

Pentecost 21A: October 29, 2017

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18 Love your neighbor

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 Paul gave of himself

Matthew 22:34-46 The Great Commandment

In our three year reading cycle, as we get very close to the end of Year A, we have come to the first part of Jesus giving us the Readers Digest version of the faith-walk God wants from each of us. In the popular words of the senior pastor at Saddleback Church in southern California, our paying attention to the first and second parts of what Jesus commanded for us, defines our Purpose.

It took the Pharisees 613 commands to summarize God's law (the Decalogue); it took Jesus two commands, with five parts. This passage in Matt 22 is called the Great Commandment. (Matt 28 is the Great Commission.) Jesus took one piece of his Great Commandment from Deut 6:4-5, to love God. The other part is from Lev 19:18b, to love our neighbor.

The first part of the Great Commandment says to love God completely, with every ounce of our being, at all times, in all circumstances, and in all places. That is the definition of worship. God asks for all of your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. A Samaritan woman tried to find out from Jesus what was the best place and style of worship. But Jesus told her that those external issues are immaterial. Where you worship is not as important as why you worship, and how much of yourself you offer to God when you worship.

Each of us is going to live out our Purpose in a unique way; no two people will do it in the same way, because you and I are not alike. We are unique individuals, crafted by God with a unique mix of Spiritual Gifts (calming spirit), Heart (Passion-helping), Abilities (org development), Personality (introvert & extrovert), (Life) Experiences (family business, engineering, other countries...). SHAPE.

St. Francis worshipped God when he was giving food or clothing to people who had none. Brother Lawrence worshipped God as he served his brothers in the monastery by washing dishes and cooking for them. You and I can build an attitude of worship into our work day, our commute, our lawn work, into our whole day. We can choose a rule of life to practice the presence of God.

The second part of the Great Commandment is to love our neighbor. We cannot love God completely if we do not learn to practice human relationships based in godly love. Another way to define the second Purpose that is contained in Jesus' Great Commandment is: ministry. God wants each of us to be ministers of His grace. This involves using all of our resources; money, gifts, talents, opportunities that get set in front of us, all that we have and all that we are - to help others. The parable of the Good Samaritan tells us who our 'neighbor' is; not to only help our best friends, but anyone in need of something we can provide. Caring, time, active listening, friendship.

Last night there was a team of about eight youth and adults who supervised crafts, brought and served food, played spooky music, and played half a dozen games (bobbing for donuts). The evening made 25-30 parents and children feel very welcome and happy. This church and preschool did great ministry through last night's Halloween party! We gave a very special gift of ministry to this community!

Paul told the Thessalonians that he was determined to share with them not only the Good News of God, but also to share himself with them. How comfortable are we; how trusting can we be in our ministry, to share ourselves with other people? One priceless part of our being a church body, a faith family, is that this is a safe place to trust sharing who we really are. This faith family, St. Luke's, is meant to be a place where we can practice how to worship God at all times and in all places (including a Halloween party). This place being our training ground is just one reason it is special, and unique, and important for us to keep strong, active, engaging, and relevant.

In the Great Commandment, Jesus boiled down 613 laws, and simplified 10 Commandments, into two ways of life that result in fully pleasing God. He taught us to fill our day with worship, and to use all the skills and resources we have to provide the ministry of God's grace to other people. Jesus silenced the religious leaders with his wisdom. May it be so that we commit to always value the wisdom Jesus shared with us, and to set these two standards before us every single day. Amen.