

## **For the Good of All**

**II Kings 5:1-14, Galatians 6:1-10, Luke 10:1-11, 16-20; Psalm 30 7-08-07**

I remember an old Star Trek movie in which Mr. Spock died, at least temporarily, shortly after informing Captain Kirk that he believed in “Doing the greatest good for the greatest number.” If we look for religious symbols in movies and other works of art, we will recall that Mr. Spock was found and resurrected back to life in a later movie.

I have often wondered what the world might be like if people actually followed the “pointy-eared one’s” lead and had the same philosophy of life: that it is our task always to try to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

Too often we are too caught up in our own desires and our own egos and our own sense of what is right and what is wrong to be able to see and understand the larger picture. We are possessed by our narrow view of the world and risk missing out on what it is God has in store for us.

This is nothing new, just take a look at Naaman in the Old Testament. He was an important man and blinded by his sense of that importance. He felt slighted by Elisha when that great prophet did not come out to him to tell him how to be healed. So, in his foolish pride he decided to show that fellow a thing or two and bypass the Jordan River and its healing waters for rivers back home that were at least as good and powerful. His servants, understanding their master far better than he understood himself, managed to encourage him to follow Elisha’s plan and Naaman was healed. He was blessed to have wiser, cooler heads around him to show him the way. Even better, he listened and did what his servants suggested and was made whole again. So grateful was he that he pledged to follow the God of Elisha for the rest of his life.

Too often we are hurt by the words or actions of others and we react in ways that we think will do them harm. But, like Naaman we end up only harming ourselves by refusing to see what it is that we need to see and understand.

All of us have, what we liked to refer to a while ago, “growing edges.” These are those places in our hearts, minds and souls that need further work as we seek to become whole people in the eyes of God. Most often we know these edges exist for us but it is far easier to ignore them and continue to bumble on in the same way we have for a long time. This is human, for it is a frightful thing to admit we might fall a little short in certain areas of our lives. Once we are able to admit our shortcoming we need to try to fix what is wrong or we will just go limping on.

For some of us, it is our pride that will not let us move forward, we are always right and no one else can help us see where we may just be wrong. For others, it is the need to control everything they can. These dear souls discover, over time, that nothing much is really in their control and unless they learn how to loosen up on the reins a little they become terribly bitter and frustrated. For some it is the fear of being vulnerable and open to others. They desperately want to be loved but are afraid they might be hurt or betrayed and those fears keep them safe and secure without touching or being touched by others. Perhaps they have been hurt before. But, who hasn’t. Sometimes they cannot even receive love freely extended to them because they are afraid they will be expected to “do something” in return. All of us have little and big edges that need work and

improvement. When we begin to see beyond ourselves, by working on these edges, we can begin to see what it means to do the greatest good for the greatest number.

Paul sounded this note clearly in his Letter to the Galatians. He encouraged people to keep moving forward, to keep growing, to recognize the burdens they all carried and not to let themselves be broken by those burdens. Paul knew we are all wounded beings but he also knew that our greatest strength lay in our service to others. He knew that through patience and forbearance and understanding things could come round all right. In this morning's reading from Galatians he is telling his followers this. He reminded them and us that we reap what it is we sow. If we sow arrogance and pride we reap the same. If we sow patience and understanding and large crops of love, it all will come back to us. It is up to each of us to decide what we will do with our lives. The choice is always ours. Growing edges abound in our contemplation of which way we should go.

Jesus was aware of what he was doing when he sent his disciples out on their own to inspire new followers. He knew some might be hesitant but he sent them anyway. And they were amazed by their own success. They learned first hand what it was to labor for the good of all—to stretch out and spread the good news of their master and their way to those who had never heard about him and it before. They moved out from a secure center to become vulnerable and to risk them selves for the sake of a better world. Instead of taking great pride in all they had done, they were told to rejoice for the joy God would find in their good works. It was not all about them but about the greatest good.

Those early disciples grew up or matured through “on the job training.” They went out knowing what they were to do but not at all certain that they were capable. As they practiced what they preached and believed, their mission became clear and their success mounted up in most places. There were some who, of course, would not receive them. Instead of being discouraged by these setbacks they would go on to a new place where they might be welcome. But they never gave up and walked away from the task that lay before them no matter how discouraging. They understood that they were working for the good of all. I am sure there were times they adapted and learned more about themselves and their project in the process.

When we can understand that life is not just all about us we have come a long way toward discovering what it is that works in different situations, in different times and places. We learn how to cope with what it is we have been handed and to make the best success of it we can. In learning how to adapt we may touch upon or even grate on some of our own growing edges. But that's what life is all about as discovered Naaman, the readers of Paul and the followers of Christ as they moved forward for the good of all.

-- Amen