

December 8, 2019

How Is Your Faith Journey Going?

Luke 10:30-36

Before I begin I must make a disclaimer. As I prepared this message I was warned by a higher authority (my wife) to not be political. This is not about how to vote or even whether to vote or not vote. It is about who we are as Christians.

I want to share two experiences that have caused me to question how my faith journey is going. I find myself wrestling with whether I am a pilgrim or a settler.

As Mike read the story of the 'good' Samaritan we all probably feel comfortable. For some of us we have known this story since our childhood in Sunday school.

There are five characters. The priest who was the direct contact between the people and God was so hardened by his religion he had to pass on the other side of the road. All his religious understanding and knowledge did not turn his heart to the beaten man.

The Levite, a worker in the temple and keeper of the local synagogues, saw only uncleanness and certainly did not feel a need to help. Was he thinking to himself "by God's grace I am not like him? Only a sinner would suffer so" and he passed as far away from the injured person as possible.

The Samaritan demonstrated grace, mercy and love even going so far as to ensure care for the hurting man as long as needed. He covered his nakedness, poured oil in his wounds, carried him to shelter and insured long term care. The Samaritan gave him hope.

The inn keeper was committed to the hurt man's welfare being paid to do so.

The man beside the road was naked, hurting, robbed and seems to be without hope.

Which do you identify with? Give an amen if you see yourself as the priest (pause), the Levite (pause), the inn keeper (pause), the Samaritan (pause) or the person on the side of the road (pause).

If you see yourself beaten and naked, in desperate need rather than as the ‘good’ Samaritan does it change how you might see the world around you. Does it maybe change how you see others? Would we have more empathy and compassion?

I have always seen myself as being like the Samaritan. I was settled in that reality for a long time seeking to hear the Lord say well done faithful servant. But I now realize from this story I am the person robbed, beaten and left naked. The religious witnesses pass me by. I was and I am absolutely dependent on the Samaritan; Jesus.

I am absolutely dependent on God’s grace, mercy and peace if I am going to be a witness of God’s good news. And without God’s Holy Spirit I can do nothing.

In our faith journey life events can throw us into the ditch just like the man going down to Jericho ... and leave us there. But we can call out to Jesus and he may want us to be a witness in his name.

Do you remember not so long ago when WWJD (“What Would Jesus Do”) was seen everywhere? It was on wrist bands and bumper stickers.

Well, the second experience which causes me to question how my faith journey is going still makes me shudder. I was having a conversation with a woman (she lives in another state) who was excited about her church; telling me how wonderful the worship was and the power of the preaching. She was sharing good news. As we talked we turned to events of the day. I asked her what she thought Jesus would do about the people seeking asylum in our country. She said she knew what Jesus would do but she was drawing a line in the sand. She was settled. She was no longer a pilgrim on a faith journey.

The same spirit that raised Christ from the dead dwells in Christians. But are we listening. “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to our mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in us” (Romans 8:11).

There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. (1 John 4:18)

We deny the power of the Holy Spirit when we draw lines to keep ourselves from being spiritually challenged in our thoughts, what we say and what we do.

There are word pairs in the bulletin. We are going to look at some word comparisons such as settler and pilgrim. We will talk about some of the word pairs, hopefully stirring us up. To quote Paul “I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory.” (2 Peter 1:13)

“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple.”(Psalm 19:7)

What does God require in the Old Testament? The Prophet Micah wrote “The Lord requires us to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God”. (Micah 6:8)

We read in the New Testament they asked Jesus ‘What must we do to perform the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God; that you believe in him whom he has sent.’ (John 6:28-29)

There is no middle way in Christianity. There is only one way: Jesus said he is the way, the truth and life. Early believers were actually called “People of the Way”. Sounds like pilgrims on a faith journey, not settlers.

It is the truth that sets us free. Today Jesus says to those who believe in him, ‘If you continue in his word, you are truly his disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’ (John 8:31-32)

Christians are the freest people on the earth although we often do not act like it. In everything we have absolute freedom of choice. That is how God has set it up. Being the freest people we actually get to decide whether our witness will lead others to God’s grace, mercy and peace or turn them away from God.

