

## **“No Partiality”**

**Isaiah 35:4-7a; James 2:1-17; Mark 7: 24-37; Psalm 146 9-10-06**

I am sure that many of us have been doing a little reflecting this past week on what happened in our country five years ago tomorrow. It is hard to believe that it has been five years since 9-11. There are those times when it seems as if it happened only yesterday and then there are times when it seems to have happened an eternity ago.

Most of us remember clearly where we were when we heard the news. It is one of those events that we will never forget, much like the assassination of President Kennedy for those of us old enough to remember that happening. I remember that I first heard the puzzling news on the radio as I moved from one place to another. There had been a terrible accident—a plane had hit buildings in New York City. A few moments later, the second plane was seen heading toward the World Trade Center. In an instant the news changed and America was under attack. When I arrived at my destination people were glued to television sets, shaking their heads as they tried to understand that which could not be understood.

There are reasons that we remember. Most often we hope we will not repeat errors of the past. Memory helps to keep us from doing this and allows us a space in which to wander and recall and then proceed with life again.

When we have some distance from a happening that might have caused us great fear and concern, we are able to see things more clearly and assess just what was going on to cause the problem. We have a calmness of heart and soul and mind that helps us put things into perspective and to begin to understand. Then we can take up life and move forward with renewed courage, faith and hope. This is true in all areas of our lives and not just when we have been faced with some cataclysmic event. We will never forget 9-11 and as time moves along, we will be better able to understand what has happened to us as a nation and to individuals who were caught up in its fury.

Every page of our Bible calls us to remember. Our Psalm for this morning reminds us that it is not wise to put all our faith in earthly princes, for they are just flesh and blood and as fallible as the rest of us. They are subject to the same passions and pulls that we are. When they lead us down pathways that turn out to be worse than the ways we have been walking we tend to condemn them. But, we need to realize, that we have allowed them to do so and that we have only ourselves to blame. God lovingly and trustingly gave us the gift of free will. When we exercise it looking for our own gain instead of for what is best for all people, we fail as do our earthly princes.

It seems that our readings from Isaiah and Mark deal with people opening their eyes and ears to the reality of life around them. These are calls to wake up to what is going on and to begin to take some responsibility and action to move out and make things better and even new again for all people. There is no partiality in who is made aware and who is not. Everyone has the opportunity to become a new creature through the touch of God.

We see that touch revealed through Jesus when he gives in to the pleas of the Syro-phoenician woman and heals her child. He, most likely, should not have been talking to her, she was a woman, after all, a Gentile and a non-Jew. He calls her a “dog” and reminds her that he has come to feed the Jews, not those who are lesser beings.

Ouch. Jesus said that? Well, to be fair, we really cannot be certain he said those exact words. All the gospels were composed long after his death and, while Mark is the oldest and shortest of the gospels, and considered to be the closest to the life and teachings of Jesus, it was written by a man carrying the message of Christ to the people of his time. Along with telling the stories of Jesus, as he knew them, he wanted to strengthen their faith and allegiance to this new movement.

Through this story, while we see Jesus trying to explain what he sees as his mission to the woman, we also see him taking a second look at her in her humanness and realizing that there is no partiality in the way God treats those God has created. So, her daughter is freed from the demon that had plagued her.

Often in the words of our gospels we see the inclusiveness of Christ: the extension of his healing and loving ways to those beyond the immediate circle of his followers. Most often we see this tender touch given to those who have sought him out and who believe that he is of God.

In the little Letter of James, one full of good news and good teachings, we are reminded once again of what it is we, as the disciples of Christ are called to be and do. We are asked to be the further extensions of God. We are called to be the ones who look at others with no partiality, with no litmus test that tell us who belongs to God and who does not.

The author reminds us that we are not to judge. Too often we take a look at someone and put him or her right in a category in which they do not belong. We have to admit this to ourselves, for if someone does not seem to fit our cookie cutter standard of what is “in” they often are cast out. Too often we make snap judgments and later need to eat our words.

James reminds us that we are to “love our neighbors as our selves.” If we tend to judge others, we must be ready to place ourselves on the same judgment seat and weigh ourselves on the same balance we use in their regard.

I always wonder what it costs us to be kind and merciful. If we are kind and merciful to others, we will find that they will act in the same way toward us: cutting us slack when we need it and offering us the touch of wholeness and love when we have granted it. It is, indeed, that old Golden Rule of “doing unto others as we would have them do unto us.” This is what makes the world go round. We need to think about this when we think about our relationships with others. If we are nasty and hurtful that comes right back at us and often makes us look bad. “Bread cast upon the waters comes back to us after many days” be it good fresh bread or that old moldy stuff. It is always up to us what kind of bread we will toss about.

It is all up to us because of the gift of free will. Can we open our ears and hear the words of Jesus as he extended his healing power to a person considered unworthy by the standards of his time? Can we sense his inclusiveness? Can we hear and see how this story about him rolls right over into the Letter of James where we are told to love our neighbors, to show no partiality to one person or another and to keep from passing judgment on anyone? And, then can we begin to understand the relevance both readings have for us in our daily life? And can we see how life can be made better for all within our circle of influence if we begin to live these words and act on them, remembering at all times that they are the very basis of our faith? To love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and might and our neighbor as ourselves.

Remember that day five years ago, when many people practiced the way they believed was the right way. When with no thought of judgment or partiality and no thought for their own lives they reached out to help others. Remember when they reached out as living and loving extensions of God to save others? Remember? We are all called to do no less no matter where we may find ourselves in life. Amen