

Lent 3, 2017

Peace in the Journey

Ephesians 5:1-14 / St. Luke 11:14-28

By Rev. Mr. Bill Baker

St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, Or

I graduated from high school many, many years ago. At that time my classmates and myself were full of ambition, knowing that we would have to fight hard to beat the next guy in pursuit of scholarships, military ranks and job promotions. We were entering the race and were trained to give our new ventures our all. Some of us rose to the top, some of us wore out and settled and others of us still endure the struggle of life just to make ends meet. We can all look to the future with grand goals in mind, but for most of us the reality is much different than our expectations.

Back in my early days as an AF Airman living in Germany, I was sent off to a school to learn leadership. The top student in this class would receive what was called the John Levito Award. This was highly sought after award that brought with it the opportunity for faster advancement in the ranks. As the instructor went around the class, we were all required to talk about our career fields and what we added to the mission of the Air Force. Well, I thought, I should have a better than average chance, after all I my job is to maintain and load F-16 weapon systems, next to being a pilot what could be more cool than that! Once I tell them how awesome my job is I am sure to come out on top. Well, I went through the class and never came close to achieving the honor of the John Levito Award. Was I sad? No. Was I disappointed? Maybe...but not for the reason you might suspect. The person who won the John Levito Award was a kitchen server. Before that class I would have thought that this was the lowest job one could do in the military. How could being a cook be prestigious? How could being a food server raise one to the level of such a reward? I'll tell you how he did it...and it changed my life. You see, he wasn't looking for fame or prestige. His whole demeanor was about what he could do to make the start of everyday a joyous beginning for every Airman who came through his line. He knew that, being the first person we saw every morning, he had

some impact, some influence on how our day would go and that the mission could only succeed if he got us off in the right direction. This was true leadership. It's funny how I never thought about the impact he had on me everyday as I stood in line for breakfast. I looked forward to watching him interact with everyone as much as I looked forward to having the omelet he just prepared for me. In hindsight I can see now that this was probably my first real example of humility and it was powerful.

So, here we are on this fine Sunday morning in Lent, wondering why is Bill reminiscing about days of old. In my Lenten journey this year I have been struck...impacted...differently than in days and Lents past. Through the technology of Face Book I have seen a progression of perception in those I have know the longest. My high school classmates and myself have reached and toppled that 50-year mark that AARP has been reminding us about since our mid-forties. What I have noticed is that the postings, for the most part, have changed from hungry embarkations reaching out for success and claims of fame to realizations that life is better enjoyed in the simple things found in contentment; reading a book, watching the waves, playing board games with the family, or even mowing the lawn. In the end our success seems to be found in simple pleasures of humility and contentment no matter how prestigious our occupations.

Yes, Lent is a time of introspection and evaluation, a time to come clean with ourselves and be honest, a time to mature and admit what is truly important in life, but Lent is also a lifelong journey, a journey were we grow and mature, a journey were we are able to look back to see where we have come from so that we might be able to lead more edifying, Christ-like lives that can impact the world around us for glory of God. Lent is a journey that takes us off our pedestals and places us on firm ground, were we can cook those proverbial eggs for someone else, giving them that love that rests within each of us, that they may take our love for them into the lives of others. Lent is the best of all the seasons of the church for this one reason; it is here and now that we set the foundation for all worship in the continuing church year. You cannot worship in the fullest unless you are willing to come in the spirit of true repentance, you cannot worship in the fullest unless you are willing to

be honest with yourselves and you cannot worship in the fullest unless you are willing to give up your prestige and replace it with humility.

Our readings today are full of negative outcomes for those outside the will of God. In Ephesians, Paul does not hold back, *“For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God”* (Ephesians 5:5). And in the Gospel of Luke we read that, *“He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth”* (Luke 6:23). We must take a closer look at the path our thoughts and action are leading us down and be willing to engage the necessary steps to repent. We must focus our hearts and minds on things above where rust does not corrupt nor thieves enter in and steal...focus on that place, deep within, where the Holy Spirit engages you, guiding you in the humility that opens the way for true sanctification to take place; and then when you come to the Table you will experience a Communion that becomes so real that you will confess that you touched the Heavens themselves.

Here is what I want to leave you with on this third Sunday in Lent because I want you to find the joy that resides within this penitential season. Both Paul and John speak to us very sternly in our scriptures today, but...not without hope. If you look at Paul’s letters he always give hope before he reminds us of the spiritual battles we must all face. In today’s reading Paul begins by admonishing us to, *“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour”* (Ephesians 5: 1-2). This should remind us that although tribulations must come, the promise is there first and we can find great comfort resting in that truth. Then, in Luke’s gospel, after hearing about devils and demons that want to possess us, Jesus counters the words of a woman who wants to bless the womb from which he comes by pointing her to something greater than the womb, *“But he said, yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it”* (Luke 6:28).

That’s it my brothers, that’s the whole enchilada my sisters...If we keep the word of God we can come to the throne of God in full confidence that we are receiving his most precious body and blood in a most worthy manor. You have entered in the very bonds of prayer and supplication

this very morning. You have come and confessed your sins by which you have received the grace of God, and now through faith you will kneel at the Holy Table and consume that which will preserve and save you souls for the glories of heaven through Jesus Christ. There is peace in the journey, may we have the spiritual eyes to recognize it.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.