Do we set our Bible on the side table and let talking heads tell us what our faith is? We are called by Christ’s name, Christians. Unlike those who are dependent on their own intellect and conscience we have the Holy Spirit to help us.

God tells us that if we will seek him first he will show us his way and give us the power to follow it. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33)

We were in that ditch beside the road and sometimes we fall back into it. Even as believers at times it feels as if we have been robbed, beaten and left naked.

Has our scriptural awareness been co-opted? Are we so settled, have we drawn so many lines in the sand we now allow fear to motivate us rather than our faith.

As Christians we are being called back to the faith journey, back to being pilgrims. We are called to leave the settler's comfort. "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil." (1Thessalonians 5:19-22)

Satan is so subtle. 'He is like a roaring lion, your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.' (1 Peter 5:8) He will do all he can to separate us from Jesus, our strength, the source of our faith. As a result we meekly become settlers. We must discipline ourselves; keep alert.

For example he has us considering the lessor of two evils (God abhors any form of evil). He has us thinking the ends justify the means (no, if it is not done God's way then no matter how good the end seems it is not the end God wants). He says God helps those who help themselves (this thinking allows us to leave the beaten person in the ditch "if he would only help himself God would keep him from being attacked and in the ditch").

Our discussion about pilgrims and settlers is not about a physical journey seeking a new life or settling but about our spiritual faith journey on into eternity.

We call ourselves Christians. Jesus made it clear we are his witnesses (Acts 1:8). Whether we are a good witness for our Savior, people of grace, mercy, love and peace, or a poor witness does make a difference. Our witness affects others.

This morning let us be stirred up in our individual faith journeys.

In the bulletin I asked Don to list comparisons I have been thinking about. Today, and maybe later, as you look at these comparisons where do you find yourself? Are we settlers, no long journeying, or are we pilgrims moving through life as God the Holy Spirit directs and guides us?

What we think, say and do comes from within. Without choosing God's Holy Spirit we are left with only our own minds. We will find ourselves being settlers in thought, word and deed. I believe we see ourselves differently if we are pilgrims; opening our hearts to God.

Have we been taught that calling ourselves Christians means we are ‘good’ Samaritans? In our own minds we think we are (or should be) ‘good’ Samaritans, witnessing for our Lord. But we easily get settled and settlers like lines in the sand. Is there a false sense of security inside the lines?

This morning we come to ask where we are in our faith journey: not to get stuck in a box. By our human nature we will draw the box to reflect who we think we are and not allow God to move us on towards the person he wants us to be.

The things we hear, the things we see, and the things we think are constantly affecting us as on our faith journey. We are bombarded by so much information (TV, radio, newspapers, other people) we find comfort in drawing lines around our settlement. We have forgotten our strength is in the Lord.

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.” (Romans 8:11)

We so easily forget that with the Holy Spirit all things are possible. ‘What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.’ (Luke 18:27) The question is do I let the Holy Spirit shape my thoughts, words, and acts or have I slipped into doing it my way?

I have been challenged by the two words stupid and ignorant. Do I readily accept what others say to avoid what God may ask of me? Being stupid is the result of injury to our brain. Ignorance is a choice.

What about children, both unborn and alive in this world around us? Jesus does not say you cannot love both with the same passion, at the same time. I don’t think we are allowed to care about one and ignore the other. Can you see how this affects our witness in our thoughts, words and actions? More importantly it may affect our intercessory prayers for all children.

Peter tells us our response to the word pair anxious and expectant. “In your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to answer anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” (1 Peter 3:15-16). Rather than being anxious about what is happening we can see it as an opportunity. Will we be ready with an answer for those who are anxious?

Our faith journey with Jesus begins in our hearts. The Samaritan didn't judge. He took care of the other person, eased his pain, covered his nakedness, and brought healing and hope.

When we see others hurting or sinful do we see ourselves? Do we react with empathy? Paul tells us "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." (Philippians 4:8)

Do we close the door on people assuming they are fixed in their present state or do we believe God can make any settler a pilgrim? You and me are proof of that. We must be a voice of life not a voice of stagnation and death.

