

Sunday, June 3, 2018

Psalm 139

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Mark 2:23 to 3:6

Decline/Respond- Your Call to Answer

There is a television program called "What Would You Do?" where actors go into a social setting like a donut shop, restaurant or even sit at a park bench and play out a scene from everyday living which causes bystanders to be in shock, to get involved in the situation or to walk away completely not wanting to be involved. The premise of the show is to find out how extensive people are willing to help another person either as an individual or to assist this individual against another person or persons who threatens to harm them. That is they set up the scene and let the cameras pick up how the people reacts, respond or walk away.

One episode shows a woman needing to fill a prescription at a pharmacy. However, she doesn't have the money to pay for it. Other customers sit and watch in the waiting room, and some offer the woman the money she needs while a few read or get up and walk away. When a person seems to have done what is expected there are smiles all around. But this is not always the case.

Another episode depicts an atheist who is eating in a restaurant. This person becomes angry and vocal when a Christian family next to him starts praying before they eat their meal. The Christian family continues to pray. Upon completing their prayer the atheist then wants to talk with one of the parents about how they should not be doing this in a public place and how they are actually harming their children that God exists.

Pentecost is now—God's Spirit is amongst us and we are called to rejoice that God is faithful, that God blesses us and that His Spirit will lead and guide us. But all of these actions are from God to us. The question we need to answer is how do we respond to all of these actions God has and does for us? God is faithful, blessing us and leading and guiding us but what do many of us do? We ignore or turn away and do not let His Spirit speak to us as we search out and make our own way. But if we say we are followers of God in faith, that we let the Spirit guide us are we truly living the way God wants us to live?.

Many of us have cell phones or telephones at home. For many of these phone lines, we have an option—call display. This is the way by which we can figure out who is calling us by recognizing their name or number as it appears either on the phone or its screen. On cell phones there are also two boxes which are coloured red and green. To Answer (Green) to stop

/end the incoming call in red. On other phones it might say the individual's name or company name, then the phone number. What occurs next is up to the individual. Do you accept or decline the call? What if you accept the call—you might be talking with this person for 3 minutes or 30. You might not recognize the name the number or even know what they are calling about. Could it be a telemarketer or your child? Could it be a doctor's receptionist or your bank? Before call display was made possible, we didn't know who called! We risked it all—time included- and said, Hello! Then began a conversation.

Today we don't receive phone calls as often for many times our messages can be summed up by texting, by tweeting or even an email. And we do these things- when we choose, not when another person is wanting us. But is this what we should or ought to do or not? By choosing not to respond what are we missing?

This is also true of the Spirit calling you to live according to Jesus' teachings and out of love that you have for God. Why do we serve God? For many reasons- but mainly because God made you and called you to be faithful to him. You are fearfully and wonderfully made and no matter where you are, where you go, God knows where you are and is with you. God is calling you to live for him are you going to accept/ decline? It is up to you. No one can decide this for you. You have to make this commitment alone. And when you do, God's abundant love will continue to grow and flourish within you. You will be touched by the Spirit who will enlighten you with a new wave of hope so that you might flourish and love others in return.

When we look to Paul's words in 2 Corinthians we note that when we accept God, we do not preach ourselves, we become servants or brothers and sisters with Jesus. The focus of choosing to follow God is a big shift. Once we say "accept" the focus of our life shifts, it is no longer about me or my, it is about who we are in relationship with Jesus. It is how we live following the commandments of God, the new commandment in Jesus and how we live as reflectors of Jesus. We need to know that it is no longer about us. We must live by his teachings and to do what is right and good in his eyes. However, there are times when we too need to decide what is best as we serve Jesus and live out our faith in God.

There is a story about a reform rabbi had a weakness for golf. He loved golf but had such a thriving congregation that he had no time for his passion. Searching his busy schedule, he found one day in a year's time when he could play. Unfortunately, that day fell on the Sabbath. The rabbi apologized to God and traveled some distance to a golf club so that no one who might know him would see him.

