life with accountability. To fill your mind with God's teachings- to pray, read scripture and do service or to live simply, generously, humbly. To be careful in what you do with all that is out there. To live within the present focusing on the future our collective future with God. And to never give up.

Never give up—because God is not giving up on you. God made you and calls you to live according to his laws. Christ teaches you to love each other. You are of Christ and Christ is of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.