We cannot be both set in our ways, a settler, and be a pilgrim on a faith journey. We all know enough science to realize like everything else we are either moving or standing still: there is no half move - half stand.

Being a pilgrim is hard. Changing is hard unless we see how important it is because there is a false comfort in old thoughts, words, and prejudices.

Our views, our understanding of what we see and hear may be wrong. Choosing to be pilgrims we open ourselves for the Holy Spirit to change our perspective. Many of our views and our understanding are driven by human selfish nature or the lies Satan spreads.

Looking at the words victim and victor one of the first things I must realize is that if I see myself as a victim then I can avoid responsibility. But we are to live as responsible, victorious people. (1 John 5:3-5)

God allows bad things to happen to his children. God is the God of good and bad experiences. Who can God use in bad situations except a believer who will suffer unjustly to witness God's grace, mercy and peace? If we are not being used by God (remember, all things work together for good) when bad things happen then we will call ourselves victims. We will respond either our way or God's way. Our response to hard times is either to complain or celebrate. Am I a victim or are these times a blessing?

Do we choose the fruit of the Spirit when we are faced with the choice between condemn and compassion? There is a contrast, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,

peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.” (Galatians 5:22)

We must not let our urge to judge others rob us of our joy. Whenever we feel we must condemn someone remember even Jesus did not think that was his job. ‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:17) So who gave us the ministry of condemning?

Our behavior and our decisions should reflect the fact we are followers of a Holy God and not accept worldly behavior as our way of living. We should choose kingdom behavior. If we commit to seek holiness in the midst trials and tests then God can help us to succeed. He does not want us to fail.

Let’s share a few more observations of word pairs. Rather than be anxious we can be expectant remembering we can do all things through Christ and He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

We are not slaves we have access to the truth and the truth sets us free. (John 8:32).

What about fear and peace? Perfect love casts out fear. We should be people with a message of peace. Jesus leaves us his peace not the world’s peace. He has conquered the world. (1 John 4:18 and John 16:33)

Are we dividers or is unity our goal? “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

If we find ourselves having trouble deciding whether to be judgmental or merciful we have forgotten Micah 6:8. We are to be merciful. God is the judge.

When comparing dark and light remember in Jesus was life, “and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1:4-5) We are to bring light into darkness.

We are to follow Paul’s admonition about interceding. If we can’t decide whether to save or condemn think about Paul’s words to us “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for everyone.” (1 Timothy 2:1)

We are not to be people who make excuses but rather we confess. Pilgrims on a faith journey move on because “if we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

When trying to figure out what to do with the choice between lies and the truth we can fall back on the Ten Commandments: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”(Exodus 20:16)

To suffer or sing, James challenges us writing “count it all blessing. My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy.” (James 1:2)

When we think about deportation or amnesty do we remember Ruth? She was a foreigner fleeing famine. She was a Moabite and she was King David’s great-grandmother. (Matthew 1:5)

Hurt or heal, reconcile or divide? ‘God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to you and me.’ (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

Deciding to follow Christ is a decision about eternity. Day-to-day the most challenging decision is whether or not to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us as pilgrims. Paul said “To live is Christ and dying is gain.” (Philippians 1:21)

Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt us is a lie. Today words are causing children to kill themselves. Words are being used to hurt people; to keep them by the roadside, poor, naked, beaten and told they are without hope.

If we set the good news message aside to avoid the discomfort of moving onward in our faith journeys we can rest assured Satan will give us all kinds of subtle but deadly messages: some of them even sound Christian.

Today if we are settlers the voices we hear can be more powerful than the Holy Spirit because we are choosing not to listen for the still quiet voice of God. We decide not to be pilgrims, no longer people on a faith journey!

Let your heart be open to the Holy Spirit, remember the words of Jesus; remember whose you are and how we are to represent him on our faith journeys.



It is important for us stop and think on these things.

In Matthew we read how important it is to Jesus. ‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord”, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?” Then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.” (Matthew 7:21-23)

**PRAYER** Lord we so easily become settlers and put aside your word. We are forgiven and we are new every morning. Lord please help us stay on our faith journey as you direct us and give us words of encouragement and hope for everyone we come in contact with. We ask this in our Lord Jesus’ name.