

Living Honorably ~ September 7, 2008
Exodus 12:1-14; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20; Psalm

All of life is filled with choices for us. Because of the free will we possess, the responsibility for living honorable lives rests with each of us. Our Bible contains sets of rules and guidelines that were written to help us live honorably with one another in communities of faith and in the broader community. To do this we need to be aware of the world around us and the people who inhabit it. Too often we lose a broader view of all that is, and, instead, focus only on what it is that is good for a few. We forget that in order to live with honor we always need to seek that which is good for the greatest number.

To do this we need to set aside petty fears and pre-conceived notions and learn to embrace change and the challenge to move forward. While it might be nice to remain the same forever, to be locked in some sort of “time warp,” only death comes to people and places with such a mentality.

The Hebrews found themselves on the brink of a total change in lifestyle. They were preparing to move away from the familiar, although limiting, surroundings in Egypt and step out into the vast unknown of the desert wilderness. They were moving from restriction into freedom.

Their symbol for this great change, this Exodus, was the observance of a special meal to be eaten quickly as they prepared to move forward. As the angel of God passed over their homes to slay the first born of every living creature that was Egyptian, they put on their sandals and packed up their families to head for the “promised land.” We can be sure they did not suspect that the journey might be 40 years in duration and we know they did complain a lot as they traveled. But they held hope in their hearts for a better way of life for their children and their grandchildren. Necessary advances had to be made to ensure a decent future.

Jesus furthered this message as he tried to tell his disciples of what it was that was before them. They needed to learn how to adapt to a different world when they would take on the task of spreading the “good news” to all who would listen. He understood human nature well enough to know that there would be disputes in their community so, he suggested a way in which such problems could be dealt with honorably. He did not suggest that they run around talking about times of friction but that they approach others to try to work to the source of the problem. He knew what would divide them and injure the mission that was before them. All efforts were to be made to knit up frayed edges of life and to move forward in faith.

He also reminded those who would be left, that, wherever two or three would be gathered in his name and united in his mission, he would be present right there among them. The same holds true for us. By understanding this we can keep from allowing things that do not belong to an honorable way of living to creep in and take us over.

Of course, Paul pulls things together for us by pointing to the core of what is essential for living honorable lives. In essence he sets aside all the rules and regulations and points to love as the great sustainer of us all. Mutual love. He reminds those who

read this letter to “love their neighbors as themselves.” Everyone is our neighbor. Not just those we choose to side with on an issue. But, also, those with whom we may be in disagreement.

And what does it mean to love our neighbors as ourselves? To understand that others are not made in our own image. Everyone has their own view of things and when we take the time and patience and understanding to put all the pieces of the puzzle of life together, each piece held by another person, we will finally understand the entire picture. To love our neighbors as ourselves means that we know that when we point the finger of blame at another, three other fingers are pointing right back at ourselves. To love others means that we realize that the characteristics we grumble about as being disgusting in another person are often the characteristics we most dislike about ourselves. To love others in the manner of Christ means that we refuse to sit in judgment of people who hold different ideas than we may. Instead we are to patiently listen and seek to understand where others may be coming from. This requires a great deal of us, but we are all the children of God and made of better stuff than we can ever imagine. This better stuff is what we are called to show to others.

When are we supposed to reflect this God we are made of? Right here and now. Paul reminds us that we do not know when it all will be over—we might be close to the end. He was talking about the end of the world. We need to reflect on our own personal ends and the way others will remember us. Will we leave a trail of miserable memories for others because of the way we saw them and treated them? Or will our lives be considered lives of honor? Lives lived respecting the other humans we have been living with and moving with and having our beings with?

The choice is always ours. Whether we choose to set off on a new and better pathway that leads us to freedom from all that restrains us, or whether we choose to remain bound by some sort of “time warp” that never allows us to see beyond our own noses. The choice is always ours. Remember to choose wisely.

-- Amen