



Pastor Gwen's Message

Sunday July 5, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
AMEN

Have you ever wondered why Moses and the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years? Come on ladies. Well, it is because even then, men would not stop for directions. Well, ok I admit, this is not really an explanation as to why the Israelites wandered in the wilderness; I do think that there is some truth to why men and women are so hesitant to stop to ask for directions.

It has to do with the pressure of public opinion. What people will think? I do surmise that if you are all honest that at least once in your lifetime you have spent some time worrying about how other people see you. And so we push on, rather than stop to get directions, admitting that we are lost or uncertain or confused. When our only hope is that no one will notice how lost we really are!

So would you agree with me that generally our fear of being ridiculed is much greater than being wrong? Think about it another way. Do we convince ourselves that as long as we have the approval of those around us, it doesn't matter how far off course we are?

In a commentary I read this week there was a story told by Rev. Paul Zwarich about an old man and his son. I apologize if you have heard this story before, but it is such a wonderful example.

Once upon a time there was an old man and his son who were walking home from town one day with their donkey. As they made their way home, their neighbors began to laugh at them and asked themselves, 'Why are both of them

walking? One of them should be riding the donkey.’ After much ridicule the man placed his son on the donkey and they continue on their way.

But soon their neighbors began to criticize them again saying, “Look at that! The boy is making that poor old man walk while he rides the donkey! Why doesn’t the boy get off the donkey and let the old man ride for awhile?”

Hearing this, the boy dismounted, and the old man got on the donkey. But before long the neighbors again began to criticize them and wondered out loud, “Why is that man riding the donkey and making that helpless boy walk.” What kind of man is he?”

Hearing this, the father reached down and picked up his son and they both rode the donkey and continued their way home. But the neighbors again complained and said to one another, “Look at that poor donkey, having to carry two people on it’s back” Why don’t they give that poor animal a break and get off of it before the animal gets hurt?”

In desperation the father and son did the only thing left for them to do. They picked up the donkey and carried it on their backs the rest of the way home.

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus is surrounded by the crowd listening to his teaching. And Jesus admonishes the crowd because they are behaving like children. Similar to the neighbors in our donkey story. And so Jesus asks, “To what will I compare this generation. It is like children. . . .” Jesus remarks about how the crowds responded negatively to John the Baptist and Jesus will knew that they also were critical of Him because he ate with tax collectors, talked to women and was king to those outside of the body of Israel.

The crowd mentality of Jesus’ day is plainly, not very nice. People were critical. They thought the world revolved around them. And so Jesus in this second part of our Gospel reading for this morning thanks His father in heaven for hiding from the wise and intelligent and revealing them only to children, to infants. What is going on here? I think, it is that Jesus is frustrated with as scripture says, “this generation”. Those in high office reject Jesus. But the common people flock to him. The more that Jesus appeals to the rejected of society, the more that society people reject Jesus. Does that make sense?

And so the little people Jesus speaks of here are those that are not full of self, but rather open to receiving God. Having no religious assurance, they are more than a little open to receiving God's grace. Possessing little wisdom, they are open to learning from Jesus. Like a child these people are soaking up all they can in learning about Jesus. Don't get me wrong, there are certainly exceptions to every rule and as we know the Gospel is good news for even the rich and powerful.

And, these little people more easily grasp the true message of Jesus. They are not worn out from all the social and religious rules and exceptions. They do not yet have the need, the burden of trying to earn social approval. They do not have the need, the burden of trying to live up to what other people tell them is right in order to fit in.

I think we still see this pressure today, maybe more than ever before in our lives. Think with me for a minute about how judgmental people can be even when dealing with a pandemic. Do you feel like people look down on you if you go into a store wearing a mask? Do neighbors think less of you because you are practicing the "stay at home" order even after it was struck down by the Wisconsin Supreme Court? Will we judge people that are not here today as being afraid to come worship because they fear for their health and those that they love? Even during stressful times, maybe even more during stressful times, the burden of worrying about social acceptance and approval is high. After all we are human and we do have an innate need to conform, to be liked, to fit in and be part of something that is bigger than ourselves.

Well, our reading today is telling us that there is a better way than relying on earthly solutions. Our society wants us to conform to their ways to sell their products and buy into their suggestions that life will be better with a certain model of car, their brand of blue jeans, a special coffee to wake you up in the morning. Or my favorite lately is the eye gel for puffy bags under your eyes, Plexiderm. WOW. Or how many of us said we would just die for a haircut? We might laugh, but we are all subject to this pressure and power of these ads, not to mention the peer pressure to influence our actions.

So, listen again to the words that Jesus speaks. "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Yes, as we

hear these words we may recall a time when they were used in a funeral service, but friends this is an invitation for us today, right now in this life.

Jesus promises us rest. Jesus is offering an alternative to keeping up with the Jones, to fending off the social opinions. Jesus gives us this wonderful opportunity to have something better than what all those false ads offer. He is offering His way to not only an abundant life here on earth, but also forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He, after all, went to the cross, willingly to make those promises real. He died and rose again to grant us those amazing gifts of forgiveness and life, real life. Jesus wants us to know and follow His way to salvation. He wants us to focus on Him and not what other's think of us. Jesus wants us to yoke to Him and let Him bear the burden of our sin and the ways of the world.

I am sure you all know how a yoke works, even if you did not grow up on a farm. Two animals, like horses or oxen are tied together. What a great invention if you think of it. Two are better than one. Imagine that ideal. Together they plow the field with less burden on one than when there are two.

Well, yoking to Jesus is even more amazing. We do not even have to work hard when we are yoked to Christ. The field, if you will, has already been plowed so to speak. There is nothing left for us to do because Christ has already moved the yoke to that cross of Calvary and to His death. He pulled the whole load for all believers.

And since the grace of God is available to all, Jesus does not scold us as the world does. But rather, He loves us just as we are. We are no longer victims in the eyes of our Lord. We are his precious children, His precious little ones.

And what good news is this. Being yoked to his death we are free from the impossible worldly expectation. We can go to God and have rest for all time. Folks, you don't have to carry you donkey home. Don't let your sins weigh you down. Give your burdens, your sins to Jesus with repentance and believe that this offer of Jesus is true. "Come to me", Jesus urges us. "And I will give you rest."

AMEN