

Not for the Whole World ~ February 21, 2010

Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Romans 10: 8b-13; Luke 4: 1-13; Psalm 91: 1-2, 9-16

It has been said that every man and woman has his or her price. The theory is, that if we want someone to do something, that might be foreign to that person's nature, all we have to do to accomplish this, is to discover what that price is. The easiest way to do this is to ask him or her.

I remember, years ago, I was asked what it would take to convince me to agree to something that was totally against what it was in which I believed. Someone I respected and admired asked me this. I was in seminary at the time and I could have had a nice shortcut to an internship and ordination. All I would have to do was keep quiet and go along with the ordination of a person who was not at all qualified and who did not want to have to go through any of the hoops the four seminary students from my church were leaping through.

In our Congregational tradition it is not unusual for a church to ordain a person they consider suitable for ministry, whether that person has gone to seminary or not. When such an ordination takes place it is by a church that has little hope of securing a minister and usually ordains one of its own members for service, just in that particular church. This is our polity. Polity is the way in which we organize and run our churches. It varies from denomination to denomination. We have Congregational polity—the congregation determines the way we do our church business with no outside intervention. Had the people involved in this deed been acting according to our polity, I would have had no problem supporting them. But, this was not the case. So, I raised some concerns. I was asked what it was I “wanted.” “Well,” I answered, “nothing—just to be sure the person was qualified to serve one of our churches.” Also that she was being accepted into the ministry according to the guidelines of our polity.

During this season of Lent, we have the perfect opportunity, as we take some time to reflect on our lives, to determine what it would take to have us sell out our values and our souls in the process.

Jesus resisted the temptations set before him as he journeyed through the wilderness. Being a child of God and knowing it, gave him great strength. Being a child of man, he showed us what it is we, too, are able to accomplish. He resisted the temptation of food to ease the discomfort of his fast. He resisted the temptation of unlimited power, which would allow him to control the world. And, he resisted the opportunity to grab the glory that he knew should not be his, but God's.

Jesus was a man who had no price. He could not be bought. When someone is a true servant of God, he or she cannot be led from the pathway set before him or her. Jesus probably struggled when things were taking a difficult turn, hoping to save himself so that he might fulfill his mission. Instead of even thinking of selling out, except for a brief moment in the Garden of Gethsemane, we see him setting his face toward Jerusalem and his death continuing to follow what he believed to be the will of his Father. His determination and dedication gave all who follow him the promise and hope of eternal life.

By being here we claim we have “decided to follow Jesus.” To do so we need to ask ourselves if we are able to drink from the same cup set before him. Are we willing to set aside power, glory and wealth to walk in his footsteps? Is the Christian life so valuable that we would be willing to give up our present way of life to become more Christ-like?

Can we give up our judgmental selves that like to consider others and find them wanting? Can we really find forgiveness in our hearts for those who we feel have wronged us in life? Can we find forgiveness for ourselves?

Can we understand that our earthly problems only cause surface ripples that fade away when we are firmly anchored in the promises of God, revealed to us through Jesus?

Can we set aside the attitudes that push us into a “me first” stance when we feel we are not getting what we want from life? Those attitudes of arrogance that only seek to make us appear better and more deserving than others?

Can we be strong enough to sit with ourselves and evaluate just who we are in life and where we are, and then adjust to become who we know we should be?

These are just a few questions wise people reflect upon when they try to determine where they might be going in life. These are questions we might ask when we feel the need to renew and regain our values.

It is difficult to do such soul-searching because it is difficult to acknowledge that we might have made a few wrong turns in life. But, it is a healthy person who can brave the wilderness of his or her soul, struggle with what might be found there, put things in proper perspective and move forward offering his or her life to God.

The good news is that we all are the children of God, we all are offered another day and another way to make things right. The choice to move forward without selling out to the highest bidder is always ours. We must learn to choose wisely.

Amen