As he teed up the first ball, an angel looked down from heaven aghast: "A rabbi playing golf on the Sabbath!" He immediately told the Almighty about it. God was upset and on the third hole sent down a gust of wind that made the rabbi's ball sink into the cup - a hole in one!

The angel watching was puzzled, "You call that punishment?" "Think about it," the Lord replied. "Who can he tell?"

In our gospel readings the Pharisees are taking close watch on Jesus and what he and his disciples are doing. They notice that he and his disciples took some grain from a field in order to make some food. These Pharisees accused him of doing unlawful things on the Sabbath, the holy day of rest. But Jesus told them a story of David from their older teachings who at one time with his friends were hungry went to the high priest in search of help and food. They were able to eat the consecrated bread usually only eaten by the priests. But, the Pharisees claimed that this was wrong and they should not have been able to eat this consecrated bread. Jesus response was that "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

A man with a shriveled hand came into the synagogue one Sabbath. The people were watching Jesus and anything he said or did was being reported to the Pharisees. Jesus saw the man with the shriveled hand. "Stand up in front of everyone," he told him. The man stood up. And not speaking to the man, he turned to the crowd and Jesus asked, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath, to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" No one said a word.

What would you have done? Nothing, answer the question, or walk away. When you answered your call to serve God you risked and continue to risk a lot of things—your life, your credibility and mostly, you risk who you once were in order to become faithful to what God wants you to be. Would you have said, "Go ahead; heal the man's hand." And then faced the consequences of that time?

In our time, if we saw someone in need- we would not hesitate to call 911 and get emergency help on sight because we know that this is what is necessary. Yet back then to go against the Pharisees meant possibly being excluded from the synagogue and for that matter the community and anyone who supported it. You would be left out and at that time it meant being left alone.

Jesus said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and his hand was completely restored. The Pharisees watched this and left the synagogue. The text then says

and they began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. The Pharisees did not like Jesus questioning their teachings, their policies, their laws including those made about the Sabbath and what healing really meant.

Often when we think of healing we instinctively acknowledge the need for physical healing because it is what is visible. More and more stories are shared now about the need for mental health or healing. But Jesus through the healing of this man's hand also raised the need to be spiritually healed that is made whole through His presence. How often do we even think of spiritual healing? And if we do, is it all right to ask for spiritual healing on the Sabbath? These are some of the questions which are raised when we accept the call to serve Christ Jesus. Is the Sabbath made for people or did the idea of Sabbath only benefit those who needed this when convenient.

When Jesus asked, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" those who heard, kept silence. But when we reflect on this situation, to stand silent when the power to heal is within reach; that is sin. They knew Jesus could heal, that wasn't the question. The question was whether he would heal on the Sabbath! They stay silent when all they had to do was say, "Please, heal the poor man!" The people listening were afraid of the repercussions by the Pharisees and they were afraid to truly follow Jesus.

Are you committed to serving Jesus? God continues to call people to serve just like the many people who communicate with you. The only difference is, is that God's Spirit is trying to break through to your mind and heart so that you will follow Christ's teachings and faithfully live. God knows you through and through and is with you wherever you go. You cannot avoid that call. Simply put, do you answer His calls? Should you? Christ calls to us to follow him. Are we willing to answer this call? There are many people who are silent; many ready to criticize and yet God's Spirit continues to reach out so that you might follow and commit yourself to serve Jesus. But we do have the ability to empty our jails of crime, our shelters of the abused, our rest homes of the lonely and our streets of hopelessness. Our world could beat hunger, educate the masses and so much more; but we lack the commitment. Perhaps, we should say; we lack the committed! But God will not give up and leave us alone. He will continue to call.

And when God calls you- what will you do—"Decline/ Respond- It's Your call!"

Loving God, here we are ready to listen, to work and to do what you enable us to do. Help us to respond in faith, with hope and to truly love others in the Jesus' name as we speak up and show up caring for those who are in need. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen..